

BOOK GROUP 2

February meeting

ARTICLE FOR THE U3A WEBSITE

AN INTERESTING VARIETY

Due to a hiccup with the delivery of books, we agreed to review a book of our choice and we were not disappointed with the wide spectrum of authors and stories we discovered. Here is a selection, a veritable cornucopia this month! My thanks to each member of the group for their contribution.

THE LIBRARIAN – SALLEY VICKERS

Set in 1958, this is the story of 24 year old Sylvia who takes up the post of children's librarian in the village of East Mole. We see her establishing her own identity in the community, developing relationships and setting up a meaningful children's library in the face of opposition and scepticism. The story focuses on relationships – that of Sylvia with her parents, Sylvia and the married doctor, two young teenagers, young love from afar, the gay lock keeper and more. The story is firmly rooted in the era and clearly recognisable to someone "who was there". The reference to libraries and the importance of books in our younger years was particularly relevant to us all.

STEP BY STEP – SIMON REEVE'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I enjoy Simon Reeve's travel documentaries and found this interesting and surprising. He describes his teenage years with total honesty. A time when he was robbing shops, dodging bus fares, joining groups of tearaways (if only on the edges) whilst growing up in North London. He had a difficult and troubled relationship with his father but ironically it was due to his father that he was given an opportunity to follow a different path. His father saw an advert in the Sunday Times placed by the then editor Andrew Neill who was looking for juniors with potential rather than academic qualifications. Simon had left school with no qualifications and was one of 4,000 applicants for 4 jobs but obviously impressed as he was selected for one of the posts. He had to work in all departments, doing any job that was required of him. With hard work and some lucky breaks you can read how he progressed to his current successful career in this enjoyable, well-written book.

A SLOW FIRE BURNING – PAULA HAWKINS

Having previously read "The Girl on the Train" by this author and thoroughly enjoyed it I was looking forward to a good read. Sadly I was disappointed. The book is about a murder on a houseboat and featured 3 main female characters but from the middle of the book onwards I was constantly referring back to previous chapters to check who was who! I would be interested in other members' views if and when they read it.

OLIVE KITTERIDGE – ELIZABETH STROUT

This book is set in a small town in Maine and comprises 13 interconnected stories in which the main character, Olive, appears. She is a brusque, formidable woman but also shows compassion and vulnerability. The stories explore grief, loneliness and family torment from different perspectives such as Jack leaning on a windowsill reflecting on the death of his wife two years earlier, his strained relationship with his daughter and other regrets. Olive has problems with her son, now married with 3 children whom she rarely sees. She invites them to stay for the first, and last, time. When visiting a

friend who is giving a baby shower for her daughter, Olive finds herself delivering the baby in the back of her car.

The stories in this collection show different aspects of Olive and her fellow townspeople with characters ranging from adolescents to aged coping with the stuff of everyday life.

OUR SOULS AT NIGHT – KENT HARUF

This is a short, tender story, about love, loneliness, family, courage and bravery when growing old. It is set in a small town in America where Addie Moore and Louis Walters live as neighbours, both widowed for many years. A brave step by Addie one evening to ask Louis to share her bed and talk to her through the long lonely nights leads to a tale told with humour and gentleness and reminds us of the ability to transcend society's mores with confidence and courage. Beautifully written.

AROUND THE WORLD IN EIGHTY DAYS – JULES VERNE

I was inspired to choose this book following the Beebs recent offering so very different from the David Niven film perhaps some of us saw in childhood. The text is a new translation from the French. A very engaging read with the sense of a Frenchman's view of a well-mannered English gentleman (Phileas Fogg) focussing on his sense of propriety, honesty and order, so different from his French counterpart (the butler Passepartout).

The story does not dwell totally on the swashbuckling adventures particularly portrayed on film and my memorable read as a youngster. This makes me think generally French novels have characters whereby authors muse on motives and philosophies of life rather more than the competitive complex plotting in many English books of adventure.

Christine Wright