

THE NEW GLADSTONE REVIEW

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an occasional e-journal

*Informal commentary, opinions, reviews, news, illustrations and poetry
for bookish people of philanthropic inclination*

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Editorial

*“Thinking offers consolation for everything.
Even if it sometimes makes you feel sad, consult it to cure your sadness and it will.”*

Chamfort: *‘Reflections and Anecdotes’*

*April is the cruellest month... (T S Eliot in *The Waste Land*, 1922)*

The last issue of this Review appeared at a time when the impending general election and its consequences for Brexit cast a shadow over virtually all news reports and public debate. Now, that distinction has been commandeered, with a vengeance, by the coronavirus pandemic – which alarms and fascinates people in almost equal measure.

The reflective, literary approach which this Review seeks to promote is represented here by three articles, and possibly more. In item 7, Jim Mephram, my elder son, suggests that cultivating the stoical approach proposed by philosophers in ancient times may be a powerful way of coping with the stresses provoked by the coronavirus crisis. (Some readers may recall that my younger son, David, who died in late 2018, wrote an inspiring piece ‘Farewell Words’ – *click C on the website, and see article 5 in No. 4* - which may be also of value to those alarmed by the threat now posed.). My main article (3) suggests that the multilayered impacts of the coronavirus crisis add impetus to the need to re-evaluate traditional approaches to moral philosophy; and item 5 is a selection of quotations that commend the restorative powers of reading in times of loneliness. In a typically engaging book review, Penny Young (4) has written an account of a rather strange but fascinating practice, *ossuary*. Item 2 reports imminent changes in the way Gladstone Books is to operate, and other articles amount to a selection of bibliophilic miscellanea.

2. Gladstone Books goes Home

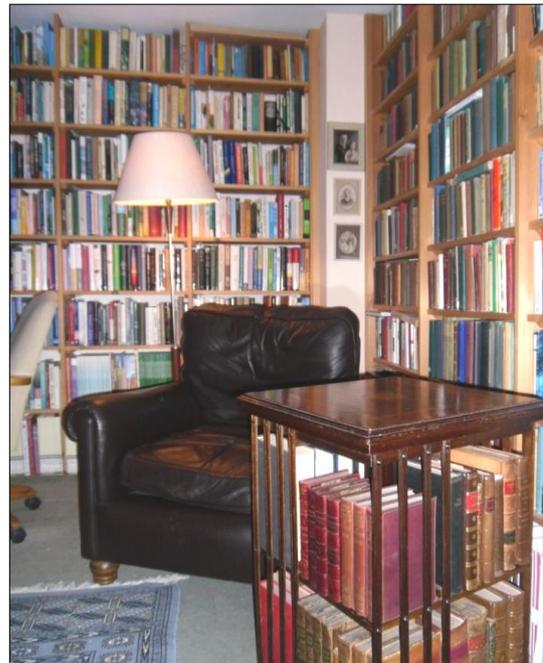
Over the last twenty years or so, Gladstone Books has had an almost peripatetic existence, having been situated at various locations in Newark, Lincoln and Southwell. None of the moves was undertaken without good reason, but the last – the return from a site in Newark – seems likely to mark the end of its travels as it returns home to Southwell.

The passage of time and changing circumstances, entailing extended domestic and caring commitments, mean that my bookselling activity has, from a financial perspective, become very precarious. Not that profitability has ever been foremost in my mind, adopting, as I do, a quite Micawberish attitude to sales. But Newark has not proved to be a good place to sell my sort of books. Consequently, I have decided to up-sticks for the last time and move Gladstone Books to Southwell, the small town where I live. In truth, the two years when I had my shop there, in Bull Yard, was the most congenial period experienced, as I enjoyed the custom and conversations with several regulars. But the rent was far too high and the foot-fall just too low to make it a sustainable enterprise.

The current plan is for Gladstone Books to become, primarily, a means of selling books online to customers in the UK. This will entail preparing catalogues, with brief descriptions of each book, which will be posted on my website. As each new catalogue is published it will be advertised on the *Sheppard's Confidential* website, which is issued weekly and hosts several other, generally larger and more expensive, booksellers' catalogues. It will take some time to prepare catalogues, and if the current restrictions persist for long it may not be fully operative until much later this year, even if then.

Apart from online sales, I intend to allow *bona fide* browsers, who will most likely be people living locally or visitors, to view my stock in a comfortable book room at a private location in Southwell, providing prior arrangements have been made. In this case, because it will greatly simplify the transactions, books will be offered at a substantial discount on the prices listed in the catalogues.

Fuller details of the first catalogues to be published and the procedure for making appointments to view the books will be announced in the next copy of the Review - from which it follows that I hope to continue to produce the Gladstone Review, and to encourage guest contributors to submit articles, poems or book reviews which are in line with the general ethos of this e-journal.



Given my advanced years, and that 'you can't take it with you,' I have decided to fill the spaces on the shelves, which I hope will appear as my stock is sold, with books of which a large proportion derive from my personal library - a corner of which is shown here. The 5000 or so books have been collected over a period of about 60 years. Some will be reserved for family and friends, but this will leave a substantial number for sale. It will give pleasure to find good homes for books that I have enjoyed discovering and reading, especially if they end up with people who appreciate their worth.

BM

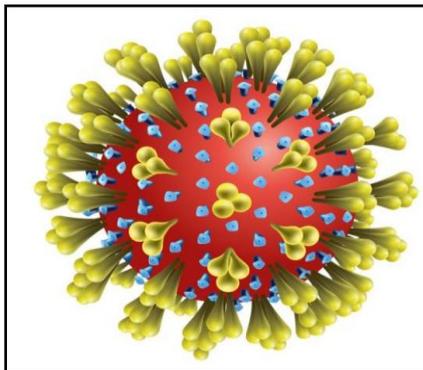
3. The Coronavirus Pandemic: Ethics in a Crisis a personal opinion¹

*If by the time we're sixty we haven't learnt what a knot of paradox and contradiction life is, and how exquisitely the good and bad are mingled in every action we take ...
we haven't grown old to much purpose*

John Cowper Powys: *The Art of Growing Old* (1944)

Almost 20 years ago, an academic paper of mine which addressed ethical concerns raised by the Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) outbreak - then devastating British agriculture and having highly deleterious effects on UK society - was published in an applied ethics journal.² Its subtitle '*ethics in a crisis*' was coined to convey two distinct concerns – i) that ethical decisions needed to be made urgently to ameliorate the immediate effects of the epidemic, and ii) that 'ethics' as an academic discipline was itself challenged by the multilayered impacts of the disease. Unsurprisingly, there are many similarities between that epidemic (or, strictly-speaking, epizootic) and the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic we are now experiencing – for not only was it characterised by large-scale mortality (although for FMD this was largely the result of a programme of mass slaughter of farm animals), but there were also very serious economic repercussions, with many businesses being ruined by the imposition of severe government restrictions on people's travel about the country. An ultramicrographic representation of the coronavirus is shown below.

In terms of the first inference of 'ethics in a crisis,' it is arguable that the worst consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic might have been avoided if more attention had been paid to learning lessons from the FMD and other related outbreaks of zoonoses (animal diseases transmissible to humans), such as SARS, avian flu and swine fever. For the fact is that zoonoses are responsible for 2.4 billion human illnesses and 2.2 million deaths every year. Cattle, domestic poultry, dogs, cats, wild birds, deer and bats (the latter a likely source of the coronavirus outbreak), are all potential disease transmitters. Not only was the crisis predictable, *it was predicted*. Regrettably, it appears that it is only when nations of the 'developed world' are seriously affected that their governments are stirred into action, often feeling compelled to impose drastic measures to limit human freedom.



But the issues I principally want to address here concern the second sense in which I intended the phrase 'ethics in a crisis' to be understood, namely, the profound ways in which the current pandemic seems likely to transform many people's perception of what 'ethics' means. Generally understood as '*the philosophical study of the moral value of human conduct and of the rules and principles that ought to govern it,*' it is often characterized as comprising two major strands that go under the names of *utilitarianism* and *rights theory*. Utilitarianism aims to maximise desirable outcomes (which might just be called *happiness*) by weighing 'good' consequences of prospective actions against 'bad' consequences. It thus depends on a sort of cost/benefit analysis, where the measure of happiness (or

¹ This article was written in early April and may well be out-of-date in several respects when it goes online.

² Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics (2001) vol 14, pp. 339-347

misery) might be financial (as a currency to achieve one's desires) or subjective (e.g. in terms of a sense of wellbeing).

The basis of rights theory is in marked contrast, in that it aims to respect rights and duties to oneself and others, irrespective of speculations as to consequences. For example, a rights ethicist might well claim that 'murder is always wrong,' despite the 'benefits' that might accrue from assassinating certain undesirable people; similarly, lying might be considered as always wrong, because no moral code can sanction intentional deceit³.

Distinct as these approaches may appear, most people, insofar as they are conscious of engaging in ethical reasoning, seem to appeal to a blend of both theories (sometimes dubbed the 'common morality'), one or other of which assumes greater significance in different contexts; and cultural factors are highly influential in determining the emphasis assigned to each. For example, reasoning in support of engaging in a 'just war' clearly appeals to different principles to those espoused by pacifists. But in settled societies, through a process of cultural evolution, norms of behaviour emerge that most people accept.

Pandemics, pandemonium and panic

However, it is now apparent from reactions to the pandemic that has been unleashed on humanity on a global scale that the clash of established codes of moral behaviour has induced a state of *pandemonium*, fuelled by instantaneous dissemination of messages of doubtful veracity via the virtually-universal accessibility of 'social media.' Anxiety turns into *panic-buying* of food supplies, as supermarket stocks are depleted to fill home freezers; and governments, under pressure to 'get things done' introduce draconian restrictions on people's movements, pursuit of their work, and recreational activities – collectively called *lockdown* – as the only way of stemming the viral tide.

Ethics, like all forms of philosophical reasoning, depends on calm deliberation, to facilitate thorough and comprehensive analyses. To the response, 'there isn't time' the reply must surely be that forward-planning to cope with epidemic zoonoses is a necessity that has often been ignored for seemingly more urgent but, in reality, less -important reasons. But, given the fluid state of official opinions, it may not be too late to raise some points that have so far been overlooked. Moreover, the *exit strategy* from lockdown by means of which a new, humane social order needs to be established, will inevitably draw on insights provided by ethical theory that informs political policy-making across the board.

Perhaps the most important feature of the Covid-19 crisis is that the approaches of experts who address specific aspects, such as the medical dimension or the impacts on commercial activity, employment and public services, often suggest contrary courses of action to be the best. In an academic paper I published in 1993 concerning experts' advice on the design of proprietary foods for infants in the 19th century,⁴ I wrote the following - an opinion that seems equally relevant today.

There was thus a marked disparity between the certainty claimed by 'experts' and the adequacy of many of their prescriptions. In that experts only maintain credibility by claiming to speak with authority, the dichotomy is understandable. However, to relate this conclusion to a modern context, in an increasingly complex world in which experts assume more and more power over the lives of others, it is a characteristic that deserves wide recognition.

³ These two definitions are, of course, concise in the extreme, but will serve to make the point that they highlight to contrasting ways in which moral behaviour is conceived and practised.

⁴ Medical History (1993) vol 37, 225-249

From the perspective of rigorous ethical assessment, many policy decisions are based on limited evidence, often confined to scientific data – with little attention paid to the wider social repercussions of enacting them. It's as though 'hand-to-mouth' solutions are proposed to address (literally!) 'hand-to-nose' problems. And where there are significant disparities between the advice given by experts who base their judgments of different premises the public is left in a state of confused anxiety.

From the medical perspective, the draconian measures to curb the spread of the disease have been questioned by prominent epidemiologists who suspect that they may do more harm than good, e.g. while school closures may reduce transmission rates, they may also backfire if children socialize in other ways, or disrupt their parents' ability to work at home, or if school closure leads to children spending more time with disease-susceptible elderly family members. But looking at the crisis from a global economic perspective, it is argued that the interventions needed require very different framing from the one that governments have long chosen. Since the 1980s governments have been told to take a back seat and let business steer and create wealth, intervening only for the purpose of fixing problems when they arise - with the result that they are seldom prepared and equipped to deal with crises such as Covid-19 or the climate emergency. In the ensuing turmoil in the UK we have witnessed a right wing government acting totally out of character – handing out billions of (borrowed) cash, while seriously restricting personal liberties. Some would argue that, if the objective is to forcibly stop people from risking premature death, then the government should ban alcohol, dangerous sports and overweight people taking stressful jobs. But, of course, the pervasive nature of Covid-19 may not, or not be perceived to, present comparable threats.⁵

The role of ethics in strategies for the 'exit from lockdown'

The UK government was recently elected on a platform that appealed to popular sentiments rather than to 'expert opinion' – which was often flatly dismissed. Yet that stance has undergone a *volte face* as the prime minister and his cabinet have meekly deferred to the claims of medical and economics 'experts.' It would, of course be foolish to reject their opinions out of prejudice (even though sometimes flawed), but what ethical analysis suggests is that 'doing the right thing' depends on taking into account the wide range of concerns that the crisis has exposed. The current situation, in which all questioning of diktats issued from No. 10 is prevented by the suspension of parliament, represents a highly dangerous threat to democracy. Cross-party debate, if only enabled by video links, is surely required – aided perhaps by citizens' juries, in which professional ethicists, skilled in the even-handed conduct of moral debates, might play key roles.

There is little doubt that the pandemic has, in an unforgiving way, opened up wounds in the global conduct of commercial transactions, and revealed the relentless undermining of ecological sustainability and unforeseen threats to human health. *Gaia* has responded to the hubris of those political leaders whose short sighted concept of happiness seems devoid of wisdom. However, in designing an exit strategy, a 'silver lining' might lie in the realisation that, as we are 'all in this together,' to ensure humanity's survival, fairer, more ecologically-sensitive programmes are not only desirable but *necessary*. The aim of this short article is not to claim that ethical analysis will provide all the answers – far from it. But formulating sound policies needs a much more rigorous analysis than that which just appeals to 'data.'

BM

⁵ Fear generated by the invisible, odourless, intangible and pervasive nature of the virus must seem, to many people, like that of miasmas (bad air emanating from rotting organic matter) that, before the discovery micro-organisms in the late 19th century, were thought to cause many diseases, like cholera and the Black Death.

4. Tour of Bones: a book review

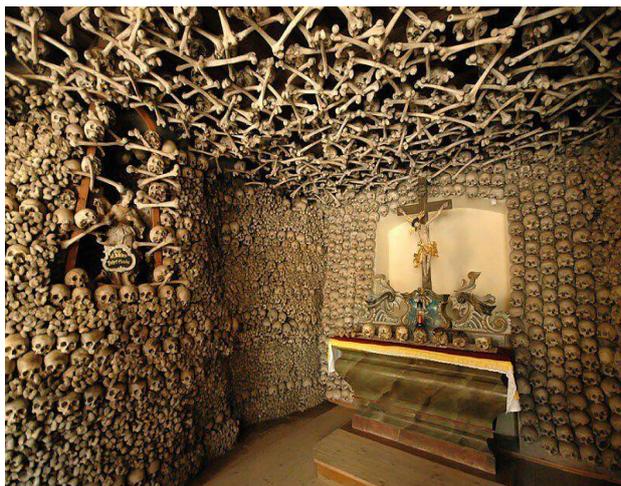
Penny Young

Poirot, Miss Marple, Morse/Endeavour – how many of us enjoy a good murder mystery with its frisson of danger while safe in our own armchairs? And alongside the fictional mysteries, real-life historical ones continue to fascinate, e.g. the Princes in the Tower (my money is on Henry VII having read Josephine Tey's *The Daughter of Time*).

Denise Inge, the author of *A Tour of Bones*, admits that she has always liked being frightened. Growing up in America, she loved travel and took delight in an adventurous life: canoeing down snake-infested rivers, rappelling down rock faces, tomb-stoning into ice-cold water were thrilling experiences of fear, which she recognised were 'pretend' fears – when we enjoy scaring ourselves in the belief that we're invulnerable.

But then there's the fear that we all face: 'a final fear, quiet as cat's feet, which sits at the heart of everyone.' We may think we are avoiding it when we fill our days with ceaseless activity, but it is not conquered. It has infinite patience. It has inevitability on its side. 'This is the fear, heavy as a tomb, that I sense when I enter the charnel house.'

The charnel house she refers to is a medieval burial chamber upon which her house is built – her house being the home she shared with her husband, John Inge, bishop of Worcester, and their family, after marrying into the Church of England. As she moved around the house each day she was conscious of the house's other, silent, occupants lying beneath a trapdoor in the cellar. She knew that sooner or later she'd have to face a 'quest into fear' in order to overcome it and learn about living life unafraid.



Czerma skull chapel

So began an exploration to discover more about such places, of which there are thousands in countries across the world, so her 'tour' had to be narrowed down. The four chosen were Czerma in Poland, Sedlec in the Czech Republic, Hallstatt in the Austrian Alps, and Naters in the Swiss Alps. One of her aims was to learn more about how the way in which we dispose of human remains has changed over time, and how this might reflect our changing attitudes to life, death and the hereafter – 'in fact, to our whole understanding of who we are as humans'.

The ossuary at Czerma exists as a symbol of reconciliation – in territory that was fought over again and again during the Thirty Years' War (1618-48) and the three Silesian Wars (1740-63). The bones were discovered by chance, by the local parish priest out walking his dog (or rather, it was the dog who found them) – Polish bones, Czech, German and old Silesian, left scattered in the low-lying fields following the old conflicts. It became his life's work to collect all the bones together, to give them a dignified disposal. As Denise Inge enters the small chapel, begun in 1776, she is faced with walls lined floor to ceiling with these human remains. What strikes her is the sameness, the

ordinariness of tens of thousands of bones, undistinguished by race, language, sex or culture. But a life, she says, no matter how unspectacular, how unremarkable, is a human life and worthy of respect just because it is. Every human counts. Even enemies – or ‘especially enemies’, for it was the generations of conflict and enmity that generated the need for the charnel house in the first place.

Sedlec is home to a cathedral built by the Cistercians in the 12th century and years of Cistercian influence. Its ossuary contains the bones of 40,000 persons, victims of plague and of the 15th century Hussite wars, collected together in the lasting hope of the resurrection. Surprisingly, and grotesquely, the bones are used as decoration – hanging in garlands, as chandeliers, or as material for sculptures. Human remains as artist’s materials. The intention, Denise surmises, was meant to be joyful, but the effect is macabre. The message, however, was clear: remember that you are mortal. ‘Do today the good you would see done. Seize the present which is real and fleeting. Hallstatt, her next visit, is the oldest known industrial community in the world – an industry based on the extraction of salt from its salt mines.



Sedlec Ossuary

In 1846, one thousand Bronze Age burials were discovered, well-preserved in their salty resting place. It was in this town that the author came across the last ‘skull-painter’ of Hallstatt, who carried out an ancient tradition of decorating the skulls of the deceased. After some ten years or so of burial in the churchyard, bodies are exhumed and their yellowed skulls left on a high ‘fox-proof’ ledge of the skull-painter’s house to bleach in the sunlight before being painted with wreaths of laurel or oak leaves, roses or other flowering plants. Then the name and dates of the person are written across the forehead in beautiful gothic script – which makes the skulls much more personal. The skulls become more than mere objects; they conveyed to her the feeling of connected humanity. Whereas Czerna and Sedlec spoke of the universality of death, here it is the individuality of each person, of their unique place in the community of life.

At Naters the ossuary is open to public view from the street, behind a metal grille fixed to an archway below the chapel building. Peering through, she was faced with a wall of skulls (technically, crania, as their mandibles were missing). Above them a black wooden beam had painted on it in gold, in German gothic, the words: ‘What you are, we were .What we are, you shall be.’ Finally, she realises that she is looking not at an interesting piece of political or social history, but at herself. The skulls ‘are not only human like us, they *are* us. They are a prophecy of our unavoidable future.’ Local inhabitants, including crocodiles of schoolchildren, stopped regularly to view the bones. One daily visitor she spoke to said that coming there to see the bones was to do with being grounded in the real not the pretend. Denise is reminded of Proust, who believed that the threat of death had the power to enliven one’s days – so that we don’t lazily put off things we’d like to do ‘one day’.

The sub-title of Denise Inge’s book is ‘Facing Fear and Looking for Life’. During her travels, the bones become for the author ‘a metaphor for the enduring and essential, the deep things that remain once all the skin and muscle of life is gone’. She quotes Henry David Thoreau, who went to live in a

woodland cabin at Walden Pond in order to live simply, facing the essential facts of life and hoping not to face one day the fact that he had not really lived – or may never live before time has run out. Each of the four places she visits raises questions that so many of us put off asking ourselves. How do we view death, or live in the face of it? How do we wish to be remembered? Where do I belong? What values do we live by? These are questions that go to the heart of how we understand ourselves. Inevitably, this review can only be a highly filleted account. The bones, as it were. But connected to the bones are fleshed-out descriptions of the places visited, their history, topography, culture – often giving rise to thoughts on topics ranging from philosophy and religion to science, engineering and human progress. It's a book to return to again and again. As P. D. James says of it, it's a book that 'celebrates not death but life' and shows how we can 'embrace life and live it more abundantly'.

Denise Inge was an author and academic who became a leading authority on the work of the 17th-century poet and clergyman, Thomas Traherne. Having been diagnosed with cancer, she died on Easter Sunday 2014, aged 51.

Penny Young is the former editor of 'Folio', the quarterly arts magazine produced in Southwell, and a regular contributor to the Gladstone Review

5. Consolations for enforced isolation?

W E Gladstone

Books are delightful society. If you go into a room and find it full of books - even without taking them from the shelves they seem to speak to you, to bid you welcome.

Thomas Jefferson

I had rather be shut up in a very modest cottage, with my books, my family and a few old friends, dining on simple bacon, and letting the world roll on as it liked, than occupy the most splendid post which any human power can give.

Lewis Carroll

If only I could manage, without annoyance to my family, to get imprisoned for 10 years 'without hard labour,' and with the use of books and writing materials, it would be simply delightful!

William Hazlitt

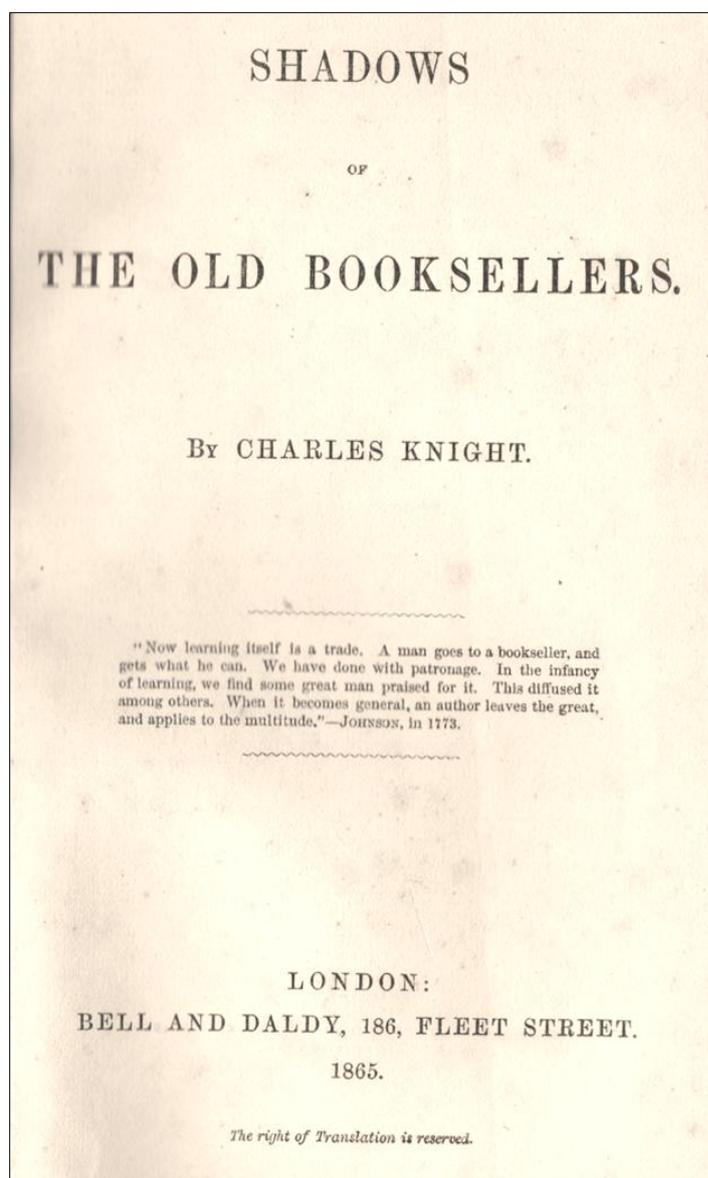
There are only three pleasures in life pure and lasting, and all derived from inanimate things – books, pictures and the face of nature.

Chinese proverb

It is only through daily reading that you refresh your mind sufficiently to speak wisely.

6. An Eighteenth Century Southwell bookseller

Ardent book collectors rarely have time to read all their books as they acquire them, so that they often sit on the shelves, perhaps for years, before an opportune glance brings them to notice. One of the delights of book-collecting is the serendipitous discovery of some literary treasure that has lain unobserved, only to give unexpected pleasure after so long a hibernation.



A case in point is the book shown here, which was published in 1865 and inscribed by its then-owner, one Hugh T Sheringham of Trinity College, Cambridge.⁶ I can't remember when I bought it (for just £3.50), but I have found it a rewarding investment in recent weeks.

The title of Professor Knight's book is ambiguous, as it might refer to old books or aging booksellers. In fact, the subject is eminent booksellers 'of old' – dating from the 18th century. And they were often not just sellers but also authors, compilers, printers and binders of books. Among notable examples were Dr Johnson's father, who sold books in Lichfield and Birmingham, and Thomas Guy, more famous as founder of Guys Hospital in London. The account of young Guy, son of a 'lighterman and coal-dealer,' is especially poignant, as in his small London shop, *He spreads his new books and his old upon a board in front of his window, now and then soliciting the busy trader who glances at them to buy Mr Wingate's 'Arithmetic made easy' or Mr Record's 'Grounds of Art.'*

A chapter is devoted to William Hutton, whose childhood was hardly conducive to his subsequent literary interests, as in '1730, a poor boy, at seven years of age, he was put to work in the one silk mill in Derby.' Like Robert Blincoe, who I discussed in an earlier Review, things went from bad to worse.: *For two years the undersized boy escaped the common accidents of badly-fenced machinery; but he then nearly lost his hand, which was caught in the cogs of an engine, and, to balance the providential*

⁶ Sheringham became a noted authority on fishing, writing several exceptional books. In his introduction to *Coarse Fishing*, he wrote: "Salmon fishing is good; trout fishing is good; but to the complete angler, neither is intrinsically better than the pursuit of roach, or tench, or perch or pike." For 30 years, until his death in 1903, he was the angling editor of *The Field*.

saving of life and limb, his father broke his walking stick over his bony back. In another year his mother died.'

The gloom of the account almost persuaded me to dip into another bookseller's less arduous experiences, when, flicking casually through the pages my eye caught the name 'Southwell,' in the way that we can often pick out, among hundreds of others, a familiar word in a subliminal fraction of a second. What transpired is mostly represented by the page below.

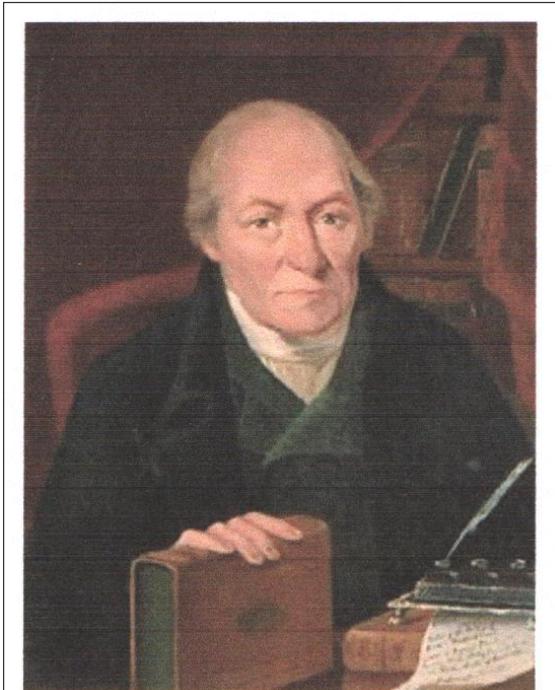
three days in London, but he has not a word to say about booksellers or their shops; which might probably have been more accessible to him than the Tower, where the wardens prevented his entrance, conjecturing that he had no money to pay for sight-seeing. And so our northern adventurer trudged home from the south with four shillings in his pocket out of the eleven which he had brought to the capital, and took back fourpence to Nottingham, having been absent nine days.

William Hutton had now to look out for a fitting place in which to exercise his new vocation. Ever cautious, he would not make too great a venture at the first starting. He took a shop at Southwell, fourteen miles from Nottingham, paying for its use twenty shillings a year. Here he deposited his stock of tattered volumes, and "in one day became the most eminent bookseller in Southwell." He was not, however, a resident in this little town, now better known than it was a century ago by being the scene of the first sensible experiment in the administration of the Poor Laws. The resolute and prudent man thus describes his course of life during a rainy winter: "I set out from Nottingham at five every Saturday morning, carried a burthen of from three to thirty pounds weight to Southwell, opened shop at ten, starved in it all day upon bread, cheese, and half a pint of ale; took from 1s. to 6s., shut up at four, and by trudging through the solitary night and the deep roads five hours more, I arrived at Nottingham by nine, where I always found a mess of milk porridge by the fire, prepared by my valuable sister." But as might be expected, the labour of

However, his bookshop in Southwell did not prove to be a success, and Hutton's fame rests principally on his subsequent move to Birmingham. Here in 1750, after a slow start, adding bookbinding to his abilities and cultivating as regular customers a set of young men interested in

essays and poetry led to him making substantial profits. He also established Birmingham's first Circulating Library shortly after the first such library had been set up in London's Strand.

But in 1756 he opened a paper mill, the first in Birmingham, which ensured a comfortable future and the ability to expand his literary interests, which included history and verse. He is credited with authorship of at least sixteen books, of which the most notable was *A History of Birmingham*, written in 1782, the year in which he was also elected a Fellow of the Antiquarian Society of Scotland.



William Hutton, about 1780

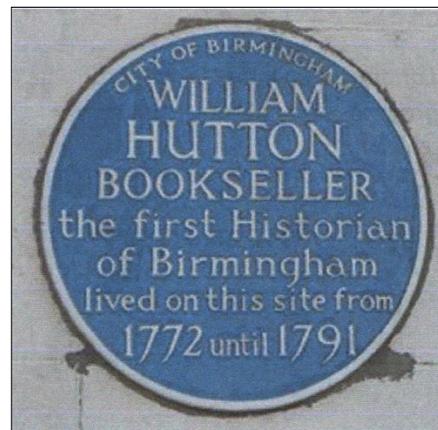
As a Unitarian, and associate of the Unitarian minister Joseph Priestley (who is often credited with the discovery of oxygen before Lavoisier, although, rather unfortunately, he called it 'dephlogisticated air'), Hutton was a victim in the so-called Birmingham Riots of 1791, in that both of his houses were destroyed. The controversial nature of Priestley's publications, combined with his outspoken support of the French Revolution, aroused public and governmental suspicion; and he was eventually forced to flee from Birmingham to the United States, after a mob burned down both his house and church.

Apart from his distinction as a historian and bookseller, celebrated by the blue plaque on the Waterstone's bookshop in High Street, Birmingham, Hutton is famed for walking the whole length of Hadrian's Wall (there and back) – a distance of 600 miles. He was at the time, in 1801, in his mid 70s, and when writing about it later he

suggested that he was *'perhaps the first man to have ever travelled the whole length of this Wall, and probably the last that will ever attempt it.'* He died in 1815, at the age of 91.

I must apologise to some readers for indulging in this rather parochial fascination in an event occurring about 270 years ago. But for me the recollection evokes memories of the installation of Gladstone Books in Bull Yard for two years – 2015-2017. And, of course, other booksellers have plied their trade in the town. I especially remember Gerry Graham, who used to have a book stall in Market Square for many years.

But, like Hutton, despite my gaining satisfaction from chatting with customers and making available to them worthy books, the enterprise was not cost-effective and has led me, as a last throw of the dice, to continue to operate as a viable second-hand book business from my home in Southwell, as described elsewhere.



7. Stoic wisdom in a time of chaos

Jim Mephram

When the world is scary, you might find comfort in the teachings of philosophers who knew how to handle a crisis.



We might think of philosophy as a bookish pursuit or perhaps as the lifestyle choice of bearded old men living ascetically in caves. But Stoicism — an ancient school of philosophy famously practised by the likes of Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius — is for the real world, and as we face the *coronavirus pandemic*, its teachings feel distinctly relevant right now.

When the future is scary and we don't know what's next, we can find comfort in the wisdom of those before us, those

who've endured famine, plague, and natural disasters. Here, I have distilled some simple ideas from Stoic philosophy that can guide us in times of chaos:

- **Worry only about the things under your control:** *It is not what happens to you, but how you react to it that matters.* — **Epictetus**

The weather, the actions of others, the way your parents treated you as a child, viral outbreaks, are all things that are out of your control. Save your focus and resources for what you can influence.

- **Understand that you are the sole source of your emotions:** *The happiness of your life depends upon the quality of your thoughts.* — **Marcus Aurelius**

Events don't create your emotions — it's the *stories you tell yourself* about those events that determine your outlook. All conflict begins internally.

- **Get things done:** *It's not that we have little time, but that we waste a good deal of it.* — **Seneca**

The Stoics believed in being productive over being comfortable. A Stoic would argue that you need to decide what needs to be done and get those things done. Keep your emotions in check and take care of your business. Be aware of time and avoid wasting it.

- **Be present:** *The whole future lies in uncertainty: live immediately.* — **Seneca**

The Stoics were against living *in your head*. We live in a time of huge distractions. We're also good at reliving the past and projecting ourselves into the future. Stoics were adamant about dealing with

reality right here and right now. What have you ever accomplished by dwelling on the past or fixating on the future?

- **Keep your expectations reasonable: *How ridiculous and how strange to be surprised at anything which happens in life.* — *Marcus Aurelius***

The great Stoics of the past believed it was absurd to be surprised by anything. Frustration is often the result of unreasonable expectations. It is unreasonable to expect that we will not face personal crisis, disaster and bereavement of loved one in the course of our lives.

- **Be virtuous: *Waste no more time arguing about what a good man should be. Be one.* — *Marcus Aurelius***

The greatest accomplishment for a Stoic was living a virtuous life regardless of the circumstances. Stick to your values, even when life is most challenging. Try to be empathetic, reflective, courageous and calm. You may be blown off course by a gust of wind but it is your intentions that matter more than the outcomes of your goals.

Stoics prized rational thinking, acting on good information and contemplating the situation fully rather than acting rashly or from a place of panic and anxiety. Marcus Aurelius coped by not allowing his thoughts to be overrun by negativity. *The universe is change; our life is what our thoughts make of it*, he wrote. Interestingly, those in quarantine in Wuhan also kept a diary as a way of coping.

A Stoic would recommend you to be careful of what media and opinions you consume during the virus pandemic.

Other people's views and troubles can be contagious. Don't sabotage yourself by unwittingly adopting negative, unproductive attitudes through your associations with others. Epictetus:

- **The obstacle is the path: *The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way.* — *Marcus Aurelius***

Obstacles will always lie in the most direct path to success. They aren't something to be avoided but are instead meant to be conquered. Whenever you reach an obstacle, you can know you're about to make great progress.

- **Be grateful: *Nothing is more honourable than a grateful heart.* — *Seneca***

Avoid focusing on the things you lack. Instead, be happy with your blessings. Be grateful for your family and friends, a freshly tasting coffee or a walk in the park. Simplicity is key. To a Stoic, being grateful for what we have, is a sign of wisdom.

Sources:

Seneca- The shortness of life; Marcus Aurelius Meditations; Epictetus – The Manual: a Philosophers guide to Life

Jim Mepham, head teacher of a Bristol school, has long been interested in modern day Stoicism. Aside from administrative duties, he introduces his students to philosophical ideas, and sometimes amuses them by demonstrating his talents as an accomplished amateur conjuror.

8. Living with Eagles: a book review

According to Wordsworth, *'The child is the father of the man'* (and doubtless woman) – an inescapable conclusion, which surely many of us accept with equanimity. But in the patchwork of influences, genetic and contingent, that shape us in adulthood some must play a larger role than others. It is not exactly flattering to admit that one affecting me in surprisingly pleasant ways was a comic called the *Eagle*, which was first published in 1950, when I was just ten. Boys' comics of that time, like the Beano and Dandy, struck me as too juvenile even for my tender years, as consisting almost entirely of strip cartoons with burlesque themes. But the *Eagle* was quite different.



Edited by the Rev Marcus Morris, it presented a hopeful, moral perspective on life in post-war Britain, and amused, educated and stimulated the minds of a generation who faced a more promising future than that endured by their parents and grandparents. When asked, on entering my South Wales grammar school, what I wanted to be when I grew up, I replied 'a space man' – a response clearly influenced by the exploits of Dan Dare, who featured on the front page of the *Eagle* (but also by my fascination with the night sky, which in those days, when street lights were dim, inspired thoughts of the extent and point of the universe). Interestingly, when Stephen Hawking was asked what influence Dan Dare had on him, he replied *'Why am I in cosmology?'*

Following a huge publicity campaign, the *Eagle* proved to be very successful, sales of the first issue (shown here) being about 900,000 copies. It could be said to have been revolutionary in presentation and content, the serialization of its most recognizable story, Dan Dare, which was created by Frank Hampson, being crafted with meticulous attention to detail. I particularly appreciated the features on nature study and educational cutaway diagrams of complex machinery.

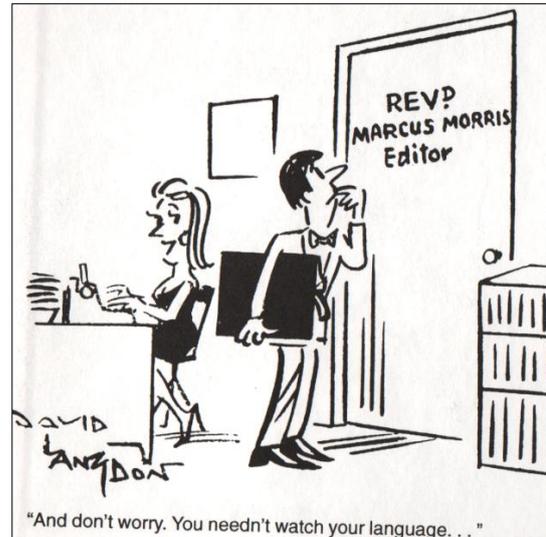
The religious and moral framework of the publication, although never far from the surface, was not explicit. A notable feature was the award of a *Mug of the Month* prize to the boy whose selfless acts had been recognized by others.

It came as something of a surprise then, in reading this biography, which was written by two of his daughters, that Morris was far from being a straight-laced vicar, with a talent for engaging the interests of aspiring middle-class teenage boys. He was in fact a man of contrasting interests and moods. He was often at odds with the Church establishment, which perhaps dated from the time when the-then Suffragan Bishop of Liverpool said to him before his ordination *'Morris, I don't think you're really a Christian at all.'* Apart from that, *'his intake of alcohol and nicotine was legendary,'* while *'his clerical status did not prevent him – or his beautiful actress wife, Jessica Dunning – from indulging in extra-marital affairs'* or, as evidenced, carefree nude swimming.

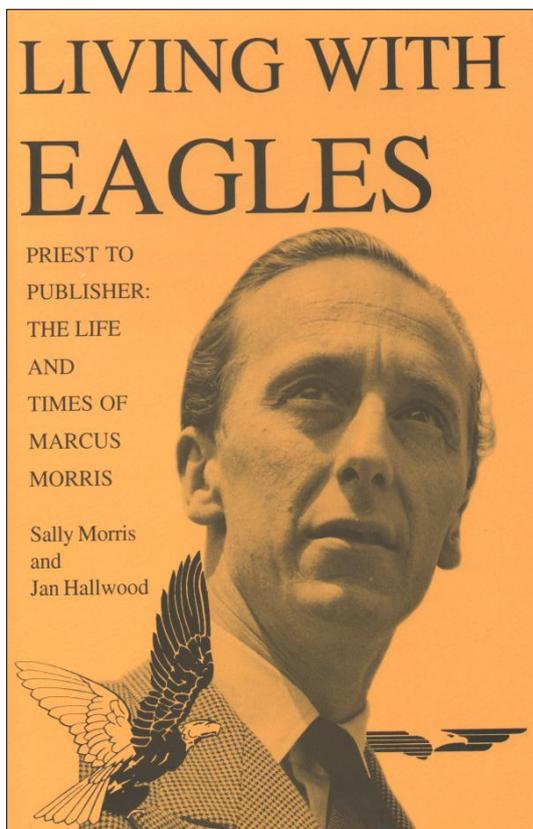
About 18 months after the launch of the Eagle, its evident success led to Morris starting a magazine for girls entitled, rather prosaically, *Girl*. This also broke new ground, challenging the long-standing assumption that the main roles of women were to support their bread-winning husbands and be largely responsible for raising their children. Not long after a comic for children of around seven to eight years old, *Robin*, issued from the same stable.

Despite their enormous early popularity, the Eagle, and his other comics, brought Morris no substantial wealth, his flamboyant way of life being largely financed by a generous expense account. But in 1959, following arguments with his new masters in Fleet Street, he left the company and spent the rest of his working life with the National Magazine Company which he made one of the most successful publishers in Britain. The Eagle ceased publication in 1969, although it was revived in a quite different form from 1982 to 1994.

At the National Magazine Company, Morris became involved in management roles with periodicals like *Harpers Bazaar* and *Good Housekeeping*. Although he grew to be disillusioned with the Church, he



remained a priest, and in spite of his frequent liaisons with beautiful women, he reputedly remained happily married to Jess until his death in 1989. And, even though his eccentric behaviour was no secret, he appears to have been greatly respected and loved his employees, parishioners, and many friends alike.



A biography written by a subject's own children is less common than other forms, and it is a genre which has a, perhaps understandable, tendency to hagiography. But *Living with Eagles* shows no hint of that. It is a candid, warts-and-all, account of what must have been a highly amusing, not to say, chaotic family life – written in their older ages by two girls whose subsequent lives followed highly different paths.

That said, I did not find it an easy book to follow, as the 20 (all untitled) chapters frequently lapsed into a 'stream of consciousness' mode which was often difficult to unpick. I must confess that I was also rather disappointed to discover that someone I had naively respected when a youngster turned out to be

much less worthy of that opinion.

Sally Morris and Jan Hallwood: *Living with Eagles*. Lutterworth Press (First published in 1998)

9. Prized for Life



These leather-bound books, from my personal library, were all presented as school prizes and embossed with the school's coat of arms. Clockwise from top left, they were from King Edward VI School, Birmingham: *The Odyssey of Homer* (1887); Shepton Mallet Grammar School: *Boswell's Life of Johnson* (1867); Bishop Auckland College and Grammar School: *Self Help* by Samuel Smiles (1895) and Rydal Mount School, Colwyn Bay: *Starland* (astronomy) (1892). They date from an era when books commanded great respect both for their contents and the crafts displayed in their physical qualities, and were doubtless cherished throughout their recipients' lives. They remain so by some of us, who are unimpressed by most modern forms of bookbinding.