

THE BANK OF DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES

Investing in the Creative Future of the South West

Jasmine Aldridge

Nestled in amongst the dynamic, historic landscape of West Dorset is a place where figments of children's imaginations come to life. These dragons, pirates and talking animals run wild across the hills and coastlines before finding their home in a very unusual space indeed: a bank. But don't be fooled, this is no ordinary bank: unlike most, this one truly has your best interests at heart. Here, fantastical beings take shape in stories deposited by local children before being transformed into purposeful, captivating anthologies that can be shared with the world. Aptly named The Bank of Dreams and Nightmares, this Bridport-based charity combines the rich heritage of west Dorset with a pirate shop in San Francisco and uses its uniquely formulated space to capture young imaginations and unleash them without limitation. It is as crazy and incredible as it sounds.

FOUNDING A FORCE FOR CHANGE

Founded in 2021 by film producer Nick Goldsmith, the charity offers free creative writing workshops to local children and is a recent addition to the Dorset town of Bridport's long creative history. Surrounded by myth, legend and breath-taking scenery, Bridport has featured in several stories and novels such as Thomas Hardy's *Fellow Townsmen* and John Millbrook's *A Bridport Dagger* (Baddeley 1). Its artistic town centre has also seen the founding of the renowned Bridport Prize in 1973 and the subsequent Bridport Literary Festival that still flourishes today. However, the idea for this unique arts charity was first formulated further afield. Goldsmith was inspired to set up the Bank whilst in San Francisco where he visited 826 Valencia, a creative initiative founded by Nínive Calegari and Dave Eggers. Yet, not everything is as it seems. In a remarkably unusual combination, 826 Valencia doubles as a pirate shop that sells costume props and as a hub offering writing workshops and tutoring to help under-represented students with their schooling. This adventurous façade captures people's imagination, brings in money from passers-by and offers the charity a storefront in which to sell the students' books. Inspired by their

ingenious response to improving creative services and public engagement, The Bank of Dreams and Nightmares was founded to offer similar services to school pupils here in the South West and has become part of the International Alliance of Youth Writing Centres. This alliance brings together independent charities from across the world who work towards creating safe spaces for young people to learn creatively. The Bank of Dreams and Nightmare's part in this collaboration opens multiple possibilities for the South West as a growing hub for storytelling.

'Since 2010, there has been a 26% decrease in the number of children and young people aged eight to eighteen who say they enjoy writing in their free time.'

Of course, the rural landscape of the South West, as beautiful and thought-provoking as it is, does present its own unique challenges. With many of the key literary hubs being in the major cities such as Plymouth, Exeter and Bristol, creative communities in between these focal points sometimes find it difficult to connect with these spaces, often because of fewer transport links in rural areas. Younger generations especially appear to be struggling to connect with creative networks, and children's interest in reading and writing nationwide appears to be decreasing. According to the National Literacy Trust's *Annual Literacy Report*, 39% of children and young people receiving free school meals said they enjoyed reading compared to 43.8% of their peers who do not receive them (Clark et al. 13). Likewise, since 2010, there has been a 26% decrease in the number of children and young people aged eight to eighteen who say they enjoy writing in their free time (Clark et al. 2). These national statistics remind us of the need for compelling initiatives that re-engage young minds with the limitless possibilities words and stories can offer. A 2022 report by The University of Exeter looked specifically at social mobility and education in the South West and found that, although the free school meal rates for the region are relatively low, the gap in educational attainment is higher than in other regions. In the South West, disadvantaged primary school pupils are eleven months behind the national average whilst disadvantaged secondary school pupils are twenty-one months behind: 'when national disadvantage gaps were closing, the South West had smaller improvements than most other regions for FSM pupils...' (Sim and Major 12). These figures outline the need for improved literary programming that promotes accessibility and support for young people living in the South West. The central ethos behind The Bank of Dreams and Nightmares works toward increasing creative engagement with disadvantaged primary and secondary school pupils to combat these statistics.

As such, The Bank of Dreams and Nightmares is an incredible example of how giving a creative voice to the younger generations can marry with the importance of making publishing and literary networks in the South West more accessible to

a testament to the charity's ability to guide children without restricting them and signals that the projects are safe spaces where all voices can be heard.

The published anthologies are, however, only the tip of the iceberg for this fast-moving charity. As well as running creative writing workshops, they collaborate with local businesses to produce varied experiences for the children involved. Another of their popular workshops focuses on journalism. Coordinated in blocks of after-school sessions, the quarterly newspaper *What's Going On?* is written by a small group of children in workshops called The Vault. Working as a team, the children are guided to produce interviews, features, quizzes and articles, with their input and interests taking the lead. Giving young people the chance to explore topics that inspire them promotes both confident creativity and keen engagement in local community events. In the interest of ensuring that the programme is inclusive and accessible, children can request a place in The Vault with priority being given to those on free school meals or whose households are on Universal Credit. For previous issues, the children have even had the opportunity to work with celebrities such as Will Poulter, Jack Whitehall and David Walliams. They are always on the lookout for the next big story!

'Giving young people the chance to explore topics that inspire them promotes both confident creativity and keen engagement in local community events.'

These workshops offer children a chance to explore their creativity in a space unburdened by fees or academic expectations. As founder, Goldsmith spoke with enthusiasm about the project's inclusivity, explaining that 'the stories aren't included on merit – every child's story is published professionally. If children believe in themselves that is what matters' (Goldsmith). It is clear then that the charity is not an 'out of school, school' and that self-belief is its central driving force. By moving away from a system of academic achievement that historically disadvantages minority and working-class children, the charity is tapping into an underdeveloped space for creative writing learning that enhances children's creative capacities. Fundamentally though, the charity works with the school initiative, not against it. The workshops aim to remove the stigma of intelligence-based hierarchy that can often deter children from joining school writing groups. This is not to say that schools are not offering similar initiatives, but creating an additional space for children outside of school inspires extra confidence that then translates into more self-assurance in the classroom.

FORGING CREATIVE CONNECTIONS

The Bank of Dreams and Nightmares works devotedly with local children to give them opportunities they may otherwise have never been given. Through this

work, the charity also engages with multiple publishing networks in the South West. Alongside the published anthologies, creative writing workshops and weekly newspaper, the children can work with other local experts to produce a wide range of projects that go beyond the written word. In collaboration with the local theatre company Stuff and Nonsense, directed by Niki McCretton, the charity brought together over ninety children from schools across Dorset to create a production of 'Three Little Pigs' that premiered at Poole Lighthouse in December 2023 before touring the UK. A quirky puppet production, the young people helped produce an alternative narration of the fairy tale. On the run from the wolf, the three little pigs trick their toothy pursuer on to a bus and hopefully escape their typical huffing and puffing ending. Those involved in such projects are given significant creative rein and, like the workshops, the collaborations are deliberately child-led. With the help of other local professionals, the young people involved also create podcasts, perform live poetry, and even film skits and videos. These opportunities provide them with inspiring connections that might springboard them into industries they may otherwise have struggled to access.

'Those involved in such projects are given significant creative rein and, like the workshops, the collaborations are deliberately child-led.'

When considering the production of these projects, yet more networks are made visible. Just as important as the child-led creative process is the ability to provide the children with a physical product at the end of their projects. Giving the young writers tangible proof of their achievement shows them that their work is being taken seriously, an acknowledgement that is vital to The Bank's ethos of inspiring lasting confidence. Goldsmith explained that for the first issue of *What's Going On?* they arranged for the children to go and watch the pages being printed in nearby Weymouth. This offered them a visual representation of their imagination taking form. Additionally, a local artist is commissioned to design the cover for each anthology before the manuscript is sent to Imprint Digital in Exeter where it is printed professionally. After this production process that utilizes the skills of local artists and businesses, the book is formally launched and celebrated at an independent bookshop. As founder Goldsmith commented in a personal interview, these are moments that evoke wonder in the children:

'Our book launches are held at local bookshops, and it is the first time the children get to see the finished book. They are amazing events, and you can really feel the electricity in the room and see a child's confidence grow when they hold their published work.'



Don't Feed The Locals by Budmouth Academy.

In the past, the charity has collaborated with the publisher Little Toller Books whose books focus on the natural world and the intricacies of rural life. The charity used Little Toller's industry expertise to edit the anthology and launched their first publication at their bookshop in Beaminster. For the people involved in making these moments come together, it is the ability to give children a sense of tangible achievement that makes these events so rewarding. In this way, the charity establishes key connections and networks with local businesses, in turn strengthening inclusivity and offering further connections to the children enrolled on the projects. The consolidation of these relationships minimizes the potentially isolating rurality of the South West. Giving the children a sense of belonging to a close-knit community who all share a creative love for their rural home is a primary goal of the charity, and it is safe to say that they have achieved it.

CONCLUSION

By focusing on widening participation in local creative industries to include children who may feel limited by their personal circumstances and location, The Bank of Dreams and Nightmares is forging a new future for the South West's publishing and literary scene. While there is no expectation for these young writers to pursue a writing career or even work in the arts sector, by empowering them to use their creative voices and transform their imagination into stories, the charity is indirectly forming a new foundation for future communities to enjoy.

Crucially, the safe space the Bank promotes allows the children scope to explore the escapism of writing and use it for self-expression. The mental health benefits of writing have long been proven and two in five children write to express their ideas, imagination, thoughts and feelings (Clark et al. 4). Putting pen to paper gives young people an outlet to organize their emotions and process difficult experiences by conjuring exciting new worlds, and initiatives such as The Bank ensure that every child is encouraged to explore their creativity through stories that resonate with them. Ultimately, writing has the potential to empower, to transform, to inspire confidence and most importantly to bring a child's wildest dreams to life; projects that tap into this potential offer the brightest future for their participants.

Looking forward, The Bank of Dreams and Nightmares is a space set to continue growing across the South West. With the dedicated support from volunteers who work tirelessly alongside the workshop organizers, the potential for the charity's impact is boundless. This accumulation of hard work and community pioneers an electrifying space for creative learning, and it is certainly deserving of wider attention. Notably, although lots of their work is Dorset-focused, their most recent publication being written by students in Devon demonstrates their widening participation across the region and suggests that even more young people will experience their transformational workshops in the near future. By reigniting curiosity outside of the classroom, children are reminded that their imagination is worthy of celebration: whether it is the adventures of a pirate or the gossip of a talking seagull, all stories find their place in Bridport's most unusually weird and wonderful bank.

KEY WEBSITES

The Bank of Dreams and Nightmares:
<https://www.thebankofdreamsandnightmares.org>

Stuff and Nonsense Theatre Company:
<https://aloadofstuffandnonsense.co.uk>

The International Alliance of Youth Writing Centres:
<https://www.youthwriting.org>

Little Toller Books:
<https://www.littletoller.co.uk>

‘GOOD CUSTODIANS OF CHILDREN’

Q&A with Barry Cunningham, Publisher and Managing Director of Chicken House

Elizabeth Greenwood-Spicer

Barry Cunningham’s publishing career has been long, successful and populated with some of the biggest names in children’s books – from Roald Dahl at Puffin, to signing J.K. Rowling following his founding of Bloomsbury Children’s Books. He founded Chicken House, a children’s publisher with emphasis on vibrant original fiction, in 2000, and its success has only grown since its purchase by Scholastic in 2005. Chicken House has published *New York Times* Best Sellers such as Cornelia Funke and James Dashner, and many other popular middle-grade and young-adult titles, while acting as an international imprint in over forty foreign languages. In 2010, Barry Cunningham was awarded an OBE by Queen Elizabeth II for services to literature and following his championing of both readers and writers, is especially proud of ‘making reading cool again’ (Chicken House).

Elizabeth Greenwood-Spicer: To start, can you explain how Chicken House came into being, and why you chose to specialize in children’s literature?

Barry Cunningham: I worked for Penguin for years, in both the children’s and the adult’s side. I worked with Roald Dahl, Mary Norton and Diana Wynne Jones, and loads of adult authors as well. I then went on to launch Bloomsbury Children’s Books, where I was lucky enough to sign J.K. Rowling,

but I always found that the relationship between children’s authors and their readership was more interesting than the equivalent adult relationship. For people like Dahl, or for people like those we publish now, they are like another character in the books they write for children, and that interested me far more as a relationship than the one adult authors tend to write. I had lived in the West Country for a while and there is lots of great talent there. I thought it would be wonderful to

start a company that specialized in debut fiction, giving authors a chance to reach a new audience and to do that without adult publishing interference.

Elizabeth Greenwood-Spicer: I understand that since 2005 Chicken House has been a subsidiary of Scholastic. Do you find that this affects the way you choose and develop projects to publish, or do you mostly have free rein?

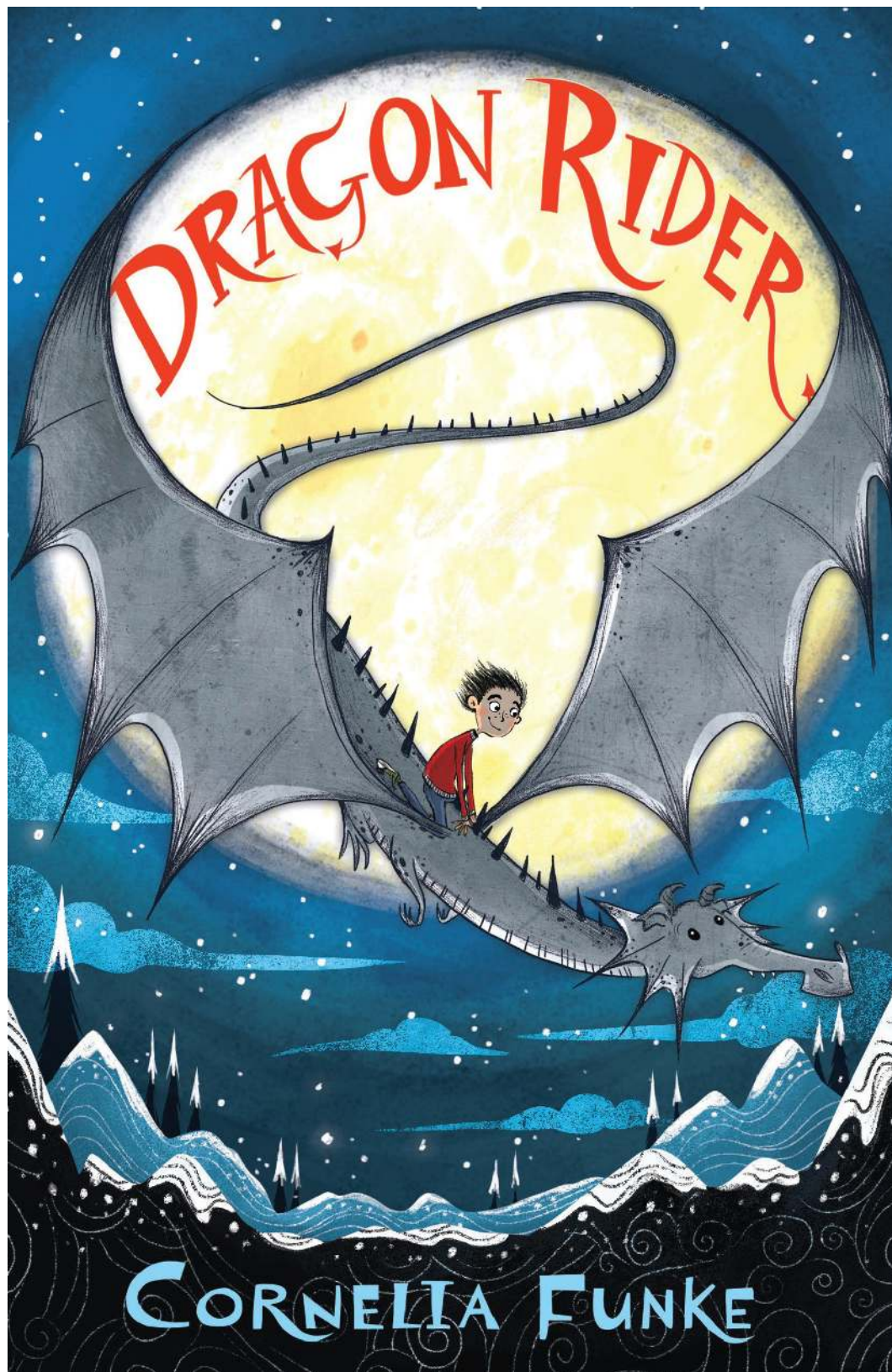
our authors. I like to think we are the Pixar to their Disney! We are about developing new talent, and as you know, sometimes this bursts forth. We work with Kiran Millwood Hargrave, and she made a huge impact from the beginning, while others take more time, or don’t work for a variety of reasons. Publishing and developing new talent is a risky, but interesting part of the business, and that’s the part we play within the Scholastic family.

‘I think publishing houses, especially for children, benefit from having personality.’

Barry Cunningham: Funnily enough, I have seen in my career how larger publishers absorb smaller ones, but Scholastic has been great. They approached us over the years, and we have always had a partnership with them in the United States, so the deal was that they would leave us alone and we would continue to publish what we wanted to publish – and they’ve done it! We publish completely independently editorially, so we can publish what we like with our own judgement without any interference. What we do have is access to very large American, Australian and New Zealand markets, as well as Scholastic book clubs and fairs, which reach huge numbers of school children across the UK, United States and Australia. It is like a mass distribution, which is a huge benefit to us and

Elizabeth Greenwood-Spicer: One of my favourite things about Chicken House’s list is – and I’ve got my copy of Cornelia Funke’s *Dragon Rider* here – the fact that you write your own little personal comments at the beginning of each title. How much of a personal role do you take in the publication of each book, and how does this personal approach to curation impact Chicken House’s business model?

Barry Cunningham: It is an interesting question, Elizabeth. I think publishing



Chicken House cover for *Dragon Rider* by Cornelia Funke, published July 2017.

houses, especially for children, benefit from having personality. There is reasoning behind the books they pick, and how they develop talent. It is important that we only publish books that we believe in, and that we make a good job of it – both editorially, in developing the quality of these books, and commercially, in making them available around the world. That little introduction that I have is an important part of why we publish books, because I want to speak directly to the reader – such as you – about why the book is a good read! This personality gives our list something which is very hard to replicate in big multi-nationals, where the people who buy the books may not be the same people who publish them. Big publishers do lots of good

Barry Cunningham: It is difficult, Elizabeth – I was a bookseller for a while and, of course, every child has a different reading age, so what we have to do is make broad age bands that indicate where children might find the books they are interested in. It is also really important for parents, carers and educators to find other books from the ones the child is already enjoying. Those broad age categories are important signposts, but they are only directions. I know children can wander through them – you have picked up a book by Funke, and there is a very wide range of people who enjoy her fantasies. This is true of fantasy in general, like *Harry Potter*, so they are only guidelines, but important ones to help choose.

‘I strongly believe we have a duty of care, so the way we resolve difficult subjects, even when you get to YA or older children’s literature, is really important.’

things, but in terms of consistency, creativity and identity, it is lovely to have some publishing which has a recognizable personality.

Elizabeth Greenwood-Spicer: When I was reading through your website, I noticed that instead of having more conventional, industry-standard age categories – going from middle-grade to young-adult – you had really specific ones, such as 8+, 9+, 13+ and 15+, which bridged these categories. Do you think children’s publishing would benefit from adopting more specific age categories or would this just complicate things?

Elizabeth Greenwood-Spicer: This is really interesting, and leads on to my next question. Since children aren’t often the ones with the disposable income to buy books for themselves, how do you go about appealing to parents, teachers and librarians when you market books, but still make sure you keep the child’s voice at the forefront? How difficult of a balance is this?

Barry Cunningham: I think we are lucky in this country that we have great librarians and teachers, and I think parents often trust companies like ours to be good custodians of their

children. I strongly believe we have a duty of care, so the way we resolve difficult subjects, even when you get to YA or older children's literature, is really important. Often, for parents, we are the guardians of how children at different ages encounter different subjects. Adults who are buying and choosing books for children know that, however difficult the subject, we have the sensibilities and vulnerabilities of children in mind. I have seen a lot of children's reactions to authors. Things like the death of a parent in a book, or even the death of a pet, are really important, and we have to treat things with age-related sensitivity. I do think we have a responsibility to do that, while of course presenting to children the best of imagination. I don't know what you think about children's books generally, but sometimes I think they are all about what they are most scared of, and how to deal with that. This is true of whatever age, and I never forget that when we are working on editorial. We have got to be aware of how we deal with things.

Elizabeth Greenwood-Spicer: Focusing on current issues, which is really interesting considering you worked with Roald Dahl, questions around diversity and representation are prominent in publishing, especially children's publishing. Do questions around diversity impact the way you acquire new titles for Chicken House?

'While you may not be able to make something a weaker force in your life, you can make yourself stronger through humour.'

Barry Cunningham: We run a huge competition with *The Times* called The Times Chicken House Competition (unsurprisingly!), and we also reach out through our Open Coop, where you have twenty-four hours to submit your books. We are trying to attract new books and communities from a wider range than just the books that literary agents submit to us. In the last year we have published Efua Traoré, who's done really well for us, Jasbinder Bilan, who won the Costa Prize, and we are trying to broaden our spectrum of communication as well. In terms of sexuality, I'm not after quotas or anything, but I am after offering different voices, and to be honest, those different voices are banging on our doors. They are an important part of our entrants to The Times Chicken House unpublished novel competition, and that's changed an awful lot since it has become wider known. Dahl was interesting, because he was prejudiced in different ways. However, his central message was 'Don't trust adults!', that they are not necessarily in your best interests – especially aunts – and 'Don't believe in anyone but yourself', which is enormously empowering for kids. It also fostered that irreverent idea that, 'If you can't deal with it, you can always laugh at it'. While you may not be able to make something a weaker force in your life, you can make yourself stronger through humour.



Chicken House cover for Once Upon A Fever by Angharad Walker, published July 2022.

Elizabeth Greenwood-Spicer: Continuing from that, the MA Publishing cohort here at Exeter have discussed the burgeoning use of sensitivity readers. Does Chicken House utilize sensitivity readers throughout the editorial process, and what are your opinions on using them as an editorial stepping stone?

Barry Cunningham: A lot of authors would like us to use them and I am fine with that. When they are unsure of a subject matter, particularly a historical subject matter – where we just have the UK perspective through our school system – they want us to find out a bit more about the era they are talking

about. We didn't call them sensitivity readers, but we have always used readers who were interested or experts in a wider range of fields. What we don't use them for is to change the editorial emphasis of the work: we don't say 'Is this right?', we say 'Is this accurate?' I think that is important as we are not asking for censorship, we are checking if we have got it right. We do use them, but we don't use them to out-imagine the authors.

Elizabeth Greenwood-Spicer: Another of my questions centres on Chicken House's list, as the work of authors such as Maz Evans, Angharad Walker, and Di Toft use the UK as a prominent setting and cultural background. How important is it for Chicken House to publish distinctly British stories, especially given the company's global reach? For instance, you mentioned China and America and New Zealand.

Barry Cunningham: I think Maz is great at playing with both our traditions, legends and beliefs, as well as the modern version of what we think of those. We published our first Chinese author last year, Chen Jiatong and *The White Fox* series, while our winner of The Times Chicken House Competition last year came from Australia. We publish a lot of American writers of a wide range as well, and we are publishing two really great novels from Nigeria, one about a Nigerian boarding school which is hilarious! We do publish widely, but I also recognize that Britain has what Funke often describes as fundamental ground-rocks of legends and stories that are intrinsic parts of Celtic and

European culture, where everyone from Beowulf upwards has contributed. It is a rich ground to play around with, and also because lots of kids will want to know what happens next: Walker's work, for instance her dark 2021 novel *The Ash House*, is a pretty harrowing version of what happens next! Looking at what will happen to us now, and where that will lead, is a huge part of what kids are interested in as well.

Elizabeth Greenwood-Spicer: Absolutely! That leads on to the last of my questions; I noticed that in many Chicken House titles, there is a focus on current problems that children face. Recently I read *Who Let the Gods Out?* by Maz Evans, where it implies that the protagonist is a young carer, and I'm currently reading *Once Upon a Fever* by Angharad Walker, which concerns fears of having big feelings and disease, especially poignant following the COVID-19 pandemic. What are some key issues that you think children and young people are facing in the UK, and how can books explain these and help children who are experiencing them?

or not, what friendship is and how it can help you – and there are increasingly bigger problems, like global warming and how that should affect our everyday lives. We all know children have a big teaching element in that too: they take things far more seriously because it is going to be their world when they are adults. Even sexuality: how do you feel you are, and how does that impact your life? I think Philip Pullman said that the reason why children's books are so popular at the moment is because they deal with important things like love and death fearlessly! Walker deals with those as well, about how the values of your talents together with society's values can be very different, and those are enormously important. I travel the world, luckily, talking about children's books, and in places like China or Mexico, some are almost like liberation texts, because they are about standing up to authority and your private liberties. I think all great children's books are about important things. Evans, who you just mentioned, is hilarious, just outrageously (my favourite joke in the book you mentioned is that someone flies on an airline named 'Don't-Care Air'), but inside those books, there is

'Books can be the secret friends of childhood.'

Barry Cunningham: Funke, who was previously mentioned, once said that books can be the secret friends of childhood, and sometimes they are the only friends you have to discuss things in your life with. I think that social media is a really big problem – what other people think of you, whether it matters

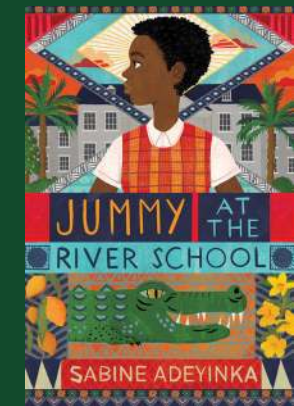
a young carer trying to save his mum with dementia. At the heart of even very funny books, there can be things which appeal to the serious side of children, and which they know is going on in their school, class or home. It is one of the reasons why we pick books, because we often say to authors: 'That's

great, but what's it about? What do you want kids to take away from this?' It is an enormous function of children's publishing, because unlike a lot of adult publishing, it is a collaborative business, and so we work with an author on things like that, and on conclusions and endings. Children's publishing is very different from adult publishing in that way – to the age range you are aiming at, what does this book really mean?



Chicken House cover for *Who Let the Gods Out?* by Maz Evans, published February 2017.

You can find more information about Chicken House, its upcoming titles, and information about submitting to The Times Chicken House Competition at: <https://www.chickenhousebooks.com/>



Chicken House cover for *Jummy at the River School* by Sabine Adeyinka, published January 2022.

THE GLOBAL SOCIAL CHALLENGES JOURNAL

Bristol University Press is Publishing with a Purpose

Katherine Peppiatt in collaboration with Nerissa Evita Niamh de Groot

Sprinkled across Bristol University Press's celebratory five-year anniversary brochure – accompanied by images of a climate protest, a Black Lives Matter march, and a child gazing into Virtual Reality goggles – is one key phrase: 'publishing with a purpose' ('Anniversary' 1). From its initial inception, Bristol University Press (BUP) has strived to promote content that connects academics, policy makers and everyday citizens alike. Although BUP just hit the half-decade milestone, the press comes from a long history of publications dedicated to social policy and changemaking. Beginning in Spring 1990, the University of Bristol's School for Advanced Urban Studies (SAUS) began publishing content that examined

BUP represents a key mission-based publisher within England's South West.

One central ideal encompasses BUP's dedication to providing both academics and ordinary people this valuable information: accessibility. By operating under a not-for-profit business model, BUP is able to reinvest the funds generated from their book and journal sales back into future titles. As Sarah Bird, Managing Editor for BUP, emphasizes, 'We are not driven by the financial bottom line. We put integrity before profit'. At the core of their company ethos lies a commitment to honest, accurate knowledge, unbridled by the restraints that a for-profit model usually places on publishers and acquisitions editors. Publishing content

'At the core of their company ethos lies a commitment to honest, accurate knowledge, unbridled by the restraints that a for-profit model usually places.'

policies regarding diversity, equity and inclusion; eventually in 1996, SAUS's initial efforts grew into Policy Press, giving way to BUP in 2016 ('Timeline'). Evolving from the longstanding history set forth by SAUS and Policy Press,

about social justice has very little impact if individuals cannot afford to access the content itself. BUP answers this concern with the recent development of their first fully Open Access (OA) journal, the *Global Social Challenges Journal*.

Publishing the first volume of the *Global Social Challenges Journal* in 2021, BUP reiterated its commitment to addressing the interdisciplinary questions and concerns that are seen across society today. The *Global Social*

as freely accessible online scholarship that is unrestricted by copyright and licensing (4). Over the five years since BUP's creation, the amount of fully OA journals across the globe has risen from 26.03% to 35.98% (Curcic). The continual

'An OA publication can reach broader global audiences, separate from monetary and other societal constraints that have barred access to scholarship in the past.'

Challenges Journal aims to include a broad variety of voices, and 'the journal is an important home for research which contributes to the creation of alternative futures that acknowledge past injustices and are socially and environmentally just and sustaining' ('About the Global Social Challenges Journal'). As Bird notes, 'The focus is very clearly on global social challenges, with a strong emphasis on both global and social'. The journal's endeavour to diversify the voices represented in academic scholarship – and BUP's participation in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Publishers Compact – allows the publication to better offer critical perspectives that are ethical and sustainable. As the *Global Social Challenges Journal* champions accessibility and the UN's SDG, it arguably should be viewed as a framework for responsible, academic publishing using the OA model in the South West.

THE OPEN ACCESS MODEL

BUP's choice to develop an OA journal fits within a broader trend in academic scholarship. Suber broadly defines OA

increase of OA publications directly ties to changing perceptions about the accessibility of scholarship.

Creating the *Global Social Challenges Journal* represents BUP evaluating the academic publishing landscape and adapting their publications to match the growing expectations of OA scholarship. There are specific benefits that branch from the decision to make an OA journal. From an audience standpoint, there is the increased potential to read and interact with published scholarship. Essentially, an OA publication can reach broader global audiences, separate from monetary and other societal constraints that have barred access to scholarship in the past. In fact, some publishers report that OA articles receive as many as five times the number of downloads than articles that are not OA ('What is Open Access (OA)?'). Emphasizing this point, one *Global Social Challenges Journal* article – 'More Than a Metaphor: "Climate Colonialism" in Perspective' – has been downloaded more than 10,000 times in a year, increasing the impact that academic publishers, specifically in the South West, can have (Bird). An OA model aligns closely with BUP's framework of

‘When creating the *Global Social Challenges Journal*, BUP developed a model to maintain its promise of featuring authors from under-represented backgrounds.’

reaching academics, policy makers and ordinary citizens alike, embodying the ethical framework under which BUP creates its publications.

The *Global Social Challenges Journal* further frames itself as an important destination of accessible scholarship through its alignment with Gold Standard OA. Articles and content published under the Gold Standard model can be accessed at no cost on a journal’s website; additionally, by licensing them under Creative Commons (CC) licenses, they can be freely distributed and shared to facilitate further research (‘What is Open Access (OA)?’). The choice to make the journal Gold Standard OA spreads the impact that new voices can have within the academic publishing space. Moreover, when creating the *Global Social Challenges Journal*, BUP developed a model to maintain its promise of featuring authors from under-represented backgrounds; they only charge authors who have funding for article processing fees, and they ‘continue to offer discounts and waivers for those without funding in low- and middle-income countries’ (‘Introducing *Global Social Challenges Journal*’). By offering these concessions to authors from marginalized communities and less economically developed countries, the journal has the capacity to offset the argument of some OA critics – that the burden of publishing now falls on

the shoulders of authors, creating yet another barrier to entry (Wingfield and Millar). The journal spreads the impact new voices can have in the academic publishing space by developing this specific OA model, which therefore leads to a wider impact in the South West and globally.

THE PEOPLE

The driving force behind any publication are the people, and BUP is no different when it comes to publishing the *Global Social Challenges Journal*. The people involved with the publication, from authors to editors, perpetuate the mission statement of the journal and ensure that the ethos of the press is evident throughout the publication.

A central goal of the *Global Social Challenges Journal* is to highlight ‘marginalised, minority and Indigenous world views,’ and while the journal does have authors from overrepresented anglophone backgrounds, it is clear that the journal forefronts different experiences and voices (‘About the *Global Social Challenges Journal*’). In the first volume alone, which is comprised of nine articles, there is representation from over eight countries. Researchers featured in this publication are, to name a few, from Brazil, India, South Africa, Ethiopia and Nepal. Diversifying the voices of academics featured within this publication allows the journal to more



Volume 1 *Global Social Challenges Journal* cover.

effectively create commentary on a broad scope of societal issues.

In addition to the authors’ impact on the journal, the publication is non-existent without its editors. The *Global Social Challenges Journal* is headed by six Co-Editors-in-Chief from a range of countries and backgrounds, such as Brazil, China, England and more (Bird). Each of these editors offers central perspectives on the development of the journal. Having a wide range of editors

from different backgrounds means the journal will have a more holistic view on the global social challenges that society faces today. For example, someone from China may not know of the challenges faced in Latin America and vice versa. Therefore, having individuals with varied experiences serve on the editorial board is a crucial component of the journal.

Although BUP has done a great job promoting diversity within their own ranks and through their authors, it is

also worth noting that Black editors are missing from the line-up. This is an area that BUP should consider broadening, especially given that they are based in Bristol, where the Black British, Caribbean or African population is 3.4% higher compared to the national average ('How Life Has Changed in Bristol: Census 2021'). Additionally, as BUP itself is part of the Africa Charter for Transformative Research Collaborations, which 'aims to ensure that African scholars and institutions are recognized for their scientific efforts,' it is crucial that the *Global Social Challenges Journal* considers the voices they are highlighting through the publication (Wood). The journal should adapt to reflect the current and changing publishing landscape; expanding the representation within the publishing industry in the South West should be a key priority as this publication continues to grow. By doing so, the *Global Social Challenges Journal* can continue its important mission of creating purposeful, sustainable content.

THE SUSTAINABLE CONTENT

Due to its not-for-profit OA model, the *Global Social Challenges Journal* connects with a wider audience, and it is crucial to evaluate the type of scholarship that is being promoted, especially in relation to BUP's participation in the UN's SDG Publishers Compact. Launched during the 2020 Frankfurt Book Fair, the UN created the SDG Publishers Compact to inspire publishers to create 'books and journals that will help inform, develop, and inspire action in that direction' ('SDG Publishers Compact'). BUP's motto of 'publishing with a purpose' naturally

lends itself to the UN's mission to inspire sustainability principles across the publishing industry. They are one of only fifty-four publishers in the UK, and one of the very few in the South West, to be a participating member of this pact to incorporate sustainable publishing practices ('SDG Publishers Compact Members'). It is important that BUP is evaluated against these standards that they have dedicated themselves to uphold because it increases the importance of the accessible scholarship they produce.

Thus far, BUP has published two issues of the *Global Social Challenges Journal* that closely align with the goal to publish content that discusses sustainable issues throughout society. In 2022, they published Volume 1, 'Addressing the Global Social Challenges of our Time'; in 2023, they published Volume 2, 'Drone Ecologies'. Throughout the two volumes, there are clear connections to the UN's SDGs. For example, the article 'Local Approaches to Climate-Sensitive Peacebuilding: Lessons from Afghanistan' by Adriana E. Abdenur and Siddharth Tripathi has clear connections to Goal 13: Climate Action and Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. Featuring Abdenur's and Tripathi's outline of ways to emphasize climate action as a part of peacebuilding demonstrates how the *Global Social Challenges Journal's* link to the SDGs informs the development of their content.

The *Global Social Challenges Journal* also expands the accessible potential of this content through its different submission types. While a majority of content, like Abdenur's and Tripathi's paper, takes the form of the typical

academic article, the journal also offers the opportunity to publish 'Interventions'. BUP created the idea of 'Interventions' to better speak to a non-academic audience, like students or policy makers. As Bird notes, 'Interventions' 'are halfway between a blog and a research paper, and that's a good opportunity for authors to write something on a more general topic, but with more depth than a blog'. These shorter articles, a maximum of 3,500 words, can move through the editorial process more quickly and address concrete issues in today's society. The *Global Social Challenges Journal's* first 'Intervention' - 'Reflections on Food Systems Transformation: An African Perspective' - clearly aligns to Goal 2: Zero Hunger. By providing authors different publishing opportunities, BUP is expanding the potential content that audiences can access.

Therefore, the content published within the *Global Social Challenges Journal* situates BUP as a key figure within academic publishing in the South West. The South West is a small but powerful player that influences how society responds to critical environmental issues; there is an established understanding that the natural landscapes must be protected against the current climate crisis. With this in mind, BUP's choice to align themselves with the UN's SDG Publishing Compact acts as an example for how other publishers in the South West can incorporate critical issues into their scholarship and promote sustainable publishing practices.

CONCLUSION

Each element of the *Global Social Challenges Journal* - the Open Access, the people, and the content - speaks to the ethos on which BUP was founded. While there is always room to grow and evolve, BUP currently represents a critical framework for responsible academic publishing within the South West. The opportunities that OA allows for accessibility, coupled with the crucial content highlighted within the pages of the journal, mark a way in which academic publishing in the South West can have a widespread impact. BUP's role as a mission-based publisher is a positive element within the publishing landscape. With the development of the *Global Social Challenges Journal*, it is clear that BUP continues to develop innovative ways to 'publish with a purpose'.

REPUBLISHING THE QUEER PAST

Lurid Editions

Katherine Burns

On 18 November 2003, Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 was repealed, overruling the law that prevented schools and councils from ‘promoting the teaching of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship’ (Section 28). Twenty years later, we are now able to see the effects of this legislation in historical archives, particularly through media and culture such as literature. The lives of LGBTQIA+ people were severely afflicted when their access to books in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries – in schools, libraries, and bookshops – was radically suppressed.

Lurid Editions is a Bristol-based publishing house who publish ‘reprints that refuse to fit in’ (‘Home’). In June 2024, they will publish their third book *The Milkman’s on His Way* by David Rees. Rees was based in the South West and taught at the University of Exeter while writing his books; the archives held at the university now contain a variety of documents and manuscripts from his collection. In 2022, *The Milkman’s on His Way* was displayed as part of an exhibition by the University of Exeter’s Special Collections. Through this, D-M Withers, Publishing Director for Lurid Editions, discovered the existence of the text and its history. During an interview conducted while researching Lurid Editions, Withers noted it was the university’s ‘exhibition dedicated to the Rees collections, curated by Annie Price’, that immediately piqued their interest in Rees’s work, especially ‘as someone whose education was shadowed by Section 28’. This discovery of Rees’s manuscript, from within the archives, has allowed for a regional publishing house to republish a text that holds significant value in queer history.

During my time as an MA Publishing student at the University of Exeter, I had the privilege of working as a Publishing Intern for Lurid Editions. As part of this work placement, I learned how archival material and the resurfacing of previously out-of-print queer books uncovers a world of texts that can be revealed to new audiences. I took a deep dive into Rees’s archive, discovering his opinions on different texts, including his own, as well as the public and media reception of the books that he had written. It provided a rich history of LGBTQIA+ publishing and writing from the twentieth century, as well as highlighting how the South West inspired and enriched Rees’s books.

David Rees (1936–1993) was a writer, primarily of children’s and young adult fiction, while also working as a lecturer of education at the University of Exeter. He won the 1978 Carnegie Medal for his book *The Exeter Blitz*, and he published over thirty texts – including fiction, essays and short story collections. Often, his writing was set in Devon and Cornwall, as the areas that he became familiar with during his time in Exeter. Alongside his creative writing, Rees held a long-standing post as a writer and reviewer for *Gay Times*, *Express and Echo*, and *The Journal of the Royal Society of the Arts*. In these articles, he referred to the lack of fiction that positively depicted gay male characters, themes and relationships, with particular note that there was none available for young adults. In response to this, he wrote three young adult novels, *Quintin’s Man* (1976), *In the Tent* (1979) and *The Milkman’s on His Way* (1982), with the intention of changing the landscape of gay representation in fiction for teenagers. Like many gay men of his generation, Rees’s life was indelibly marked by the AIDS crisis: in 1985 he was diagnosed as HIV positive. This diagnosis influenced Rees to write the book *The Wrong Apple* (1987), depicting a young man coming to terms with an AIDS diagnosis, who then finds care and reassurance from a new friendship. In 1992, Rees was forced to stop writing as his illness worsened. He died a year later on 22 May 1993.

‘Rees’s literary papers are stored alongside the artefacts of significant South West-based organizations and authors such as Ted Hughes, Agatha Christie [and] William Golding.’

In the University of Exeter archives, Rees’s literary papers are stored alongside the artefacts of significant South West-based organizations and authors such as Ted Hughes, Agatha Christie, William Golding and the Arvon Foundation. The Rees archive consists of ‘original manuscript and typescript drafts of his novels, short stories, poems, reviews, articles, speeches and interviews; as well as correspondence and newspaper clippings’, explains university archivist Annie Price. Alongside his own writings, the collection also contains newspaper articles about his works, including responses to his inclusion of homosexual characters in several of his books, that were often viewed as being controversial due to the social attitudes of the time. Additionally, the archive holds a typescript draft of Rees’s Carnegie Medal acceptance speech, where he discusses his own career in depth from a personal perspective, describing the motivations behind his writing of certain themes. The speech also reflects on the importance of Exeter for Rees, not only within his books but for the network of writers that it provided for him. This included Sidney Robbins, founder of the magazine *Children’s Literature in Education*, and Gene Kemp, winner of the Carnegie Medal the year before Rees. Price explains that the speech shows Rees’s ‘love for Exeter and the influence of the city on his works’, highlighting that a ‘passion for place’ is something that Rees shares with the other South West-based writers represented within the archives (‘Personal Interview’).

For reprint publishers like Lurid Editions, archives and libraries are important places to discover the existence of forgotten books. The curatorial role performed by archivists, according to Withers, ‘highlights the vital role [they] perform in research – without Annie’s curation it would have taken me longer to find the book, there is also the risk that I may never have found it’. This exemplifies the advantages of using university archives in the publishing industry – not only are they useful for learning more about previous writers and their publishing practices, they also allow publishers to rediscover lost manuscripts and texts. Within the archives, the manuscripts are also surrounded by their relevant history, both authorial and publishing-business related, inducing the publisher to become quickly invested in the story’s rich historical narrative and context. It is this rediscovery of a past once lost that makes the reprint publishing business an important venture: the reward is knowing that the public will once again be able to access an author’s hard work, and a valuable piece of history.

In order to highlight the marginalized voices and lives that, to date, may have been overlooked, Special Collections are now taking a proactive approach to the curation of their collections. Price explains that ‘since 2020, Special Collections has been

*Exhibition about the David Rees collection, Special Collections, University of Exeter.
Photo by D-M Withers.*



undertaking work to identify problematic language, bias and erasure in our catalogue descriptions’, elaborating that this review was especially important in relation to Rees’s archive (‘Personal Interview’). According to Price, the archivists ‘identified the omission of significant contextual information in the collection description for the David Rees literary papers’, previously overlooking his self-identification as gay, and that ‘he was one of the first writers in the UK to feature central gay characters in his books for children and young adults’. Thus, the collection description was modified, making his work more easily identifiable for researchers. Rees’s archive offers an insight into how queer history affected the restrictive outreach of his book, presenting a detailed representation of his personal and working life, especially his self-identification as a gay man.

The Milkman’s on His Way, originally published in 1982 by the radical Gay Men’s Press, caused a political stir due to its inclusion of homosexual content targeted towards a young adult audience. The novel portrays teenage Ewan Macrae’s coming-of-age story as he grapples with his gay identity and experiences the reactions of others, including his parents and close friends. Set in the small town of Bude in Cornwall, Ewan discovers that he cannot be himself in such a tight-knit community of locals and leaves for London to discover himself and queer culture. Throughout his journey, Ewan learns about his identity while finding freedom in London’s flourishing gay scenes. The book also embraces the awkwardness of the teenage phase, discussing self-discovery, sex and identity throughout.

‘The *Milkman’s on His Way* was heavily suppressed from its intended audience, and the representation that Rees had sought to enable within the industry was tragically lost.’

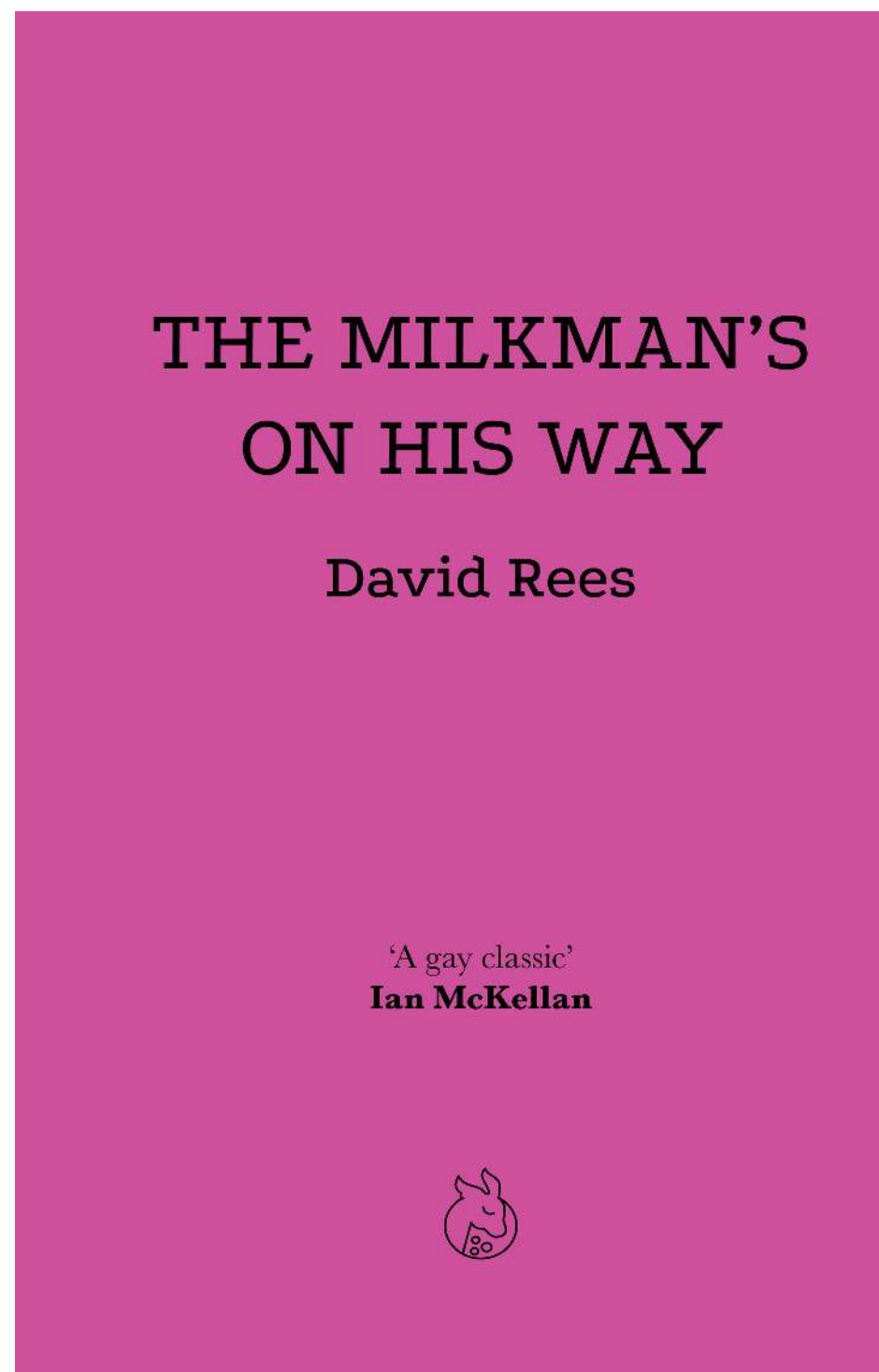
In a feature published in *Gay News* in June 1982, journalist Alison Hennegan noted that the publication of *The Milkman’s on His Way* was for Rees: ‘the culmination of a theme he’s pursued for several years: the adolescent gay boy who makes his way cautiously, uncertain but ultimately triumphant, towards an adulthood in which his sexuality is accepted, integrated and enjoyed’ (Hennegan 37). In a handwritten note held within the Rees collection, he wrote: ‘There is no subject which interests adolescents more, and we are short-changing our readers if we don’t show the teenage characters in our books at least *thinking* about sex, experiencing sexual desire, and wondering how to cope with themselves as sexual beings’. It is clear from several of Rees’s articles and personal notes that discussion of sex was a theme he believed to be fundamental to children’s and young adult fiction.

Upon its publication, *The Milkman’s on His Way* was celebrated by gay reviewers for providing the kinds of representation Rees believed was so important. Yet, a few years later and amid the AIDS crisis, the book achieved notoriety for its depictions of sex and homosexuality. An article published on the front page of *North London*

newspaper *The Journal* on 31 October 1986, titled ‘New Gay Sex Book Scandal,’ describes responses to *The Milkman’s on His Way* as ‘obscene,’ ‘stomach-turning’ and ‘pornographic’ (Klein). The controversial responses to the book, from parents and politicians, originated from uproar regarding access to the book in public libraries. Many critics expressed fear that ‘impressionable’ children were able to access the book, believing that young people should not be reading explicit content depicting gay relationships or sex. By including *The Milkman’s on His Way* in the Section 28 debates, Margaret Thatcher’s government characterized the novel as ‘explicitly describ[ing] homosexual intercourse’ and ‘glorif[ying] it’ (‘Section 28’, LGBT+ History Month). This label of explicit content was also applied during these debates to other books that featured gay characters such as *Playbook for Kids about Sex* by Joani Blank (1980) and *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin* by Susanne Bösche (1983) (‘Section 28’, LGBT+ History Month). Through the passing of Section 28, *The Milkman’s on His Way* was heavily suppressed from its intended audience, and the representation that Rees had sought to enable within the industry was tragically lost.

‘As a publishing house, their aim is to bring books that have fallen out of print and history back to the foreground of publishing, in beautifully striking “Lurid Pink” designs.’

The Milkman’s on His Way will be the third book published by Lurid: *Chase of the Wild Goose* and *The Awakening of Indian Women* were both published in 2023. To publicize their titles, Lurid have held launch events with independent bookshops in the South West region, including Bookbag (Exeter), Bookhaus (Bristol) and Gloucester Road Books (Bristol). Their previous book launches have featured conversations between artists, publishers, scholars and historical experts. As a publishing house, their aim is to bring books that have fallen out of print and history back to the foreground of publishing, in beautifully striking ‘Lurid Pink’ designs. When asked about the curatorial influences for Lurid Editions and their selections, Withers noted that ‘each book is an experiment in marketplace positioning, about finding readers for overlooked works. All the books are queer, in the sense that they challenge the norms of the moment they were written, and that challenge continues to echo loudly today’. The decision made by Lurid Editions to publish reprints of forgotten books in turn generates its own echo: they seek to diligently restore the lost queer voices of the past, giving them the recognition that they have deserved all along.



The Milkman’s on His Way cover.

As a new South West publishing house, Withers hopes that Lurid Editions can help to practise cultural justice in publishing and to reclaim lost voices in history. With regards to *The Milkman's on His Way*, they emphasise that:

This sweet and unthreatening book was taken away from a generation of queer readers, and republication is a way to put the text back into circulation. We can't take back that stolen time, or the isolation that gay adolescents may have felt growing up in the 90s and 00s without positive representations to help them feel secure in their identities, but we can right a historical wrong, and talk about what it all means now (Withers).

Evidently, the importance of Lurid Editions' republications is to demonstrate how books provide an insightful view of the past, inspiring new conversations about the significance of their texts, and perhaps why they were unfortunately lost to history in the first place.

'It provides an opportunity for people who were young adults at the time of the original publication to revisit and rediscover texts that were suppressed when they were young.'

When Lurid Editions' new edition of *The Milkman's on His Way* publishes in June 2024, it will feature an introduction from Paul Baker, author of *Outrageous!: The Story of Section 28 and Britain's Battle for LGBT Education*. By publishing a young adult novel, Lurid aims to begin a conversation about the past between different generations. Articulating the positioning of the novel's reprint publication, Withers explains that: 'I do think for the generation who were young adults in the 1980s and 90s, the book will have a nostalgic appeal.' They note that the book also has a poignancy for young readers today as 'it will offer a way of connecting with the queer past – a queer past that they too may experience as a loss, albeit one step removed. I think what can unite all generations is a reading of what might have been' (Withers). The young adult framing of the novel brings a unique perspective on queer history to its readers. It provides an opportunity for people who were young adults at the time of the original publication to revisit and rediscover texts that were suppressed when they were young. Nostalgia for the time and setting of the book opens discussions between readers about how their teenage journey of self-identity occurred. For younger generations, *The Milkman's on His Way* can provide an insight into what it meant to be a gay teenager in the 1980s and also, as Withers notes, the book offers the chance to read and discuss the possibility of what might have been had Section 28 not been passed. Lurid's new edition provides an opportunity to reclaim the text's optimism: its hope for a better queer future. Withers explains that the novel 'has a resolutely positive tone, it offers us a happy ending. In that sense, it functions as a time capsule – a spirit of optimism that was taken away but can still be recovered'. This is what Withers personally determines to be the most moving and powerful

aspect of Rees's text, highlighting that this once-lost novel speaks to past, present and future generations of queer readers.

The local events that Lurid Editions hosts provide an opportunity for communities to rediscover important moments of queer history together, and it is through each reprinted book that these important parts of history can be truly uncovered and explored. Like other South West-based publishers – Little Toller Books, Handheld Press, Persephone Books – whose mission centres on out-of-print works, Lurid Editions is finding gems from the past and giving them the chance to be read again. While Withers details that each book is 'connected by their differences', they become united by the Lurid Editions name, presented within the publisher's interconnected history of bold, unique queer texts.

CONVERSATIONS WITH BALDWIN - LIVE

Dazzles at the Arnolfini, Bristol

Amelia Kemmer and Elio Smith y Díaz-Andreu

On October 21, 2023, the Conversations with Baldwin Festival came to a triumphant conclusion with a spectacular live event. The festival was dedicated to celebrating the renowned twentieth-century writer and civil rights activist James Baldwin, whose plethora of pivotal works include *Another Country* and *Giovanni's Room*. It was a test run for a larger, nationwide event in 2024 that will celebrate the centennial of Baldwin's birth. The live event was held in Bristol at the Arnolfini arts centre and placed particular emphasis on showcasing a wide variety of local talent from the city and its surroundings – a rapidly growing cultural and artistic hub. The evening was produced by the festival's organizer, Words of Colour, an agency set up to create opportunities for writers, creatives and entrepreneurs of colour in the UK. The event was created in collaboration with Bristol-based spoken word and live arts events organization Raise the Bar. Many in the audience had attended other events that ran as part of the festival such as book clubs, online panel discussions, film screenings and workshops stretching from September to late October. As the venue filled up before the opening of the show, anticipation

hummed in the air and what was to come did not disappoint.

Baldwin's activism and writing powerfully engaged with a variety of themes that still hold much significance today including racial justice and LGBTQIA+ rights. In a conversation with Heather Marks, the creative director for Words of Colour, she explained that the objective of the festival was not only to learn about the author's ideas, but to engage with them in a variety of formats and explore the ways that they can be applied to the contemporary context in the ongoing fight for civil rights and racial justice. The need to hear a wide variety of viewpoints to have a modern, intersectional conversation with Baldwin led to the festival being conducted in an accessible way. The affordable price points allowed participants to 'engage in his ideas without having that financial barrier exacerbated by cost of living'. Half the events were delivered online, several were BSL interpreted and all were wheelchair accessible.

Indeed, all of the performers at 'Conversations with Baldwin - LIVE' spoke to an aspect of Baldwin that resonated with them. The headliner was British-Jamaican poet, writer



Diomedea performing. Photo by Sam Cavender.

and broadcaster of deaf experience Raymond Antrobus. His works include *Shapes & Disfigurements* (2012) and *All the Names Given* (2021), and he is the recipient of more accolades than can be named, including the Ted Hughes Award and the Rathbones Folio Prize (2019). He shared poems about his experiences of deafness in

a world designed for hearing and how this intersects with racism. Antrobus frequently brought the audience back to Baldwin through his calls for justice for marginalized social groups and his emphasis on the importance of empathy. The poem dedicated to his friend Tyrone Givans, who took his own life after serving time in prison

where he was denied his hearing aids, was inspired by reading Baldwin. He similarly referred to *Another Country* and the loneliness he found in *Notes of a Native Son* as inspirations for other works he shared.

Antrobus's expressiveness, both in reading his poems and addressing the audience, was captivating. His poems are exceptionally written, which was made clear through his delivery. His speeches were direct and compelling, and his communication with the audience, and especially his BSL interpreter, was flawless. The poet was working with not only Baldwin as an author, but also as a public speaker. Heather Marks reminded us that Baldwin 'was very eloquent, very intelligent in his writing',

he brought 'that into performance [in] debates, [in] interviews when he is standing up on a podium and speaking to people. That was also another string to his bow. It is where oracy and literacy are connected.' Here Antrobus took on Baldwin's role as civil rights activist saying that 'this is not the world Baldwin wanted' and called for a ceasefire in Gaza.

Muneera Pilgrim similarly engaged with Baldwin's politics, talking directly to Bristol's communities of colour as a poet, writer and cultural producer. She is the author of *That Day She'll Proclaim Her Chronicles* (2021) and co-founder of the Muslim Hip-Hop and spoken word duo Poetic Pilgrimage and the Black Muslim Women Bike

platform. Her presence on stage in a bright red jumpsuit was electric and the audience's delight was palpable. Pilgrim articulated incisively her experience of being marginalized as a woman of colour, with a focus on the reclamation of her own body. She also expressed powerfully how recent events were affecting people of colour, internationally and in the city. She spoke about Grenfell, police violence, and called for a free Palestine, while always circling back to James Baldwin. She discussed how she thought he would feel about contemporary injustices such as these, and how inspiration can be taken from his works to tackle them in the present day.

Two other artists who performed were Sails Katebe and Deepraj Singh. They collaborated on a combination

Katebe and Singh's performance showed how literature, like Baldwin's works, can stretch across time and mediums. Marks told us, referencing both Katebe, Singh and the BSL interpreters, that it was 'about the fluidity of literature. Not just taking it from the page to the stage, but even translating it [...] in the moved word.' As Katebe read poetry exploring his Black male identity, Singh moved captivatingly around him, expressing both the words and his own experience as a person of colour in the UK. 'Performance is about making it live, making these words alive,' said Marks. The performance was a moving combination of spoken word and dance. As it progressed, Katebe's poetic choreography started to mirror Singh's gestures in a powerful fusion of mediums.

'Baldwin's activism and writing powerfully engaged with a variety of themes that still hold much significance today.'

of poetry and dance. Sails Katebe is a writer, performer and workshop facilitator born in Zambia and now based in the South West. He is the author of the poetry pamphlet *Katabasis* (2021), co-hosts *Raise the Bar*, is a BBC Poetry Slam runner-up, a Milk Poetry Superslam winner and was the 2019 poet-in-residence for the SS Great Britain. Deepraj Singh is a performer of contemporary dance. Going from after-school capoeira to the London Contemporary Dance School with a Duke of York Scholarship, Singh now works as a freelance dancer, touring internationally with pieces such as the Akademi's *The Troth*.

The event didn't just celebrate Baldwin as an intellectual, a writer and a civil rights activist, but also focused on talking with Baldwin as an individual. Marks was particularly sensitive to the need to acknowledge Baldwin's queerness, something often erased when focusing on his political ideas. Moreover, she considers it an important interpretive lens, without which his texts cannot be properly understood. For this reason, the festival had an advisory group primarily made up of queer people of colour; the festival's first book club read Baldwin's foundational text of queer literature, *Giovanni's Room*; and their digital



Raymond Antrobus performing with Nikki Harris, BSL interpreter.
Photo by Sam Cavender.

salon 'Baldwin on Love' interrogated the depth of Baldwin's statement 'love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within' (Baldwin 103).

During the evening, Baldwin's queerness was represented by two drag performers: Mariana Trench and Diomedea, bringing glitz and glamour to the stage. Mariana Trench, perfectly coiffed and in a splendid gown, sang a resonant version of 'I Know Where I've Been' from the musical *Hairspray*. Originally performed by 'Motormouth' Maybelle as she leads a protest for racial equality, the song's words echo Baldwin's civil rights activism and his itinerancy as he travelled the world. As Marks said, 'He was sometimes a man of exile. He had to get that distance from America in order to write, in order to think and then that necessitated him making relationships with places across the world.' Diomedea brought a further personal dimension to approaching Baldwin, dancing to 'Ain't No Mountain High Enough' by Diana Ross, a record that had been in Baldwin's own collection. Through their engagement with the audience and joyful countenance Diomedea brought an upbeat element to the live event. The performance embodied the vibrancy with which the author lived and seemed to beckon the audience, telling them that they too could dance with Baldwin in their own living rooms as if it were his.

In the space of just one evening, 'Conversations with Baldwin - LIVE' managed to capture the ethos of the entire festival and the wider organizational objectives of Words of

Colour and Raise the Bar to promote diversity and inclusion. The aim was to create a safe space for previously unheard voices to call for the types of changes Baldwin himself would wish to see. The hosts, Heather Marks and Danny Pandolfi, Raise the Bar's founder and director, also brought attention to someone who had been pushing for these changes, someone who is no longer here but whose work reverberated throughout the events: Gboyega Odubanjo, a young poet who died at Shambala festival in August. After a minute of silence in his memory, the theatre erupted in rapturous applause. As the MCs drew the show to an emotional conclusion, there was one clear message from Baldwin: get people talking. Due to the immense financial strain on the arts, events like 'Conversations with Baldwin' are becoming progressively more challenging. Despite the differences between the individual performances, they were unanimous in sustaining Baldwin's timeless message: 'Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.' This can only continue to happen if there is support from audiences that extends beyond the event's conclusion. Next year's festival aims to build on this resounding success and expand beyond the South West to encompass the UK and beyond, however, we feel very lucky that the literary networks of the South West were the first to be graced. Exciting things are coming. We'll be staying tuned.

A LIVING ARCHIVE

Common Ground

Davina Quinlivan

Oliver Rackham more than once observed that 'The most difficult task in the whole of art is to draw a tree.' 'Any picture of a tree,' he continued, 'has to leave out most of the detail.' The same can be said of bees, otters, raptors, reptiles...all are beyond our drawing. Our record suggests that we are just too pre-occupied with our own needs, our ambitions, unable to focus politically and in detail on the other forms of life with which we share the land.

(Rackham quoted in 'Uprooted', Robert MacFarlane and Adrian Cooper, 2016)

In Crediton, on the fringes of rural Devon, my eye is often drawn towards the façade of a derelict Victorian cottage whose giant, over-grown veil of creeping ivy had clearly been plucked away, leaving only its skeletal outline like a chalked silhouette at a crime scene. The ivy is a fugitive presence. Here and not 'here', a ghosting of surfaces. What of the parts removed from the bricks, I ask myself, over and over. Were they now more 'house' than ivy, moulded into its plaster and dust, or was the house more 'ivy' than brick, since it left such a large imprint of itself on the walls? It was always the stencilled shape of the ivy I saw each time I passed that house, never the building, which seemed to mute itself in its shadow. Ways of being, ways of knowing. As an admirer of the Japanese art of Kintsugi, where a seam of gold is painted between the cracked surfaces of ceramic pottery, I suffer from an all-consuming desire to fill in those damaged bricks with a golden yolk, or perhaps some simpler kind of common ground.

Sometimes, living things leave traces and imprints in time which we can hold on to as cultural artefacts. We tend to call these demarcations, fragments, 'collections', or what is more commonly known as 'archives'. Books, letters, objects of any kind, published works and private manuscripts can be held within an archive and it is our presence in the archive which, hopefully, brings such things to life again, assembling new narratives from historic threads. The Common Ground archives, held within the Special Collections at the University of Exeter library, remind me not of the house in Crediton I regularly pass, but the living system which deeply

connects a great number of environmental writers not only across the South West but also further afield nationally. Founded in 1983, the charity's radical focus on community activism and nature writing lives on through the work of Dorset-based publisher Little Toller Books, as well as many other cultural organizations in the UK. While the Common Ground archive is housed within multiple series and sections spanning 125 linear metres ('Cataloguing the Common Ground Archive'), it also exists far beyond this space and brings together a large network of writers, artists and academics, myself included. Common Ground celebrates its momentous fortieth anniversary in 2024. In the essay 'Vibrant Localism: The Lure of Common Ground', Jos Smith, who completed a postdoctoral research project at the University of Exeter exploring the history of Common Ground, refers to an historic moment in which three debates on environmental politics were held at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in 1984. The debate focused on the question: 'Who

'Sometimes, living things leave traces and imprints in time which we can hold on to as cultural artefacts.'

owns nature?' What followed caused passions to rise and 'sparks flew', as several more discussions peaked; these were the first events organized by the arts and environmental charity 'Common Ground', established by Sue Clifford and Angela King, both active members of Friends of the Earth, and in collaboration with author-activist Roger Deakin. Deakin founded Common Ground to steer conversations away from government politics and professional, large-scale environmentalism,

Local Distinctiveness pamphlets. Special Collections, University of Exeter.



instead leaning towards community engagement and the everyday lives of people whose connection to nature was local and ordinary:

working closely with artists of all kinds to inspire and embolden communities across the country to protect and celebrate what they valued about their local environments, putting into practice the environmental slogan *think globally, act locally* (Smith).

Soon after the events at the ICA, an anthology of nature writing was launched, *Second Nature*, largely consisting of non-fiction essays and artworks from forty contributors. From its outset, publishing was key to Common Ground and its environmental initiative, and it is apt that its current directors are Adrian and Gracie Cooper of Little Toller Books. Adrian and Gracie Cooper continue to evolve the practices of Common Ground, extending to films and many other innovative and experimental responses to nature. In 2017, Adrian co-produced *Arcadia*, a poetic documentary using archival footage of Britain's landscapes, supported by the British Film Institute's National Archive. There have also been projects involving architecture, digital photography, art installation and educational initiatives with schools across the South West of England.

'There have also been projects involving architecture, digital photography, art installation and educational initiatives with schools across the South West.'

In addition to *Second Nature*, the archives hold project proposals and planning notes, thousands of letters from people across the world writing about their connection to local flora and fauna in 'Flora Britannica' (1992-6) and Parish Maps (1985 and 1996). Consisting of fifteen sub-sections, the archive comprises a wide range of material created and collected by the charity over the course of its activities between 1982 and 2013. According to the online guide to the collection, this organization reflects the archive's original chronology and the way these records were used by the charity. 'The Campaign for Local Distinctiveness' presents a record of Common Ground during its earliest period, encompassing leaflets and notes including a publication of '15 ways in which we might begin to recognise and reinforce local distinctiveness and resist the march of uniformity' and essays on 'Local Distinctiveness: Place, Particularity and Identity' (Clifford and King). 'Field Days' documents a project launched in 1995 which encouraged communities to restore and uncover the original names of fields in their local areas; 'Trees, Woods and the Green Man' aimed to raise awareness of the spiritual and cultural significance of trees, winning a Prudential Award for Excellence. Other key publications of *Trees Be Company: An Anthology of Poetry* (1989 and 2001), *In a Nutshell: A manifesto for trees and a guide to growing and protecting them* (1990), and a special edition broadsheet newspaper, *Pulp! with contributions from actors, authors, artists and cartoonists* (1989), as well as a range of leaflets

and postcards. Several other sub-sections include the work of projects such as 'England In Particular', 'Producing the Goods', 'Rhynes, Rivers and Running Brooks', 'Apple Day' and 'Confluence'.

While the Common Ground archive is an impressively large collection of work created by local communities in response to nature, it is also an archive of activism, of place and of the localism which Smith writes about, rooted in the 'everyday'. Physical presence, indeed, life itself, falls out of the archive as pressed flowers and Richard Mabey's handwriting appears below vivid descriptions of wild daffodils, edible greens, fig trees, snowdrops, orchids, hogweed and ivy. The activist intentions of the initiative marry literature to the environment in a way that calls to mind the current work of the Urban Tree Festival, organized by Neil Sinden, a Director of Common Ground, Writers Rebel (part of Extinction Rebellion, led by a number of authors including Monique Roffey, Toby Litt and James Miller) and 'Right to Roam', a campaign to bring back the right to roam in England, founded by illustrator-author Nick Hayes (*The Book of Trespass*) and the AHRC project Speculative Nature Writing: Feeling for the Future which funded the international symposium 'Decolonising Nature Writing' and a mentorship with Jessica J. Lee, editor of *The Willowherb Review*.

'While the Common Ground archive is an impressively large collection of work created by local communities in response to nature, it is also an archive of activism.'

The spirit of Common Ground lives on through the work of local and national environmental initiatives, many of them closely connected to literature and cultural creativity. In 2016, Smith, Luke Thompson and the artist-archaeologist Rose Ferraby, ran a community project which led to the publication of *Tree Tales*, inspired by the 'story of a plane tree in the grounds of the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital that was grown from a seedling brought over from the island of Kos where Hippocrates first practised medicine (it was after Hippocrates that the doctors' "Hippocratic oath" was named)'. The hospital also has on permanent display photographs of orchards around the West Country, commissioned by Common Ground. And so it seems, amongst the hospital beds and stacked trolleys, the nurses' strident footsteps and polished linoleum, apple trees still grow.

Under the stewardship of Little Toller, and a board of trustees including Tim Dee (a BBC radio producer, author of *Four Fields* and co-editor with Simon Armitage of *The Poetry of Birds*), Common Ground continues its commitment to literature as a means through which communities, and artists, can express their relationship to place. Little Toller are known internationally for their publication of nature classics including Mabey's memoir, *Nature Cure* (2005), Gilbert White's *The Natural History of Selborne* (1789), Clare Leighton's *Four Hedges* (1935) and recent modern non-

fiction such as Pamela Petro's *The Long Field* (2021) and Dara McAnulty's *Diary of a Young Naturalist* (2020). With Common Ground, Little Toller have produced titles including Robin Walter's *Living With Trees* (2020) and *Arboreal: A Collection of New Woodland Writing* (2016), edited by Adrian Cooper and featuring writing from Ali Smith and Philip Hoare. Forty years on, the Common Ground archive can be seen to represent an essential part of the history of eco-political writing, activism and cultural production which now constitutes much of the UK's literary landscape.

In 2022, Little Toller published my book, *Shalimar: A Story of Place and Migration*. Through a fictional, magic realist and activist lens, I tell the story of my ancestral heritage, my parents' migration and my own seven moves across Deep England. I'm acutely aware of how my storytelling has been sheltered under the ever-expanding, living system of words and practices inherent to the legacy of Common Ground. Now, the words on these pages are also an archive. A tiny pigmentation of gold, a liquid history, my words, along with others whose voices are yet to come, fill up new spaces, within nature writing and elsewhere: we make a new shape on the walls.

Flora Britannica pamphlets; cards illustrated by Julia Sorrell (1992).
Special Collections, University of Exeter.



Could you please start by introducing yourselves and your role within the society?

Eleanor Gaffney: I am chair of the SYP for this year. We are a volunteer-run organization, and we provide events, networking opportunities and other resources that we think would be helpful for junior publishing professionals and aspiring publishing professionals in the South West. As the chair, I oversee all the branch's activities, run the annual mentorship scheme and I represent the group at cross-branch events and meetings. I also help with South West events planning, social media strategy, and I am the point of contact for members.

Maddy McManus: I am the digital content officer. I heard of the SYP through the University of Exeter, and I managed to land a job in sales and marketing at David and Charles – a publishing house in Exeter. Once I got that job, I really wanted to push myself. I did the SYP Ahead Mentorship Scheme, which is for those who are already working in the publishing industry and want to find a mentor to help them get ahead. Now I am the digital content officer for the South West branch, and that means I help with the online resources.

Sophie Dickinson: I serve as the Communications Officer for the SYP South West. I graduated in July from the University of Exeter and during my time at the university, I decided that I wanted to work in publishing – mainly because I got back into reading during

the pandemic! I then started working at the university's Career Zone doing admin, and ended up running a few of the publishing panels that they do. Here at the SYP, we run a monthly newsletter, which I do all of the graphics for. We will feature a bookshop every month, or someone who does Bookstagram from the South West.

Why do you think that it is important that the South West has its own branch?

Eleanor Gaffney: There is a myth that there are no publishing opportunities in the South West, and it then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy as people won't want to live in the South West if they want to work in publishing. There was a need to not only highlight that there are great publishers already existing in the region, but also to prevent the brain drain into London because so many people feel like they must move to the capital to work in publishing.

How do you think that publishing in the South West is reflective of its culture and heritage?

Maddy McManus: So at David and Charles, we do lots of arts and crafts books. I feel like Devon has a really creative hub of people, which is reflected with our main sellers being crochet books. It has been nice to reach out to creative groups in Devon such as Wool on the Exe, which is a knitting community we've been in touch with recently.

Sophie Dickinson: I think that publishing in the South West predominantly came about in an attempt to make mainstream publishing more accessible. I think, due to this widening of horizons, perhaps culture and heritage are not quite as linked as they once would have been.

Eleanor Gaffney: There are also a lot of indie publishers here, separate from London, which often link to the culture and heritage of the South West in their own ways.

In terms of publishing in the South West, do you think it is changing? And how has the pandemic specifically changed the way that the SYP operates?

Eleanor Gaffney: Having worked in publishing pre- and post-pandemic, I can see changes happening, and I think they were sped up significantly by the pandemic. It showed that everybody, including those in entry-level roles, could work remotely on a hybrid basis. This opened up a lot of South West candidates to roles in publishing that previously wouldn't have been accessible to them. Now, people can take up remote internships and hybrid jobs, which were rare in publishing beforehand. I think that has made a big difference in terms of decentralization. There is a long way to go, but things like Hachette (one of the Big Five publishing houses) opening an office in Bristol has marked a changing point in terms of what is accessible in the South West. In terms of the SYP, during the pandemic all in-person events stopped, and we shifted to virtual

events. Now we do a mixture of virtual and in person because the South West is so massive that having virtual events is incredibly helpful. People can attend things without travelling for hours across the country.

Sophie Dickinson: I would say that doing events in person is so hard when a lot of people tend to be graduates or looking to get into a career. For example, going from Exeter to Bristol can be quite an expensive trip. So, we still lean towards a lot of online things.

Maddy McManus: It helps with accessibility as well. I was part of the society, and we never did virtual events before COVID-19, whereas now I think people take accessibility a lot more seriously, and virtual events help with that.

What are you doing to increase accessibility and inclusivity for people who want to join the industry but don't have a lot of spare time or money to be able to participate in events?

Eleanor Gaffney: We offer a sliding-cost membership, so anybody who is a student or unwaged will get a discount. We also make sure to record virtual events and share them afterwards to make sure that anybody who isn't able to attend for whatever reason can access the recordings. Every two years, we run an inclusivity survey to get feedback from our members so that we can always hear from them. Committee members also provide feedback on what they think we are doing well and what could be improved on from an

inclusivity and accessibility standpoint. In the last few years, all branches have also introduced inclusivity officers on to the committee to make sure that the events we run and all the actions that we take as a committee are seen through the lens of inclusivity and accessibility. Our inclusivity officer, Han, has put together some social media guidelines to make our work accessible to anybody who is looking at us on social media.

Maddy McManus: In terms of inclusivity more generally, there are also the Into and Ahead mentorship schemes, which are done as a blind review to make them more inclusive.

‘There is a long way to go, but things like Hachette (one of the Big Five publishing houses) opening an office in Bristol has marked a changing point in terms of what is accessible in the South West.’

Eleanor Gaffney: Yes, so all applications for the mentorship schemes, as well as for the committee, are blind reviewed. We also chose to make the mentorship scheme virtual to make sure that people aren't limited in who they are paired up with because of geographical reasons.

The committee of the SYP shifts every year; what do you think the value of this is?

Eleanor Gaffney: It gives more people the opportunity to get involved with the society and give back to the publishing community in the South West. It also allows fresh ideas about how to

help others get into and ahead in the industry and makes sure that other voices are heard. Part of the reason I joined the committee was because I had just moved to the South West and had taken up a new job in publishing. It was great to meet other people in publishing in the area. There are also downsides to changing every year. I think you have to make sure that you have really good handover documents because otherwise it could be a case of people learning from scratch every year, and that can be a bit of a waste of time. So, there are things to be conscious of, but I think having fresh perspectives is always a good thing.

How do you promote opportunities within the society for aspiring publishers in the South West?

Sophie Dickinson: In our newsletter, we focus on both South West news and news from the society as a whole. So, if there is something going on in London that is relevant, we'll pop it in there. We also have a jobs board that focuses on jobs in the area, and we only include jobs that are transparent about salaries. We also do a Bookstagrammer spotlight every month, which is really great because we can point people in the direction of who to follow on Instagram so they can build that publishing



SYP's most recent social trip in Exeter. Photo by Eleanor Gaffney.

network in the South West. So, it is getting you involved with people who have similar interests to you – people to follow and things to keep up with.

Is there anything that you do to reach people who aren't students and are trying to get into the publishing industry?

Eleanor Gaffney: Although we are the Society of Young Publishers, you don't have to be young to be a member. It is open to anybody in the first ten years of their publishing career or anybody

who'd like to work in publishing. You could be starting your first job in publishing aged fifty, and to us you'd be a young publisher. Our social media is not specific to students, and we do try to share what we are doing as widely as possible.

Maddy McManus: The Ahead Mentorship Scheme is also for people who are already in a role in publishing and want that extra push.

Sophie Dickinson: In terms of the types of publishing that we engage with,

I would say we really go across the board. Through our newsletter, we look at any job that is publishing-related, whether that is an admin assistant in a publishing office, traditional book publishing, academic publishing or any other sector. Any editorial roles that are adjacent to publishing or might give you experience, we'll put that in.

How are you currently reaching your target audience?

Sophie Dickinson: Our newsletter subscribers choose to opt in to receive communications from us, but we do post on our Instagram stories when we've got a new newsletter out. I think a lot of the time the SYP will come up in universities, and then you have people seeking us out that way.

Eleanor Gaffney: In terms of them coming to us, we've got two student outreach officers, and they maintain a database of contacts at different universities in the South West. And not just universities that run an MA Publishing course, but anything that might be connected and any place that we think that there might be students who would be interested in working in publishing – because there is no one set way of coming into the industry. For any events that we have going on, the student outreach officers contact anybody who they think might be interested.

How do you promote smaller indie publishers compared to larger ones now that there is such a mix within the South West?

Eleanor Gaffney: It is about what kind of opportunities are out there. I think it is important to make the differences between the two clear so people can make their own decisions about which jobs they'd like to apply to.

Sophie Dickinson: In our newsletter, we'll do a spotlight feature every month on indie bookshops and any small presses that are linked to them. We also try to promote shopping at indie bookshops and feature this at the forefront of our communications. We don't want to push anyone in one particular direction, but we do try to support independent businesses. People in the South West are less surrounded by publishing on a daily basis compared to if you were in London, so it is helpful to have that knowledge of the differences between big and small presses and what it would be like to work for them.

Eleanor Gaffney: Definitely. I feel like one of the massive aims of the SYP generally is to demystify things that go on in the industry, because I think it can be opaque to anybody not already working in it.

Is there a type of content that you find your audience engages with the most?

Maddy McManus: We do blogs and podcasts. I can remember listening to our podcast when I was a wee publishing hopeful as well, and I think people really engage with that because you can just put it on when you are doing your chores and things, getting some work done. I think with the blog posts, you have to put a bit more effort

into engaging with that content as you have to sit down and read it. And the way it works is that all the different branches do different podcasts and different blog posts, so there is a wide range of content.

Do you find yourself conforming to trends on social media to garner more exposure?

Maddy McManus: For TikTok, we did a meetup in Exeter recently; we went around to lots of different bookstores, and Eleanor kindly filmed that. And then we did another independent bookstore crawl in Bristol.

'Don't feel like just because you didn't do an internship with a publisher, it means that you don't have the skills to work in publishing.'

Sophie Dickinson: The thing with TikTok is that you've got to be so hot on it every single day to try and drive a massive audience: posting, answering comments – Instagram reels are very similar. The way that we work, we do one to two hours a week for the SYP. We just don't have the time or resources to be there every hour of the day.

Eleanor Gaffney: We are really new to TikTok. We basically created it this year. And it was definitely in response to the enormous literary community that existed first on Instagram and then on TikTok. We wanted to make sure that we were embedded in that community.

What other organizations are out there, and what do you think sets the SYP apart?

Maddy McManus: I think the most similar organization is *The Publishing Post*, which is also volunteer-run by publishing hopefuls.

Sophie Dickinson: I worked with them for a year and a half. I've found building relationships and networking more effective through the SYP, whereas *The Publishing Post* allows you to gain industry knowledge and have something tangible to direct people to on your CV.

Eleanor Gaffney: It is like we are siblings with *The Publishing Post*. I think we serve different purposes, but we are working towards a similar goal. We definitely focus more on events, networking, resources and community.

Sophie Dickinson: I think as well, there is the impact of societies at universities. I say this only because I was on the Exeter English Society committee, and it was my baby for two years! We did a lot of outreach with the university's Career Zone in terms of publishing careers and careers that focus on the humanities.

Eleanor Gaffney: In terms of careers, BookMachine and Bookcareers are adjacent to us, but the SYP specifically focuses on aspiring junior publishers, mid-career publishers and anyone in their first ten years. We are perhaps more focused in that way.

Finally, do you have any immediate advice for anyone looking to get into publishing?

Maddy McManus: I think if you have the opportunity to do work experience, really make the most of it. We've had two people at David and Charles from MA Publishing programmes who did work experience with us, and now they've got full-time roles. Work experience can really affect what jobs you get after your degree.

Eleanor Gaffney: You gain so many transferable skills from work experience. Don't feel like just because you didn't do an internship with a publisher, it means that you don't have the skills to work in publishing because that is not true at all. No matter what you do, if you are doing something that has admin experience or customer service or working with people, you are going to have tons of skills that you can bring to the table. So don't feel like it is not an option for you, because it is.

Sophie Dickinson: As someone who has recently gone through the whole graduate job interview system, I'd say to be confident in your CV and cover letters and know them back to front. Don't just send them out to so many different people and then forget what you sent out.

Eleanor Gaffney: Don't leave a different publisher's name on your cover letter. Just going to say that one!

Sophie Dickinson: The first question I was asked in about six of the interviews was, 'So, can you tell me what you do and what you get up to at the moment?' And if you can reel that off, have a little go-to speech, pinpointing your skills, it'll go far. For me, once I'd said that, I knew I'd covered so many things, and I was much more comfortable going into interviews.

Maddy McManus: The final thing is to join the SYP!

If you are interested to know more, visit the Society of Young Publishers South West branch page: <https://thesyp.org.uk/branch/south-west/>

If you would like to learn more about the other organizations cited here, visit the links below:

*Bookcareers:
<https://www.bookcareers.com/>
BookMachine:
<https://bookmachine.org/>
The Publishing Post:
<https://www.thepublishingpost.com/>*



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A TOUR OF INDEPENDENT BOOKSHOPS OF THE SOUTH WEST

Amelia Kemmer in collaboration with Lana Danzeisen, Arya Anil Kumar, Bethan Oakley, Aditi Kumar, Jessica Laffan, Olivia Pearce and Yuchun Bian

Independent bookshops have perhaps had a more tumultuous time than most in the last two decades. They have undergone numerous challenges, including declining high street footfall and a global pandemic. With constant competition from bookselling giants such as Waterstones and Amazon, the course for independent bookshop owners has far from run smooth. In recent years the industry has nonetheless seen a revival, with numbers of independent bookshops across the UK being at their largest in over a decade. According to the Booksellers Association, 2023 was the sixth year of consecutive growth, and the future of independent bookshops is continuing to look optimistic. An area that has seen particularly exciting growth is the South West of England; to celebrate this, we've spent the last few weeks touring some of our favourite independent bookshops that we believe are well worth visiting.

BOOKHAUS, BRISTOL

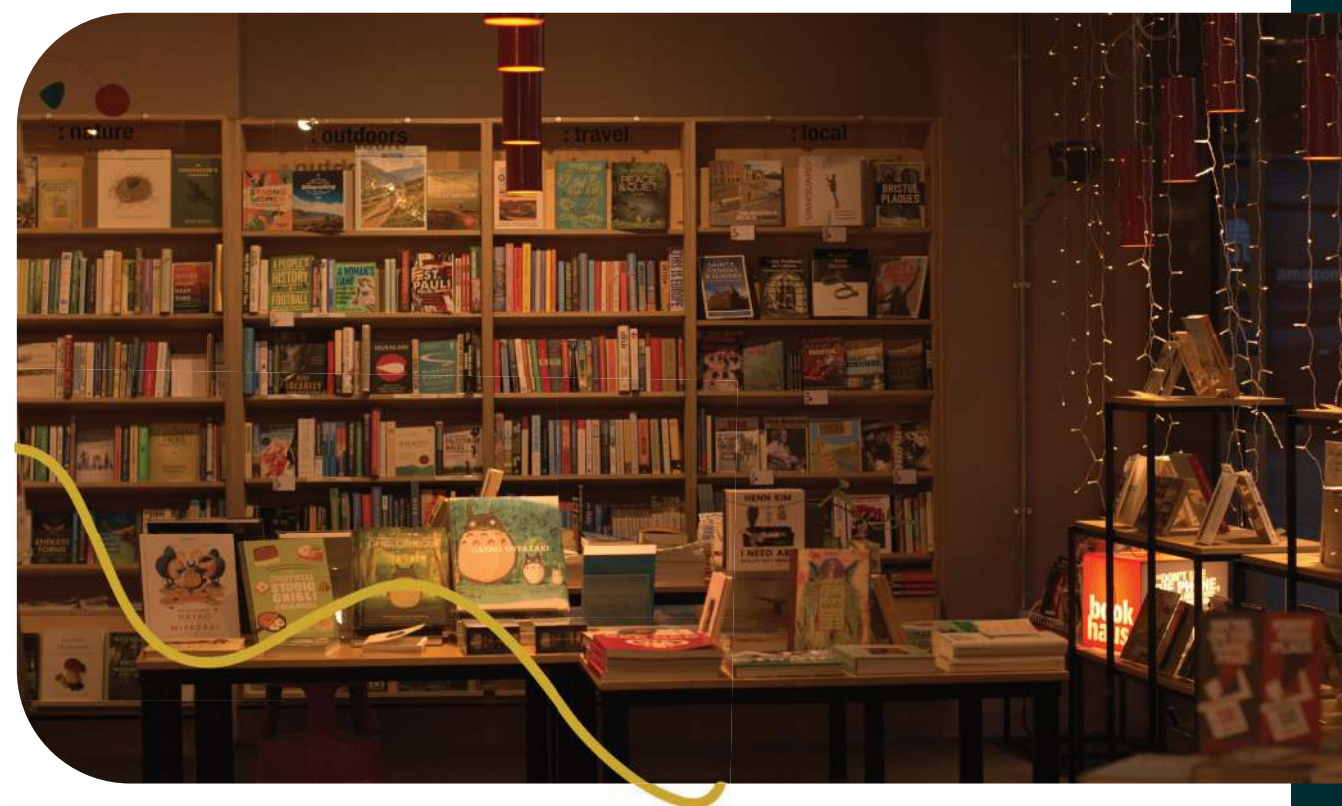
Set in the bustling Bristol city centre, Bookhaus is a radical bookshop that flung open its doors in August 2021. Established to fill a gap in the Bristol independent bookshop market, it aims to appeal to the city's young, liberal demographic. Bookhaus offers a variety of publications, rooted in contemporary themes and current events. Following the momentous 2020 Black Lives Matter protests in Bristol, it was noted by Bookhaus owners, Jayne Pascoe and Kevin Ramage, that there were no existing bookshops that matched Bristol's reputation as a cultural and political hotspot. The recommendations we received from the bookshop included *The Coming Wave* by Mustafa Suleyman, which explores the impending social revolution at the hands of AI, and Alison Rumfitt's debut *Tell Me I'm Worthless*, a horror novel set in Brighton that explores trans identity amid the rise of fascism.

What sets Bookhaus apart from other bookshops on our tour is its placement in a buzzing urban centre surrounded by cafes, bars and restaurants. They take advantage of their surroundings through their impressive opening hours of 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays and 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Thursdays,

Fridays and Saturdays. These timings were established to accommodate the busy working lives of many Bristolians and keep up with the city's vibrant nightlife.

When speaking with Bookhaus's manager, Darran McLaughlin, he highlighted the shop's desire to be a bookshop and a community hub, as represented by their Thursday-evening book clubs. The groups currently include a 'weird' fiction group, one that focuses on contemporary fiction and another on revolutionary texts. The gatherings are free to attend with only the polite request that the discussed text is purchased from Bookhaus. Each are led by a member of staff with a passion for the chosen genre. Additionally, the bookshop maintains a packed 'in-haus' events schedule that goes beyond traditional readings and signings. For example, in November 2023, they hosted the boundary-resisting fashion brand Sports Banger to discuss their socially conscious message in their book *Sports Banger: Lifestyles of the Poor, Rich and Famous*.

When compared to the half-a-dozen-odd independent bookshops also in Bristol's city centre, Bookhaus have found their niche in a selection of texts that catches attention and sparks conversation. Haus-ing around 5,000 volumes, their stock is constantly updated and changed to align with and inform the discussions taking place around them. A relatively new addition to the literary scene in the South West, Bookhaus is a passionate force to be reckoned with and one that promises to take Bristol's arts and culture scene by storm for years to come.



Bookhaus – Shop interior book displays. Photo by Amelia Kemmer.

PERSEPHONE BOOKS, BATH

The cobblestone streets of Bath host an expansive variety of independent bookshops and small publishing houses. Having graced the pages of figures such as Jane Austen and Alexander Pope, the city is a long-established literary hub. Among this community, you can find Persephone Books. Both an independent bookshop and publishing house, Persephone is a feminist press that focuses on reviving (mostly) female voices that have fallen out of print, with two new releases every spring and autumn.

The outward appearance of the shop is elegant and understated. Its grey front echoes the colour used on their iconic Persephone book jackets, emulating the tranquil presence they have established in the literary market. The interior is brightly lit and displays a variety of items alongside their publications including Persephone notebooks, diaries and postcards. The shelves are stacked with the star of the bookshop – their carefully crafted volumes, each bound in a soft grey jacket. They all also boast vibrant endpapers inspired by fabric samples from the era in which the first edition of the book was published. Universal in their simplicity, these editions prove that you don't need to be swayed by an elaborate cover to purchase a book. They signify a silent promise between Persephone and their customers that any publication they produce will be well worth a read.

‘Their distinctiveness comes from their willingness to embrace domestic feminism as a significant tool for change.’

Over the last twenty-five years, Persephone has flourished as a focal point of feminist publishing. Their distinctiveness comes from their willingness to embrace domestic feminism as a significant tool for change, communicated by their chosen namesake – the gentle daughter of Demeter and a symbol of growth and prosperity. This symbolism is shown through their publication of texts expressing the many facets of femininity, including cookery books, gardening guides and political reflections.

Persephone acknowledges the contributions their authors have made to literature through a variety of events. Notable examples include: a Russian music concert in honour of Lydia Chukovskaya, the author of their 149th publication, and Susan Stein's performance of her play *Etty* to commemorate the 80th anniversary of Etty Hillesum's death, the author of their fifth publication. These events, often involving champagne and cheese straws, are held in the compact upstairs space just above the shop and cultivate the Persephone reading community.

The jewel in their calendar is the upcoming Persephone Festival in April 2024. For three days both the bookshop and venues beyond will become a hub of activity with events including workshops, readings, walking tours and tea parties. A commemoration of their 150th publication and twenty-fifth anniversary, the

festival is set to be a joyous occasion which celebrates everything Persephone has achieved and the lost voices they have revitalized.

It is greatly encouraging to see that Persephone's influence extends far beyond Bath and indeed the South West. With 75% of their sales being mail order and their variety of subscription services, their devoted customers are spread across the United Kingdom and beyond. Their mission is to do justice to the hundreds of voices that have been concealed as a result of their gender or domestic setting, and they are succeeding, one grey volume at a time.

BRENDON BOOKS, TAUNTON

Tucked away down Bath Place, a fifteen-minute walk from Taunton station, you can find Brendon Books, located away from the bustling high street in a shaded alley of independent businesses. Established in 1989, the non-profit houses over 20,000 books and enlists a combination of paid staff and volunteers with the aim of sustaining a love of literature in the local community. The shop front champions popular new publications, with a particular celebration of local authors such as Hazel Prior who had visited Brendon Books just a few weeks before our visit with her harp for a dazzling evening of music and literature.

Lying behind the shiny new publications at the front of the shop is their expansive second-hand section. Brendon Books feels fit to burst in the best possible sense. With around 80% of their collection having previous owners, each shelf is piled high with donated books seeking a new home. Titles range from

Persephone grey volumes. Photo by Amelia Kemmer.



The Reader's Guide to Everyman's Library to *iPad 2 for Dummies*. Brendon Books feels like an eclectic personal collection made up of thousands of tiny individual pieces of the contributors' lives. Upon asking for recommendations, we were led past the brand-new releases to the offerings laid out on the tables outside. They were books that had lived out their shelf life and were now being sold at £1 or three for £2 in the hopes of giving them one last chance to find their next home.

Brendon Books's proudest achievement is its annual literary festival that has run for the last thirteen years. Beginning as a small endeavour, it has since expanded to venues hosting up to two hundred guests both from and beyond Taunton. The events of this year's instalment have an impressive range from Vince Cable on 'How to be a Politician', to Lady Carnarvon discussing the discovery of Tutankhamun's Treasures in her family home. With its variety of events and speakers, the Taunton Literary Festival spans a multitude of hobbies and has become a cornerstone in the local community that has embraced it with equal enthusiasm.

Brendon Books – Shop exterior. Photo by Amelia Kemmer.



With most stock comprised of donations and the increasing popularity of the festival, the sustainable, community-oriented example of Brendon Books is one we should all follow. Its foundations are literally built on the generosity of fellow bibliophiles and we were lucky to have witnessed it first-hand.

GNASH COMICS, ASHBURTON

Nestled on the south-eastern side of Dartmoor, the picturesque town of Ashburton is home to a variety of small businesses. Known for its quirky selection of antique shops, Ashburton also boasts a shop dedicated to bespoke guitars, a clothing store called The Quirky Bird, and the reason we came, the comic book and graphic novel shop Gnash Comics. Having moved from London to Ashburton, the owner, Jenny Donaldson, made the decision to contribute to the small number of bookshops dedicated solely to appreciating comic books and graphic novels as a complete artistic medium.

When we asked for recommendations, we were amazed by their expansive selection. Ranging far beyond the classic superhero genre, we were handed books as diverse as *Rosa* by Kate Evans, a graphic biography of communist activist, Rosa Luxemburg, and *The Roles We Play* by Sabba Khan, a graphic memoir told through an unflinching feminist lens.

‘Donaldson deservedly prides herself on the sense of community Gnash has maintained over the years.’

Like many other independent bookshop owners, Donaldson deservedly prides herself on the sense of community Gnash has maintained over the years. Apart from regular game nights and their long *Magic: The Gathering* tradition, Gnash has hosted prominent local creators such as Jock and Lee Garbett. They have similarly had artist Bethan Welby conduct a children's character-building workshop. Despite the struggles that the newly thriving industry has faced due to declining footfall and the increasing popularity of digital literature, the passion and dedication to comics and graphic novels has not wavered amongst individuals like Donaldson, who have tirelessly sought to keep it alive amongst existing fans and ignite it in new ones.

When we left Gnash, we were in possession of a signed copy of the fresh take on the superhero genre, *The Devil's Cut*, and a newfound appreciation of the comic and graphic novel industry that we think should be instilled in all those who consider themselves literature lovers. When asked if there was anything she'd like us to tell readers about, Donaldson simply responded, 'Tell them to look around their local comic book shop'. Despite the increasing success of the British comic book industry, there are many individuals that have not even begun to explore this art form. We believe that this should be changed and Gnash Comics is an excellent place to start.



Shrew Books – Shop interior. Photo by Kate Longman.

SHREW BOOKS, FOWEY

Painted vivid powder blue and nestled on the corner of South Street in Fowey is the southernmost stop on our tour, Shrew Books. The owner, Kate Longman, moved from London to Fowey in 2020, bought the bookshop Bookends and renamed it. She turned away from the Daphne du Maurier-orientated second-hand stock that Bookends was known for and turned the shop into a bright and colourful space. Longman describes Shrew as a pocket-sized treasure trove that stocks a rich variety of titles ranging from

blockbusting sellers to hidden gems. She aims to create a comfortable, safe space for literature lovers and to bring the people of Fowey, and Cornwall at large, a diverse and progressive range of books that they might not be able to find anywhere else nearby.

New releases that Shrew stocks include instant bestsellers like *The Fraud* by Zadie Smith, a historical novel which examines nineteenth-century England through the eyes of a Scottish housekeeper and former enslaved person from Jamaica, as well as more experimental works such as *A Book of Noises: Notes on the Auraculous* by Caspar Henderson, a compendium of the miraculous sounds which shape our world. Despite Shrew's compactness, it stocks a wide variety of genres and points of view which spark a multitude of discussions about how we perceive our surroundings. One of Longman's greatest aims is to feature smaller, more overlooked titles despite what's being heavily publicized. Some of Longman's favourites include *The Vet's Daughter* by Barbara Comyns, *Cuddy* by Benjamin Myers and *Simple Passion* by Annie Ernaux.

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It is clear that Shrew maintains and partakes in the small but vibrant community of publishing and literary networks in the South West. This can be seen in their collaborations with indie bookshops and publishers such as their recent event with Persephone Books, which we visited earlier on our tour. The occasion 'Shrew Books in Conversation with Persephone Books,' held at North Street Kitchen down the road from Shrew in August 2023, was a resounding success – ticket holders had to squeeze into the space. Longman looks forward to hosting similar events in the future and dreams of collaborating with indie presses like Galley Beggar Press and Fitzcarraldo. Collaborations like these are a shining beacon of the South West's literary community.

Shrew Books encapsulates the feeling of its beautiful Cornish surroundings with its calm and inviting atmosphere. In Fowey, Longman embraces her new community, highlighting Cornish writers and settings. Literary networks in the South West tend to be quieter than those in major cities like London, but as a result there is a much greater sense of community among bookshops and publishing houses. Shrew Books is invaluable in its contributions to this community and tenacious in its efforts to showcase a variety of voices and genres.