

7th August

A holiday quiz in four parts:

Part 1: The Booker Prize

- 1. Who won the first ever Booker prize? Name the author, title and year.*
- 2. Who was the first woman to win the Booker prize in 1970 and what was the title of her novel?*
- 3. The prize was shared by two authors last year but this has happened on two other occasions. Name the years in question and the four authors.*
- 4. What is the longest winning novel in the prizes' history?*
- 5. What is the Booker Dozen?*
- 6. Who won the special Golden Booker celebrating fifty years of the award and for which work?*

Answers

- 1. P H Newby. Something to Answer For. 1970.*
- 2. Bernice Rubens. The Elected Member.*
- 3. 1974. Stanley Middleton and Nadine Gordimer. 1992. Michael Ondaatje and Barry Unsworth.*
- 4. The Luminaries by Eleanor Catton. 2013.*
- 5. The longlist comprising thirteen novels.*
- 6. Michael Ondaatje for The English Patient.*

Part 2: Poetry

- 1. Name the two poets who edited The Rattle Bag poetry anthology in 1982.*
- 2. Which character in Dylan Thomas' Under Milk Wood sings of loving Tom, Dick and Harry?*
- 3. Who composed a symphony based on W.H. Auden's The Age of Anxiety?*
- 4. Who dreamt about making a hot beverage for Kingsley Amis and what was the beverage?*
- 5. Uccello's painting Saint George and the Dragon (National Gallery) is the subject of which amusing poem by U.A. Fanthorpe?*
- 6. In which two poems did John Betjeman refer to Highgate mansion flats? Name the poems and the flats.*
- 7. Who wrote a tribute in verse to the jazz musician Sidney Bechet?*
- 8. The play The Dark Earth and the Light Sky opened at the Almeida Theatre in 2012. Which poet's life did it explore?*
- 9. Whose 1938 Autumn Journal describes everyday life set against the background of Munich and events in Spain?*
- 10. Who has been broadcasting from his garden shed during lockdown?*

Answers

- 1. Ted Hughes and Seamus Heaney*
- 2. Polly Garter*
- 3. Leonard Bernstein Symphony No.2*
- 4. Wendy Cope. Cocoa*
- 5. Not My Best Side*
- 6. Parliament Hill Fields (Brookfield Mansions) N.W.5 & N.6 (Lissenden Mansions)*
- 7. Philip Larkin For Sidney Bechet*
- 8. Edward Thomas*
- 9. Louis MacNeice*
- 10. Simon Armitage (Poet Laureate)*

Part 3: Theatre History

1. Peter Hall's production of *Hamlet* launched the National Theatre on the South Bank in 1976. Who played the lead?
2. Which organisation occupied the Almeida Theatre building in 1833?
3. Name the oldest London theatre site still in use.
4. What year did the Open Air Theatre in Regents Park open?
5. What would you have found in the Donmar Warehouse in the 1870s?
6. "Don't clap too loud – it's a very old building". Which play do these lines come from and who says them?

Answers

1. Albert Finney.
2. The Islington Literary and Scientific Society.
3. Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. (Shakespeare's Globe is near the original site but not on it).
4. 1933.
5. Hops stored for a local brewery.
6. The Entertainer by John Osborne. Archie Rice.

Part 4: Pen names

Give the pen name and the actual name of the authors of

1. Bulldog Drummond
2. Gigi
3. A series of unfortunate events
4. A dark-adapted eye
5. The little grey men
6. Candide

Answers

1. Sapper/H. C. McNeile
2. Colette/Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette
3. Lemony Snicket/Daniel Handler
4. Barbara Vine/ Ruth Rendell
5. BB/Denys Watkins-Pitchford
6. Voltaire/François-Marie Arouet

31st July

HLSI as part of a countrywide movement

HLSI is unique, but it's not the only institution of its kind in the UK. Like many of the others, HLSI belongs to the Independent Libraries Association (ILA), with other members ranging from Innerpeffray in Perthshire to the Morrab in Penzance, from the large London Library and Newcastle Lit & Phil to the smaller Armitt in the Lake District and the Leighton Library in Dunblane.

Covid-19 and the lockdown has hit us all in a similar way. Across the country historic institutions have embraced new technology to move lectures and courses online, to launch new activities like quizzes and member chat rooms, to set up virtual book groups and most of all to keep in touch with members.

Although many are now open again, it's probably not the best time to travel the country and

visit these wonderful institutions, but have a look at the ILA website (independentlibraries.co.uk) to learn more about them and plan future trips.

24th July

This week, a selection of books published 100 years ago:

E.F. Benson Queen Lucia - First of the Mapp and Lucia series

Agatha Christie - The mysterious affair at Styles Christie's first published novel, introducing Hercule Poirot

Colette Chéri - The first English edition was published by Gollancz in 1930

D.H. Lawrence Women in love - Sequel to The rainbow; film by Ken Russell in 1969

Kathleen Mansfield - Bliss & other stories Stories previously published individually

Marcel Proust The Guermantes way - Third in the sequence (Remembrance of things past/In search of lost time/À la recherche du temps perdu)

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch On the art of reading - Collection of lectures given at Cambridge 1916-17

Margaret Sanger Women and the new race - On women's reproductive rights and the resulting benefits for society (not eugenics, although the title suggests this; the Nazis burned her books)

"Sapper" Bulldog Drummond - First in the series. "Sapper" was H.C. McNeile

Edith Wharton Age of Innocence - Won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1921, the first time a woman had won the prize

17th July

Members' views on the Click-and-collect launch – *The service began on Tuesday 7th July and has already proved very popular. Members have described the scheme as "safe, efficient and well-organised", with appointments to collect from the foyer "sensibly spaced out" and "a wonderful opportunity to replenish my summer reading and drop off the many books I took out before lockdown". The individually named, crisp brown paper carrier bags were described as "a nice, environmentally friendly touch".*

There is currently no limit on the number of books each member can borrow and we hope that you will take full advantage of this service.

10th July

Book review: *The understudy* by David Nicholls

I have always enjoyed David Nicholl's books, so I was delighted to find this one. It proved to be an ideal antidote to lockdown boredom, as it has such believable characters and dialogue. It contains a good mixture of funny and sad episodes. The theatrical background was so authentic that I was not surprised that Nicholls had once been an actor himself. I would highly recommend this book.

Valerie Littman

3rd July

This Highgate themed quiz appeared on the Newsletter's library page a few years ago. The challenge now is can you remember the answers? Perfect practice for the Zoom Quiz Night on 22 July. Scroll down for the answers.

1. *Which Dicken's character fled across Hampstead Heath via Highgate and slept under a hedge at North End?*
2. *"When we came upon Highgate Hill and had a view of London, I was all life and joy". Who wrote these words?*
3. *Where in Highgate did John Wesley preach in 1782?*
4. *"long, low, wood and plaster... with a central bay window and porch, set eight or ten feet back from the foot-way." Whose home is described here?*
5. *"Before the good folk of this kingdom be undone, shall Highgate Hill stand in the midst of London." To whom are these words attributed?*
6. *What pseudonym did Coleridge use when he enlisted in the dragoons as a young man?*
7. *When did the cat arrive on Dick Whittington's stone?*
8. *We all know that Francis Bacon, the philosopher and statesman died in Highgate but where is he buried?*
9. *"His conduct was shocking. When we passed Highgate Archway, he tried to pass everything and everybody." This dangerous trap-driving is described in which well-known North London diary?*
10. *Which poet, scholar and one-time Highgate resident spent ten years working at the Patent Office?*

Answers

1. *Bill Sikes (Oliver Twist, Chapter 48)*
2. *James Boswell in his London Journal, on returning from Scotland.*
3. *Lauderdale House*
4. *Andrew Marvell's cottage*
5. *Mother Shipton*
6. *Silas Tomkyn Comberbache*
7. *1964*
8. *St. Michael's Church, St. Albans*
9. *The Diary of a Nobody by George and Weedon Grossmith*
10. *A.E. Housman*

26th June

Struggling to concentrate? Why not try a short story collection?

The uncertainties and preoccupations caused by COVID-19 and lockdown have not always been conducive to concentrating on lengthy reading material.

A collection of short stories offers the perfect antidote.

There is a good selection of this genre in HLSI library, just use the category as your search term. I can recommend Binocular Vision by Edith Pearlman (brilliant) and You Think It, I'll Say It by Curtis Sittenfeld (witty and topical).

Not from the library but as part of my own lockdown reading, I have recently enjoyed the excellent New York Stories (Everyman Pocket Classics). This eighteen strong selection ranges from Edith Wharton and Willa Cather to Jay McInerney and Junot Diaz by way of Truman Capote and Jack Kerouac. The tales vary in length from a handful of pages to forty or more and create a vivid portrait of the city from the late nineteenth century to late twentieth century. There is a rich gallery of characters. The most amusing story is by Damon Runyon (Social Error- Guys and Dolls); one of the most powerful - Sonny's Blues by James Baldwin.

Megan Pilgrim

19th June

The Foundation Pit by Andrey Platonov in a new translation by Robert & Elizabeth Chandler, Olga Meerson

A surreal, sometimes satirical, novel written in 1929-1930 during the period of agricultural collectivisation in the Soviet Union, but not published even in Russian until the late 1980s, this is a work that protests against the brutality of Stalin's structural reforms. For the last couple of months the Russian Reading Group has been studying and discussing it, most recently meeting via Zoom.

The language is strange and strained. At first I was puzzled. Why are such renowned translators presenting us with contorted vocabulary and rhythms? They are reflecting the original text where the author's awkward language describes the forceful imposition of a social re-order that denies and destroys people's humanity for the sake of compliance with the national directive.

We are introduced to Voshev, who has just been sacked for wasting time, thinking at work. His excuse is that he "could have thought up something like happiness, and inner meaning would have improved productivity". But he is told "Happiness will originate from materialism" and sent on his way. Outside the town he finds a wilderness being scythed clear. A foundation pit is to be dug there. It seems initially it will be to erect an enormous communal house for the proleteriats, but by the end of the book it seems to have become a mass grave.

There are bitter scenes describing the process of forced collectivisation. In order to protect their livestock, peasants slaughter and eat them. One old farmer cuts down his trees "my own flesh" rather than see them "collectivised into captivity". Those who are arbitrarily deemed kulaks are loaded on to a raft and floated off down the river.

The incidents Platonov describes are rooted in reality according to the Translator's Notes. Unlike most of his contemporaries who stayed in the major cities, as an engineer and journalist Platonov travelled about the country and saw with his own eyes what happened to the helpless peasantry.

*Much acclaimed today in Russia, **The Foundation Pit** describes the Soviet state's assault on the human soul, a national outrage Platonov considered so enormous that a new style had to be created. It is not just an angry book, but a furious book, with its fury expressed variously in comedy, satire, fairy tale, folk lore and religious allusion and imagery.*

Ground-breaking writers do not always make easy reading, and perhaps if they are raising important subjects, their work should not be effortlessly digestible after lunch on a sunny afternoon. New styles of writing require dedication and persistence from the reader, and in my case a second reading was certainly worthwhile. I feel very privileged to have been introduced to this book, which I would never have found on my own. This is why it is so helpful to be part of a group like the Russian Reading Group that spurs you on to complete a text by the deadline of the monthly meeting. And unlike much Russian literature, it is short.
Elisabeth Thom

12th June

A review of *They Came Like Swallows* by William Maxwell

*This slim novella by William Maxwell proved to be extremely relevant lockdown reading. Written in 1937 and partly based on his own experiences, this early work tells the story of a family of four living in Illinois in 1918, whose lives are about to be changed forever by the Spanish flu pandemic. Many of the background details are familiar to us all – the closure of schools and churches and the risks of train travel. It is impossible to write a detailed review without revealing the plot but, suffice to say, I was gripped and read the 174 pages in one sitting. The title is taken from *Coole Park* by WB Yeats. Its relevance becomes clear as the story progresses.*

*Maxwell is a fine writer whose prose does not date. He was fiction editor of the *New Yorker* from 1936 -1975 and influenced many other prominent authors. HLSI library holds five of his six novels, including this one, and a collection of short stories. When circumstances allow, I urge you to discover his work if you have not already done so.*

Megan Pilgrim

5th June

A review of *Lee Krasner: Living Colour*

Last year I attended an art exhibition at the Barbican entitled “Lee Krasner: Living Colour”. On an impulse I bought a biography of Krasner by Gail Levin which I have finally read during lockdown.

Krasner was an abstract expressionist. The biography is arranged chronologically, complete with dates. For this detailed work, Levin has drawn upon personal interviews, research and her close working relationship with the artist. There are also many photographs to support the narrative. Levin is an art historian, biographer, artist and the author of many books on twentieth century American art, including a biography of Edward Hopper which is in HLSI library.

Krasner’s artistic merit has been overshadowed as the wife of Jackson Pollock. In this book Levin rectifies the balance, portraying Krasner as an artist in her own right. The biography demonstrates how devoted Krasner was to her own art, her admiration of and influence by Mondrian and Matisse and her support for female artists even though she had no affinity with feminist art.

This account also charts her relationships, both personal and professional, with artists, dealers and galleries. Levin explores the dynamics of these relationships and shows how Krasner continued to paint when faced with emotional trauma and professional disappointment.

I think this statement by Krasner herself sums her up: “I was a woman, a widow, a damn good painter, thank you, and a little too independent.”

I enjoyed reading this and will read Levin’s biography of Edward Hopper when lockdown is over.

Stuart Baines

29th May

The perils and pleasures of cookery editing

I became a cookery book editor more by accident than design. I had just started working at the publishers Chatto & Windus, reading unsolicited manuscripts (affectionately known as ‘the slush pile’ from which, one lucky day, I extracted Hilary Mantel’s first novel). Chatto published a small cookery list, edited (reluctantly) by Jeremy Lewis who claimed to know nothing about cooking. One of his authors was Mollie Harris, best known as the archetypal mistress of gossip Martha Woodford in the shop-cum-post office in Ambridge. Mollie lived most of her life in Eynsham and wrote books about Cotswold customs and crafts (one was devoted to Cotswold privies). She was a great maker of country wines and homely food. Unfortunately both she and Jeremy failed to spot that there was no flour among the ingredients listed in her Christmas cake recipe. Every December for several years, the Chatto switchboard was flooded with calls from puzzled, often irate housewives whose cakes had failed.

For someone interested in food and cooking, working on cookery books is fun. I was invited to some of London’s best restaurants, given a free pass to the annual Oxford Food Symposium, and would-be authors cooked delicious meals for me. After photo shoots (if the food had not been sprayed to make it look good under the photographer’s lights), I got to take home carrier bags full of wonderful things. But it is a demanding job too.

There is no room for error. I was to discover that not all cookery writers rigorously test their recipes. I could only cook a sample, so I had to learn to read them very carefully, imagining and enacting each step of the process. Happily with most of my writers, with Frances Bissell, for example, or Claudia Roden, I could be completely confident that what they had given me would work. I loved going to meetings with Claudia at home when I would be invited to share a dish she was testing. And I learned a great deal from watching Frances demonstrating her recipes in Harrods or in Books for Cooks – how to make a perfect pumpkin risotto or her exotic lavender ice cream.

*But like Jeremy, I too made mistakes. I greatly regret the tin of potatoes in one recipe that I let pass but which reviewers did not, and the books I might have bought and didn’t, Margaret Shaida’s *Legendary Cuisine of Persia* for one. All of us – editors or cooks - can be caught unawares. My most recent experience involved spinach, very large quantities of spinach, one of the ingredients in Angela Hartnett’s apricot, almond and spinach turkey stuffing. The recipe called for 6kgs, an awful lot but, I reasoned, spinach shrinks dramatically when cooked. So I went ahead. I was not alone. So many readers wrote in to the Observer which had published the recipe that the Reader’s Editor, Stephen Pritchard felt he should try it himself. The required twenty-four bags of spinach all but filled his shopping trolley and, once cooked, filled all his available dishes and had to be decanted into two plastic buckets. Advised to cook the stuffing mix in foil, he ended up with six ‘swiss rolls’, each about a foot long, ‘enough to feed the Huddersfield Choral Society’. We needed only 1kg of spinach, not 6kgs as stated in the recipe. Fortunately the stuffing was very delicious, so it was*

no great hardship to have enough in the freezer for several Christmases to come.

Hilary Laurie

22nd May

Putin's People **Catherine Belton**

Over the past few years, there has been no shortage of books about Russia under Putin. As the former Moscow correspondent of the Financial Times though, Catherine Belton was ideally placed to produce a definitive study of the regime that has run Russia throughout the 21st century. And what a story it is.

The author reveals how Putin used his KGB colleagues and underworld contacts to take control of St Petersburg with its oil terminal and shipyards. Once Yeltsin was persuaded that Putin would be a safe pair of hands to succeed him as president, he then moved to Moscow where he worked to displace the oligarchs who had prospered from the sell-offs of the Russian oil and gas industries. To do so he established Kremlin control over both the media and the judicial system while, of course, loudly asserting the latter's independence. Once firmly ensconced in power, he was ready to take on the West. What apparently motivates Putin is the desire to restore Russia as an empire and world power which the West has to take seriously. The take-over of the Crimea and the undermining of Eastern Ukraine is all part of the overarching plan. At the same time, Russian agents with bulging wallets are steadily corrupting democratic states in Moscow's interests.

The final chapter is all about Donald Trump. A worrying but fascinating read.

Jim Lloyd Davies

13th May

The Lost Carving – A journey to the Heart of Meaning by David Esterly (Penguin, 2013)

An American post-grad student working on Plotinus has a moment of revelation that changes his life. He goes into St James Church and sees the Grinling Gibbons carvings. “Floating on the reredos, the wall behind the altar, was a shadowy tangle of vegetation, carved to airy thinness...My steps slowed, and stopped. I stared... It seemed one of the wonders of the world. The traffic noise of Piccadilly went silent, and I was at the still centre of the universe.” David Esterly gives up academia to become a wood carver and this book takes us on his journey of discovery. Learning to become a craftsman he is inspired by Gibbons who could carve a flower so delicately that it trembles in a breath. He “did what masters do, even from the grave. He made me put away childish things”. Esterly writes superbly evoking the sensual delights of working with wood, as well as places and people. He restores the fire-damaged Gibbons carvings at Hampton Court, months of “paralyzing romance” and frustration with its administrators. This is a book by a master triumphantly bringing together craft, art and philosophy. A beautifully written escape for these locked down times.

Paul Kafno

5th May

Members may be interested in The Big Book Weekend 8-10 May 2020

This is a free, three-day, virtual festival that plans to bring together the best of the British book festivals cancelled due to coronavirus. There will be interviews, panel discussions and performance.

Find out more at <https://bigbookweekend.com/>

Review

A member reviews the latest novel by Anne Enright.

I have always enjoyed the intelligent and perceptive novels by Anne Enright and her latest work, Actress, proved to be no exception.

Norah, in present day Ireland, looks back on the troubled life of her late mother, the legendary actress, Katherine O'Dell. As she examines their complex relationship, the story moves back and forth in time, taking us to pre-war rural Ireland, Hollywood, New York, London and Dublin. I particularly enjoyed the passages describing a somewhat ramshackle company of travelling players touring Ireland in the late 30s.

This is a fascinating and moving tale about the price of fame, a daughter's search for the truth and above all, a tribute to the theatre and the power of stage performance.

30th April

The Library Lockdown Log is back after its Easter break.

Please join in by sending your suggestions for reading, reviews or other book-related notes to admin@hlsi.net from now on.

We start with a member's review of a book which has just been included in the short-list for the Women's Prize for Fiction 2020.

I have just finished reading A Thousand Ships by Natalie Haynes. She is well known as a stand-up comedian, specialising in presenting classical characters as part of a comedy routine and thus bringing classics to a wider audience. She has written and presented four series of the BBC Radio 4 show Natalie Haynes Stands Up For the Classics.

This book is similar to The Silence of the Girls by Pat Barker, who also explores the experience of women during the Trojan War.

A Thousand Ships is her third novel and gives voices to the women, girls and goddesses involved in the Trojan War. I particularly enjoyed the scene where the three goddesses Phrodite, Hera and Athene are present at the wedding of Thetis and Peleus. They proceed to argue over who should have possession of the golden apple inscribed with the words "For The Most Beautiful". Zeus is asked to decide and he ducks the question. This leads to the introduction of Paris and the subsequent consequences.

The book is thoroughly enjoyable and a list of characters at the beginning is helpful if one is not too knowledgeable about Greek myths and legends. I will certainly put her second novel The Children of Jocasta on my list of books to read.

9th April

A holiday quiz, in two parts

Family Quiz : How much do you know of children's literature?

1. In The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett where was Mary Lennox born?

2. *What is the name of the druid in the Asterix stories, who brews a power-giving potion?*
3. *Where does the March family supposedly live in Little Women by Louisa M. Alcott. It is where she herself grew up. (Answer should give a place name and state).*
4. *In The BFG by Roald Dahl what is the only kind of edible plant food that grows in Giant Country?*
5. *Which two groups of animals from the Wild Wood occupy Toad Hall while Toad is in prison, having thrown out Mole and Badger?*
6. *What or who did Dave lose and then find on a toy stall at the school Summer Fair?*
7. *What is the only discernible difference between Thompson and Thomson in the Tintin books (apart from the spelling of their names)?*
8. *Where does Mrs. Large try to find Five Minutes Peace? (Jill Murphy)*
9. *What are Peter Pan's directions for flying to Neverland? (James Barrie).*
10. *In We're going on a Bear Hunt by Michael Rosen, the family go through grass, a river, mud, a big, dark forest and finally what do they go through before they reach the cave?*

Which novels begin with these lines? All 19th and 20th century works.

1. *The schoolmaster was leaving the village, and everybody seemed sorry*
2. *It was a bright May morning some twelve years ago, when a youth of still tender age, for he had certainly not entered his teens by more than two years, was ushered into the waiting-room of a house in the vicinity of St. James's Square, which, though with the general appearance of a private residence, and that too of no very ambitious character, exhibited at this period symptoms of being occupied for some public purpose.*
3. *There was no possibility of taking a walk that day.*
4. *Les curieux événements qui font le sujet de cette chronique se sont produits en 194., à Oran.*
5. *On the bump of green round which the green twists, at the top of the brae, and within cry of T'nowhead farm, still stands a one-storey house.*
6. *Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress.*
7. *If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth.*

Answers to Family Quiz

1. *India.*
2. *Getafix (UK version).*
3. *Concord, Massachusetts.*
4. *Snozzcumbers.*
5. *Weasels and Stoats (Wind in the willows by Kenneth Grahame)*
6. *Dogger, his soft toy dog.*
7. *The shape of their moustaches. One has slightly curled ends.*
8. *In the bath.*
9. *Second to the right, and straight on till morning. (Disney added the word star)*
10. *A snowstorm.*

Answers to first lines

1. *Thomas Hardy – Jude the Obscure*
2. *Benjamin Disraeli – Coningsby*
3. *Charlotte Brontë – Jane Eyre*

4. *Albert Camus – La Peste*
5. *J.M. Barrie – A window in Thrums*
6. *George Eliot – Middlemarch*
7. *J.D. Salinger – Catcher in the rye*

9th April

Today, two very different pieces from members of the Library

1. *Two books have kept me sane. House of Glass by Hadley Freeman. I was the first person to take this out from the library and it's a WONDERFUL book. I think she's great. I read her in the Saturday Guardian. And secondly, The Hockneys by John Hockney. Very easy to read. I enjoyed it because I know exactly where they all come from. I spent about 6 years in this part of Yorkshire and I love the Dales /Bolton Abbey/Armscliff Crag and I can almost smell the fish and chips!!*
2. **How to slay the dragon virus**
There are no doubt theses and possibly books (?) on the subject of the rhetoric and propaganda surrounding major plagues. Personally, I am not familiar with them but while Europe was Christian a plague was presented by the all-powerful Church as a manifestation of "the wrath of God." Despite the secularising influence of the encyclopedistes, the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 was still being presented in Europe's pulpits in precisely these terms.
When, then, did the rhetoric and propaganda around plagues become secularised? Was God still being invoked at the time of the Spanish flu pandemic and, while on the subject of this particular pandemic, a prize for anyone who knows why the 1918-19 deadly flu was labelled "Spanish," without having to go online first!
Now in 2020 the rhetoric is clear and all too predictable. World War II is being invoked as we (supposedly) cower in our shelters, walk through bomb-cratered streets, contemplate skeletal buildings and queue for hours for unappetising basics. The Blitz is recalled, although more time is given to "the Dunkirk spirit" and "the little boats" being sent out to gather such equipment as they may find to protect those "in the front line." In the meanwhile, there is Vera Lynn in the background singing "We'll meet again," a wartime favourite invoked by our queen who at least has the excuse of having been there at the time! In New York comparisons are made with the Iraq war. It is "a full-out war against the virus" and there are references to "battlefield triage."
But if the language of conflict is inappropriate in the context of a pandemic (the virus, after all, is only doing its own stuff), what kind of language should replace it?

8th April

From our Science Group:

A review of one of the books on your latest list – Black Sun by Owen Matthews, a “whodunit” detective story set around true events in 1961 when the USSR decided to build and test a 50Mton hydrogen bomb.

In the book the hero, Major Vasin, is sent by Moscow to the closed city where the bomb is being designed and built in order to investigate the supposed suicide of a young physicist. Unsurprisingly, the local military authorities don’t welcome Vasin with open arms, and a lot of the tension in the book comes from the conflict of authority between the local commanders and the Moscow investigator. To start with the commanding general denies Vasin permission to interview the chief scientist – a fictional version of Andrei Sakharov. The young physicist, however, was related to a Politburo member, and Vasin can call on powerful allies. The plot then centres on the risks associated with the detonation of this size of weapon. In military terms, the bomb has little conceivable value. When a hydrogen bomb is detonated, a plug of the Earth’s atmosphere is projected into space. With a bomb of this size, a lot of the energy goes into projecting the plug at a higher speed. The curvature of the Earth minimises the resultant damage on the ground. It transpires though that a feature of the design of the Soviet weapon could conceivably have serious consequences for all life on the planet. The physicists are split over the issue with some of them accusing others of dangerous irresponsibility. At the same time, various subplots confuse the issues and make Vasin’s task that much harder. Like all good whodunits, the novel comes to an exciting – and just about credible – conclusion. A very good read.

7th April

On this day, 250 years ago, William Wordsworth was born in Cockermouth. His collaboration with Coleridge, Lyrical Ballads, published in 1798, was poorly received at the time but is now considered as the beginning of the Romantic Period.

A contribution from one of our Library Committee:

I, like many readers at the HLSI, have quite a few books I have been meaning to read and with the current restrictions a window of opportunity has opened. I am one of those people who have several books on the go simultaneously and these can include fiction and non-fiction.

I am currently reading the biography of Thomas Cromwell by Diarmaid MacCulloch. The biography is well written and although scholarly is very well researched with interesting snippets of minor players within the Tudor Court and society. Another biography of Thomas Cromwell I read a few years ago was by Tracy Borman (not as detailed as MacCulloch’s).

I decided to read this before embarking on the last volume of the trilogy by Hilary Mantel, The Mirror and the Light. I am also enjoying listening to Anton Lesser reading her latest book on Radio 4.

If this inspires you, try some of these related titles from our collection:

Derek A. Wilson In the lion's court: power, ambition, and sudden death in the reign of Henry VIII

David Starkey – Henry: virtuous prince

Henry’s letters

Biographies by Alison Weir and Antonia Fraser

On our fiction shelves, apart from Hilary Mantel, we have C.J. Sansom’s Shardlake series and Philippa Gregory’s historical novels set during the reign of Henry VIII.

3rd and 4th April

On this day ... in 1687 James II (VII of Scotland) signed a declaration of indulgence allowing non-conformist worship – this was reversed in 1688 after the Glorious Revolution when Catholic James was replaced by Protestant Mary II and William of Orange ... in 1968 Martin Luther King was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee

[source: The Times (2018) On this day]

Quiz (answers below)

Which classic novels begin with these lines? They are 19th and early 20th century works.

- 1. 1801.- I have just returned from a visit to my landlord- the solitary neighbour that I will be troubled with.*
- 2. Under certain circumstances there are few hours in life more agreeable than the hour dedicated to the ceremony known as afternoon tea.*
- 3. I returned from the City about three o'clock on that May afternoon pretty well disgusted with life.*
- 4. One may as well begin with Helen's letters to her sister.*
- 5. An ancient English Cathedral Tower? How can the ancient English Cathedral Tower be here!*

ANSWERS

- 1. Wuthering Heights Emily Bronte*
- 2. The Portrait of a Lady Henry James*
- 3. The Thirty-nine Steps John Buchan*
- 4. Howards End E.M. Forster*
- 5. The Mystery of Edwin Drood Charles Dickens*

2nd April

On this day ... The Panda crossing was introduced in London (later abandoned and replaced by the Pelican Crossing).

"One old lady, who was one of the first pedestrians to use the new crossing in York Road, was not impressed.

She said: "That man Marples is up to too many tricks. It's a hairbrained (sic) scheme and most dangerous."

[from the BBC website

http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/april/2/newsid_2840000/2840919.stm]

I haven't found any books in our collection about Panda Crossings so, as we can't go far at the moment, here are some suggestions for armchair travel:

Bill Bryson – *almost any of his books. The first one I read was Notes from a small island, a hilarious and all too recognisable picture of Britain, about his first visit to the UK. Recently revisited in The road to Little Dribbling*

William Dalrymple (another writer who has lectured at HLSI) – *start reading his earlier books about his travels in Asia*

Patrick Leigh Fermor – *shockingly to modern helicopter parents, he set off across Europe alone at the age of 18, completely confident in and reliant on the kindness of strangers, related in A time of gifts. His adventurous spirit continued throughout his life.*

Martha Gellhorn – *war correspondent and travel writer. Try Travels with myself and another (subtitled Five journeys from Hell) for her energetic accounts of her experiences.*

Mary Kingsley – our Kingsley collection will provide you with all you might want to know about this Victorian traveller and explorer, raised in Highgate. Start with *Travels in West Africa (1897)*

Beryl Markham – raised in colonial Africa, was the first woman to fly across the Atlantic east to west, as described in *West with the night*, allegedly a memoir but possibly written by one of her husbands

Dervla Murphy has travelled widely, first alone by bicycle and later with a young daughter, preserved by an intrepid approach to all eventualities and still travelling and writing in her eighties.

Bruce Chatwin, Robert Louis Stevenson, Wilfred Thesiger, Fanny Trollope, Michael Palin ... there are so many more, and our library has a particularly good selection. Until we re-open, check the catalogue and create your own wish-list.

1st April

This began as a look at diarists in times of crisis, but has wandered ... more diarists (in different crises) will follow.

Contemporaries Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn left diaries covering the period of the Great Plague of 1665-66. Pepys, whose diaries are probably better known now, recorded his impressions through his own experiences and encounters; Evelyn was much less personal, often writing retrospectively and, as a known writer himself, with readers in mind. Margaret Willes's book, *The curious world of Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn*, is moving to the top of my reading list. Known as a garden historian (she lectured at HLSI in 2015 on *The gardens of the British Working Class*) she may have been attracted to Evelyn by his passion for gardens and then to his relationship with Pepys and their shared interests. I look forward to learning more.

Daniel Defoe's *Diary of the plague year* was written some time later, and is thought to be based on the diaries of Defoe's uncle – Defoe himself was a young child in 1665. It might now be called 'faction', but is agreed to be sufficiently accurate in much of its description of events to give a good account of the time.

The experience of the inhabitants of the Derbyshire village of Eyam, almost all of whom agreed to shut themselves off from the outside world after the Plague arrived in a bale of cloth, has been fictionalised at various times but most recently in *Year of wonders* by Geraldine Brooks, told from the point of view of one young woman, which has been popular in the library since it was published in 2001.

Moving away from London and a few decades earlier, one of our members has contributed:

One non-fiction work I am reading is by Professor John Henderson, *Florence under siege: surviving plague in an early modern city*. It was published a few months ago and examines how the Plague in 17th century Florence was handled. (Reviewed in the current issue of the *London Review of Books*). Some aspects like communal kitchens to provide meals to all those in lock down in their houses were innovative.

31st March

Today's entry comes from one of our members. If you'd like to contribute, please see below.

I, like many others I'm sure, have a shelf full of books that are waiting to be read and in these difficult times it looks as though I will be able to start on it. I have 2 sources for my reading: the HLSI library and the Harington shop where I look after the book section with another

volunteer. Each time I go to either place I can't resist borrowing or buying at least one book. This means that the books in situ on my shelves don't get read! I've just finished a James Patterson, *Along Came a Spider*, which I couldn't put down. I'd never read one of his before but if you like thrillers it is very absorbing. Two friends have highly recommended *Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens so I have downloaded it to my Kindle.

It's interesting that Margaret said that before the library closed there was a demand for books from the reserve stock, a sort of 'comfort reading' of the old classics. A fellow member recommended reading Rosamunde Pilcher so I'm going to try one of hers. I do have the complete works of Dickens as well so they should keep me going for the duration!

I hope HLSI fellow members are keeping well and managing the self-isolation. Luckily there is a lot of support from local communities but it's nice to have this blog to keep people in touch as well.

27th March

Friday quiz – answers below. Without checking online, can you say who wrote:

1. *Fair daffadils, we weep to see
You haste away so soone;
As yet the early-rising sun
Has not attained its noone.*
2. *Daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty.*
3. *Once in a golden hour
I cast to earth a seed.
Up there came a flower,
The people said, a weed. To and fro they went
Thro' my garden bower,
And muttering discontent
Cursed me and my flower. Then it grew so tall
It wore a crown of light,
But thieves from o'er the wall
Stole the seed by night. Sow'd it far and wide
By every town and tower,
Till all the people cried,
'Splendid is the flower! '...*
4. *Jet-black and shining, from the dripping hedge
Slow peeps the fearful snail
And from each tiny bent
Withdraws his timid horn*

Answers

1. Robert Herrick
2. Shakespeare *Winter's Tale*
3. Alfred, Lord Tennyson
4. John Clare *Summer images*

26th March

Now is the time to investigate online resources, if you don't already use them. Radio 4 book programme websites – Open Book, A Good Read and Book Club – offer inspiration. As well as the back catalogue of programmes, the websites feature useful information. Open Book has a weekly list of all titles mentioned in each edition.

Podcasts on every imaginable subject can be found online – try the BBC to begin with.

Explore YouTube and Facebook for free online broadcasts from the Royal Opera House, Sadlers Wells, Glyndebourne, the National Theatre and others. Many major museums and galleries offer virtual tours of their collections.

25th March

In the days before we closed, our Reserve Stock came into its own. Our readers turned to the likes of Trollope, Galsworthy, Mrs Gaskell and George Eliot. Among more recent writers in demand were (local) Stella Gibbons, Evelyn Waugh Somerset Maugham and, interestingly, Nigel Tranter. Crime fiction remained popular, together with biographies, diaries and personal accounts of travels.