

**BOOK GROUP 2
DECEMBER 2022**

This month members reviewed a book of their choice so lots to choose from.

1 *Beastings by Benjamin Myers*

This story is set in the Lake District and is about a girl unable to speak who is brought up in a Catholic institution, sexually abused by the priest until puberty when she is discarded and placed with a farmer and his wife. His wife had just given birth but was too ill to look after both her baby and her husband. The girl forms an immediate bond with the baby because she received attention and unconditional affection not previously experienced.

One day she finds the farmer shaking and shouting at the baby and resolves, due to her own upbringing, to rescue this child and give her a better life than she had. She has an idea that she can get them both to an island in a lake and live there together forever. The book is her story of the abduction of the baby, the chase over the fells by the priest and a poacher, and her struggle for survival against the elements. It also describes the power of the Catholic church embodied in the nuns and priests at that time.

The reader is absolutely involved in the journey with her across fells and mountains but know that her end goal is impossible to achieve and one wonders how this story of violence, despair and horror can possibly end. The way it does is totally unforeseen and an absolute “OMG” moment!

2 *The Wild Silence by Raynor Winn*

From the author of “The Salt Path” about a couple who lose their farm in a legal battle and their trials and tribulations as they walk the 630 mile South West coastal path, this is the sequel. Inspired to write the first book, this one concentrates on the kindness and positive actions of people who help them rebuild their lives when they are given the chance to repair a Cornish farmhouse and an offer to live in an old chapel.

3 *Shrines of Gaiety by Kate Atkinson*

Kate Atkinson's latest novel takes us into the Soho underworld of the 1920s. At the centre of the novel is Nellie Coker (based on the real life Kate Meyrick) who has five nightclubs and six children and is struggling to protect her empire from gangsters and corrupt cops. Other characters in Nellie's orbit include two teenage runaways intent on becoming stars of the West End stage, a fearless young woman trying to track them down and an upright policeman investigating a spate of missing girls.

For me, there were a couple of drawbacks to the novel: the large number of characters comes at the expense of character development and the "Where are they now?" ending feels tacked on. Nevertheless, Kate Atkinson keeps all her plates spinning and this was a hugely enjoyable read combining wit and gaiety with a steely core in a fascinating setting.

4. Lessons by Ian McEwan

One good read leads to another. The group choice earlier in the year was Ian McEwan's "The Childrens Act". His latest book is "Lesson" just published. It is a long 500 page saga of a baby boomer's aspiring experience of life, work and love. It details a generation with unrivalled opportunity and so many options to change the world. However there is underlying truth and guilt the story points to that our generation has had so many options to improve the world but despite being wrapped up in good intentions has in fact not changed a world for the better.

5. The Boy, the Mole, The Fox and the Horse by Charlie Makesy

This book should be read by everyone. It is essentially a book about empathy, friendship and unconditional acceptance of others who are different and has recently been made into a film that was shown on BBC over Christmas. If you did not see it, get it on catch up if you can. The boy is trying to find his way home, he meets a mole who likes cake, a fox and a horse and they travel together. It is about kindness. The reviews on the back cover are far better than anything I could write so I am taking the opportunity to copy two of them here.

"The world that I am required to live in is this one, but the world that I long to inhabit is the one that Charlie Maksey has created" – Elizabeth Gilbert

"Simply, the world needs Charlie's work right now" – Miranda Hart

6. Mother's Boy by Patrick Gale

Laura, a Cornish girl, meets her husband when they are both in service at Teignmouth in 1916. They marry, have a baby, Charles, but Laura's husband Charlie a damaged man with TB from the First World War will soon leave Laura a widow.

In the small class-obsessed town of Launceston she raises her boy alone, working as a laundress and she gradually becomes aware that Charles is some kind of literary genius. He makes two close friends in school, Ginger, clearly attracted by men, and Joe, the big, confident butcher's son.

As an intensely shy, private, young man himself, Charles signs up as a coder in WW2 having above average intelligence. Life in a wartime Navy is an extreme contrast to all Charles has known and he blossoms through his work and different postings. Using diaries,

letters, papers and poems, Patrick Gale says he has “shamelessly used fiction and conjecture to fill the gaps in stories that history and discretion have left blank”.

In 1948 Charles Causley returns from wartime service to live with his mother and to teach creative studies in the local school. Charles Causley never came out as gay but the author includes a couple of Charles’ acknowledged sexual encounters during the war with his great friend and shipmate Cushty, and later Charles falls for an officer who likes sleeping with him while dreaming of married life after the war which is what happened.

Christine Wright