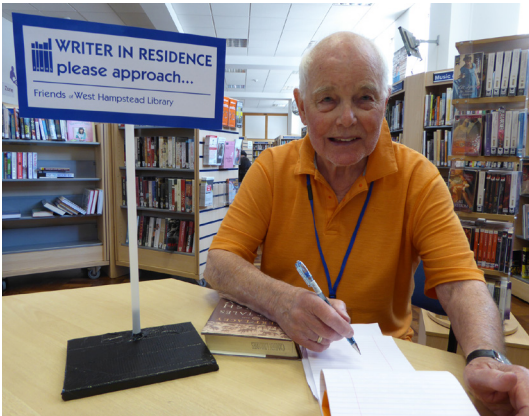


## Writer in Residence 2016-17

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# Ted Booth a compilation



**Ted Booth** was FoWHL's first **Writer in Residence**, appointed in May 2016 with a request that at the end of his term he'd be rewarded with a bottle of claret. Born in 1938 and educated at the London School of Economics, for many years Ted was a lecturer in creative writing at Middlesex University. He has published three volumes of poetry: *Rough Draft* (1998), *Fair Copy* (2010) and *Lower School* (2017). His work has also been anthologised in *Football: Pure Poetry*, Vols. 1 & 2 alongside Seamus Heaney, Roger McGough and Adrian Mitchell. From 2013-14 Ted was Poet in Residence for the **Friends of Fortune Green**. Here are Ted's blogs for FoWHL, dating from June 2016 to September 2017.

June 2 2016

### Book Reading at West Hampstead Library

For the audience, book readings can be a variable experience, there can be so large a crowd you are standing at the back, scarcely able to hear, or there are six of you sitting in embarrassment in an empty hall. Some authors read their work very well, others are surprisingly awful, indifferent almost. Then there is the book itself, if you have read it do you want to hear it read out again? If you haven't read it are the extracts such that you can make sense of it? Finally, is the event well organised? Some start ruinously late as the audience trickles in with the noise of the traffic outside and the end can be tediously prolonged with exasperatingly self referential questions from local show offs. The wine runs out.

FoWHL's evening with **Simon Garfield**, however, was a pleasure; book presentation at its best. The author, a local man, was articulate, amusing and appealingly modest. Every chair was full and the new PA system made for clear and easy listening. Simon's book, *A Notable Woman*, was an edited version of **Jean Lucey Pratt's private and Mass Observation diaries**. (Simon is a trustee of the MO material held at Sussex University). The audience were soon drawn into this woman's fascinating life, in particular her account of life during World War II.

Simon Inglis was the perfect chair, introducing, interviewing and providing the link with **Flick Rea's readings** from the diary. This our local councillor did quite beautifully, as befits a noted stage actor. She was Jean Lucey Pratt.

The event started on time and finished on time and the wine did not run out. Our friends from **West End Lane Books** were on hand ready to sell this very attractive volume.

Finally, if the evening aroused your interest in **Mass Observation** can I recommend *Worktown* by David Hall, a history of the movement's origins and work. Come into the library and order it.

15 June 2016

### The library's Over-55 Group

Armed only with a notebook and pen, I set out. Yet another heavy shower, the 328 irritatingly late, so I arrived as the group was already in session. I explained I was the **FoWHL Writer in Residence**, showed off my ID, and got what I have come to recognise as the usual greeting, 'I didn't know we had one, but do join us.' There were eight women in a quiet corner of the library enjoying coffee and biscuits, and I sat down with them. Simon and Andrew were the hosts.

The women present were all old friends from the **Townswomen's Guild** and the **Women's Institute**. I was told by my neighbour that there is sometimes a speaker but otherwise the agenda is talk, and once I had introduced myself, very fine talk it was, taking in La Brioche, the radio, school days, music, Irving Berlin, Jacky Kay, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Billy Collins, Paul McCartney, where did I live and was I voting in or out?

Did I write long poems? The answer is no. If poems didn't rhyme, were they poems at all? I asked the group what would rhyme with 'As I listened to the slide trombone...' and got back: 'Sitting by myself alone' and 'chewing on my Toblerone' and 'sipping on my Côtes du Rhône'.

I was invited back in a month's time to read some of my poems, rhyming or otherwise, and was asked to write a poem on over-development in West Hampstead. I gave my thanks and left, having enjoyed the group's hospitality.

July 14

### The Wealden Literary Festival

A Writer in Residence is allowed out occasionally, but on my last trip beyond NW6 I felt very much at home. Just like our local library, the Wealden Literary Festival, set in the beautiful **Boldshave Gardens in Kent**, offers a chance to celebrate the world of books, readers and writers. This year's theme was outdoor writing, nature writing and travel.

We listened as authors, chaired by friendly experts, read from their works. As an audience we talked about what we had heard. The authors then signed copies provided and sold by a friendly local bookshop from Sevenoaks. Doesn't this all sound like a West Hampstead literary evening? And just like our local library, this mixture of reading, listening, buying and borrowing, of public service combining with private enterprise, is mutually sustaining.



There are many forms of library. Our homes are museums dedicated to ourselves, our bookshelves are our libraries whose contents shift over time and changing taste. Hotels and B & Bs have libraries of books left behind by travellers. There are help-yourself libraries in hired cottages, in railway station waiting rooms and pubs. On the commercial side, independent bookshops are holding their own, at least in our area. Despite the growth of the internet, second-hand bookshops still exist in most towns and cities. I recently found three in York. Charity shops are also excellent value for money and there is always a book sale presence at festivals such as our own Jester Festival.

I see these 'libraries' – these bookshops, these providers – not as being in competition but as being mutually supportive in keeping the writing and reading of books alive and flourishing.

August 1 2016

### Browsing

At the end of July I spent two mornings in the library. On the Wednesday I met again the **Over-55 group**. I had been asked to read a few of my poems. As well as my offerings, one of the group had written a lovely poem on the theme of friendship inspired by a 'tip' on the lid of a yoghurt pot: '*How to feed your inner smile*'. Other members recited poems learned in childhood and we also discussed post offices, funeral operations, beach walks, watering the garden with soapy water and **Carol Ann Duffy**.

The next morning was less successful. At opening time I set up at a table with my *Writer in Residence – Please Approach* logo. It was very quiet and nobody did. Nothing much happened, though I found to my shame that my library ticket had lapsed.

After a bit I got up, stretched my legs, and walked round the bookshelves. I picked up the **Keats' House** *What's On* booklet and found an afternoon poetry event on *The Romance of Travel*. In the biography section I took out *Dylan Thomas* by **Andrew Lycett**. I returned to my seat and sat thinking I had done something I rarely do: I had browsed.

It is one of the tenets of **post-modernism** that we lead guided and instructed lives; our activities are seldom random. Think cookbooks and the pages of guided tour adverts in newspapers and magazines.

As far as books are concerned, *mea culpa*. I read the reviews and order what I want from **West End Lane Books**. Only in second-hand bookshops when I have nothing in particular in mind do I wander around.

My browse round the library paid dividends; once home I booked into the **Keats' House** poetry session. In the **Dylan Thomas biography** I had come across a reference to **Over Sir John's Hill**. I found my *Collected Poems* and re-read it, enjoying the very fine poem that it is. Browsing pays off and the library is the place to do it.

To finish on a bit of personal history. My mother's last job was as an unqualified library assistant at **Crawley New Town library**. She often commented on the number of readers who came in and asked her to recommend 'a good read'. 'Why don't they look round?' she said, but I always felt she was proud of being given this trust. (The answer to the question was often the latest **Dick Francis**.)

September 16 2017

**"Pardon the egg salad stains, but I'm in love."**

In *Cricket Country* **Edward Blunden** wrote in praise of visiting the local bookshop whatever town one found oneself in. For myself, I make for the second-hand bookshops and in one such in **Arundel** I came across *Katerina Brac* by **Christopher Reid** and the poem *On the Subject of Fingers and Thumbs* set me thinking about how we personalise our reading by making marks. The last verse reads:

In some ways I am still as childish.  
There is a book I love  
less for the words it contains  
than for the smudge of my thumb on its fore-edge.

Now I am not encouraging library users to mark their book, but it happens, and *Marginalia*, a poem by **Billy Collins** (an American Poet Laureate) celebrates the effect this can have on the reader. Again the end of the poem:

Yet the one I think of most often,  
the one that dangles from me like a locket,  
was written in the copy of *Catcher in the Rye*  
I borrowed from the local library  
one slow, hot summer.  
I was just beginning high school then,  
reading books on a davenport in my parents' living room,  
and I cannot tell you  
how vastly my loneliness was deepened,  
how poignant and amplified the world before me seemed,  
when I found on one page

A few greasy looking smears  
and next to them, written in soft pencil –  
by a beautiful girl, I could tell,  
whom I would never meet –  
"Pardon the egg salad stains, but I'm in love."

My mother would have been shocked; we were not allowed to turn a book face down, nor to turn down a corner to keep our place. It wasn't done and I still never do it, still less do I make comments. Collins again:

Other comments are more offhand, dismissive -

"Nonsense." "Please!" "HA!!" -

That kind of thing.

Finally a poem I wrote about my first year in grammar school – a poem about margins, living on the edge.

### Maths

Mr Wells, kind and old  
exhorting us, we who were  
seated alphabetically  
to show our workings out  
in the margins of the pages  
credit thus to be gained  
if the end result went wrong.

Now our poetic scribblings  
adorn the margins of our lives  
tho the end results foregone.

Ted Booth, September 2016

November 2016

### Finding Common Ground

I have been thinking recently of ephemera, reflecting on the things we find inside previously read books, whether they be from the library, from second hand bookshops or from our own shelves. Then a coincidence prompted a different and more serious focus. In the library one day I was returning the latest **Ian Rankin crime novel** and got into conversation with a librarian who told me that not only had they had just lost one of their two managers, but she was not going to be replaced; another job lost, another cut.

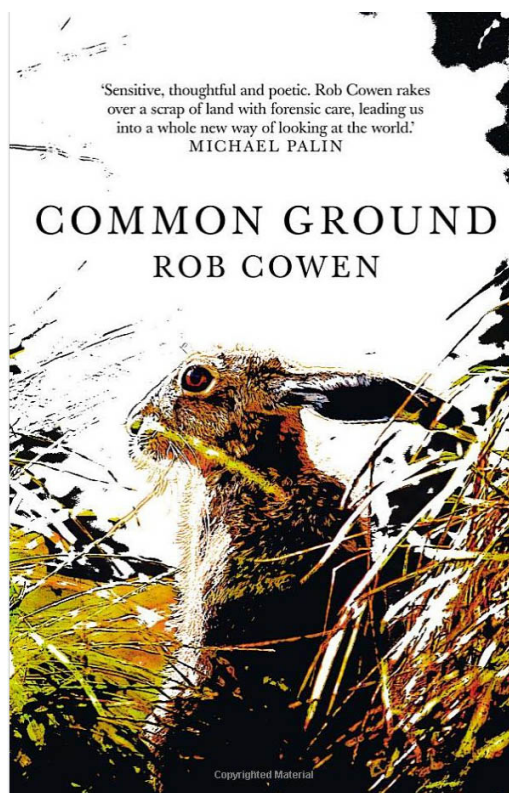
At home, having finished my thriller I turned to *Common Ground* by **Rob Cowen**. The author has moved from London to Bilton, an outlier of Harrogate. He finds himself drawn to an edge land, a wasteland, a pylon-strung tangle of wood, hedge, field and stream sat between the town and farmland proper. He involves himself in its life, beast, bird, insect, plant and people. He discovers there is a conservation group keeping records, organising walks, clearing litter and keeping a watchful eye on the threat of urban development. Do I need to draw parallels with the **Friends of West Hampstead Library** and indeed other local groups, such as the **Friends of Fortune Green**?

As I read on, the coincidence occurred. Cowen, a journalist, is sacked. Another cut has taken place. Cowen responds: 'I heard a minister on the radio yesterday saying "given we are in a recession, anything that cannot justify its existence financially has to go." What, like education? I wanted to shout. Like libraries? Like a reed warbler? Like love? And go where exactly? Out to the shed with a revolver?'

At the end of the book in Acknowledgements – usually a prosaic section – I was taken back to where I began. Cowen writes: 'My thanks to all the staff at **Harrogate and Ilkley libraries**. In recent years libraries have come under overwhelming financial strain, tasked with ever greater areas of responsibility to the community. Writing this book has shown me how important are such quiet spaces, repositories of local memory and gateways to new worlds. The day we allow free and public centres of learning to degrade or disappear is a step down a dangerous road.'

We need FoWHL. We need the Friends of Fortune Green, just as Bilton needs the Bilton Conservation Group.

Common Ground, indeed.



7 December 2016

### Brought to one's attention

Is it because I've been a library's Writer in Residence for six months that I've started to notice references to libraries in the press and in books, or is it that correspondents and authors are rallying to the cause of keeping our libraries open and increasingly acknowledging their debt to libraries. Or both? The latest example of an author's praise for a library of his past that I've come across came in **Jim Perrin's** *The Hills of Wales*. Perrin is the foremost UK writer on mountaineering and mountain landscapes and is one of *The Guardian's* Country Diarists, specialising in North Wales, which is where he lives. He was brought up post war in a Manchester slum, but soon developed an abiding passion for the **Peak District and the Welsh hills**. Here is an early memory:



'The library of my grammar school was a version of a safe and quiet heaven, from which could be had glimpses of the Derbyshire hills. And it had an outdoor section with a few mountain books that I devoured again and again, avidly: Charles Evans's *On Climbing*, Colin Kirkus's *Let's Go Climbing*. Both of them recounted outdoor odysseys that started on the Berwyn. The latter had an idiosyncratic Bartholomew's one inch to the mile map.'

I have a copy of *Let's Go Climbing* on my bookshelves and turned to the now so old-fashioned **Bartholomew map** of the Berwyns that illustrated a beginner's mountain walk. My copy of the book is a worn maroon-coloured hardback. This book and I have history. Inside the front cover is an **ex libris label** that says 'The Shaw Library of the London School of Economics and Political Science'. Inside the back is a three-column library form with rows of date stamps. The last 'to be returned' stamp reads Nov. 15th 1957.

Oh, the shame of it; I must have kept the book through my university years, throughout my teaching career and many household moves. I don't care to think what the fine must be.

Like Jim Perrin, I am, or rather was, a mountaineer. He is ten years younger than me, but the same book in two different libraries, two different havens of quiet, let us both nearer to the sky in the magnificent isolation of the Berwyns.

### Postscript

The day I wrote the above, two letters appeared in the *Guardian* under the heading 'Time to invest in good reading for everyone', stressing the importance of reading in educational and occupational attainment and the part libraries have to play in the provision of books. The next day, December 8 2016, a *Guardian* headline read 'Library Budgets cut by £25m'. Last year to March, **121 libraries** closed.

A closure in reading and culture, a few less footfalls on the ridges of the Berwyn.

January 1 2017

### New Year Resolutions

**Alan Bennett**, in *Keeping On Keeping On*, extols the virtues of **Armley Public Library** and the part it played in his education in working-class Leeds. The *Guardian* has a full half page of letters outlining the debates over the future of libraries as well as devoting editorials to the issue. What I have to offer may be small beer, but here are my New Year Resolutions for 2017:

1. Renew your library ticket so you can access the new automated system
2. Take a family member, neighbour or friend along and get them to join
3. Take out a book a month
4. If you already take out books, take out an extra one.
5. Try one of the shelves you don't normally use – cookery, sport, travel, poetry; it's up to you.

This is going to be a year of number-crunching. Let's all do our bit to keep membership and withdrawals moving the right way... upwards.

February 1 2017

### A Cultural Pick-Me-Up

Over the last few months my efforts to promote libraries and reading have been upstaged by letters, articles and leader columns in the printed press. I am not complaining. *The Observer*, 22 January, invited readers to submit pleasurable and uplifting cultural experiences from the media, arts, performance arts and books. There were ten categories. Below is an entry in the book section, citing **Laurie Lee's** 1969 memoir, *As I Walked Out One Midsummer Morning*.

'Laurie Lee's memoir and sequel to **Cider With Rosie** is an account of his journey from the Cotswolds to Spain via London. For reader GorgeousRedHead, Lee's work is 'totally inspiring', while Pat Lux's fondness for the 'glorious book' is bound up in the nostalgia of 'going to a library and borrowing a bagful of books for free'. Atthecoalface2 agrees: 'At times when I've been down and desperately broke, I've walked out of libraries with a bag of assorted books feeling rich beyond measure... Pity those who have lost / are losing this cultural pick-me-up without peer'.

I can't and don't want to add to this. Get your book bag down to the library.

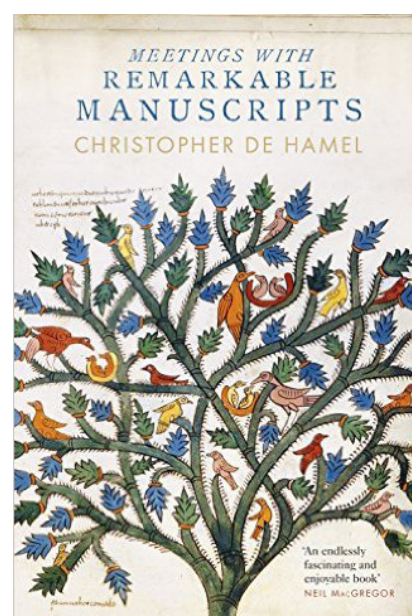
February 17 2017

### Invest in Libraries

I love coincidences. I had just finished reading a letter in the *Guardian* from a Professor at the **University of Southern California** pleading for investment in libraries on the grounds that for 'many children of poverty, their only source of books is the library.' He finished the letter by saying that for children, 'research tells us that better libraries are associated with better reading test scores. The implication is obvious: invest in libraries and librarians, not in phonic texts.' [Stephen Krashen, *Guardian* 1/2/2017]

I put down the paper and began reading a chapter entitled '**The Leiden Aratea**' in *Meetings with Remarkable Manuscripts* by **Christopher de Hamel** (Allen Lane 2016), the librarian of **Corpus Christi College, Cambridge**. The book is a trawl through rare medieval manuscripts held in prestigious libraries throughout the world. The Aratea, a Carolingian manuscript, is held in the **Universiteitsbibliotheek** in **Leiden**.

In the chapter on the Aratea, de Hamel quotes the French polymath **Joseph Justus Scaliger** (1540-1609), who famously said of Leiden: 'Est hic magna commoditas Bibliothecae, ut studiosi possint studere.' [The great benefit of the library here is that the studious may study]. Which is true today.



So I came across two heartfelt pleas in support of libraries for two different, but related, types of readers in the space of ten minutes, on our settee.

16 March 2017

### Gone Missing

This month official figures from the **Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy** revealed that books stocked by public libraries have dropped by 25m since 1996 and that since 2010, 8,000 librarians have been made redundant in England and Wales – 25% of the workforce – while the number of libraries has fallen by 340 since 2008. So, never mind Brexit and Trump, am I, as Writer in Residence at **West Hampstead Library**, along with the FoWHL membership, swimming against the tide, fighting a losing battle, fiddling while Rome burns?

I put this to **FoWHL Secretary Jeannie Cohen** and she was firm in her belief that we must continue in our support of the library to protect it, and other libraries, from irreparable decline. I then recalled a time when my university lecturers' union called a strike, a one-day strike over pay and conditions. Many members were doubtful. 'The management will do what they want, regardless,' was the argument. But one of my colleagues, the art historian **Professor John Bird** had the right reply. He made the point that if you didn't make a stand and protest, the powers that be will walk over you that much more easily the next time.

John Bird and Jeannie Cohen are right; we must continue to do all we can, especially in these hard times, to protect what we have.

March 24 2017

### So what has this got to do with libraries?

**Reading is learning.** Mills and Boon, *War and Peace*, *The Tiger who came to Tea...* whatever, there is always something informative, interesting and new. But it is not often that a hoary hand reaches out from the pages and lays itself on your shoulder, bringing back a moment of your very own personal history.

Immediately after the Second World War our family was housed in a flat in the sports pavilion belonging to the firm my father worked for, The Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Company. The sports ground had football and cricket pitches and tennis courts. For my brother and me it was heaven. Once a year in the summer there was a sports day: races, tug of war, slippery pole, entertainments and a beer tent. August 1946 was a special celebration. The company had been involved in the laying of the first underwater transatlantic telephone cable. There was a guest of honour, the Canadian biscuit millionaire **Garfield Weston**.

It was a warm Saturday evening. I was indoors with my father and uncle. The sports day was over. My mother and Aunt Enid had gone down to the beer tent for a drink. First back was my mother, flustered and flushed. 'Jack, get down to the beer tent. Garfield Weston has proposed to Enid and wants to take her back to Canada.'

A somewhat unsteady Aunt Enid was rescued, a crisis was averted, order was restored.

So what has this got to do with libraries? Once again I have been reading *Meetings with Remarkable Manuscripts* by Christopher de Hamel, and had got to the chapter on **Hugo Picton**, a late eleventh-century manuscript held in the **Bodleian Library at Oxford**. De Hamel's research was interrupted because that part of the Bodleian known as Duke Humphrey's Library was being refurbished. As de Hamel wrote:

'The original Bodleian is now named the Weston Library in recognition of a £25,000,000 donation in March 2008 from the Garfield Weston Foundation. Willard Garfield Weston himself (1898–1978) was a Canadian manufacturer of biscuits, a not unfitting adjunct to the fortune of St Thomas Bodley, based on fish.'

Oh for another beer tent; would that West Hampstead Library might enjoy such luck.

May 2 2017

### There's more between the covers of a book than its pages

The other morning I didn't turn the radio alarm off and was woken again a little later by a male voice reading a poem. I recognised the poem but not the voice. It turned out to be **Philip Larkin** reading *The Whitsun Weddings*. On my bookshelves I found the slim Faber volume of *The Whitsun Weddings*, intending to read the poem myself. The page was marked by a red ticket stub for the Sheridan Brass Quintet at St Martin's-in-the-Fields, 9th July 1991, £3.00. At the back of the book was a copy of an epithalamium written by a friend who had used *An Arundel Tomb* (in the same volume) as a sort of template. These finds made me realise that my books, and I'm sure yours too, are full of such ephemera.

**Ali Smith**, writing in *Browse*, edited by **Henry Hitchings**, recalls working in an Amnesty International second-hand bookshop and finding inside books unexpected repositories of the lives they've been so close to. 'We leave ourselves in our books via this seeming detritus: cigarette cards, receipts for the chemist, opera, concert or theatre tickets, rail or tram or bus tickets from all the decades, photographs of long-gone places, dogs, cats and holidays.'

**Sophie Beard**, an artist, as part of her submission for her MA, recorded, photographed and published a list of found ephemera between the pages of books inside the **Royal College of Art** library. The starting-point was the first book on the first shelf. She found 300 items and published them in a book in which each item has a short descriptive text.

In the *Guardian G2* of April 27 20, **Paula Coccozza**, in a feature on the decline of the **Kindle**, writes: 'Here are some things you can't do with a Kindle. You can't turn down a corner or tuck a leaf into a chapter. You can't pass it on to a friend or post it through a neighbour's door.'

I would add to this that you can't put in a bookmark, a birthday card, a receipt or a boarding pass.

There is, I feel, a significant metaphor arising from these insertions. They represent us in the book. As readers we get something out of a book, but we are not passive, intellectually, emotionally and, as we have seen concretely, we put something back in.

June 10 2017

### Books about books

I have come to realise over the year that I have been Writer in Residence that there is a vast and ever-increasing number of books about books, about reading, about readers and about libraries. Indeed, any library could have a section alongside cookery and crime labelled libraries. The latest example that I have come across is **Alberto Manguel's** *The Library at Night* (Yale 2008). In the chapter entitled '*The Library as Island*' he touches on **Robinson Crusoe**, who brought ashore from the wreck of his ship 'a small collection of books' including 'three very good bibles'.



Photo courtesy of [www.thepolisblog.org](http://www.thepolisblog.org)

However, the part of the chapter that fascinated me was the account of the **Colombian Ministry of Culture's** 1990 initiative to set up **itinerant libraries** that could reach distant rural areas. For this purpose, books in large carrier bags were transported on donkeys' backs up into the jungle and the sierra (*left*). Here they were left for several weeks in the hands of a teacher or village elder who became *de facto* librarians. These donkey libraries are carried by a **biblioburro**.

The author concludes: 'It is likely that libraries will carry on and survive as long as we persist in lending words to the world and storing them for future readers.'

So will we one day see a couple of donkeys tethered to the bench outside our library on West End Lane?

July 3 2017

### Over the hills and far away

In my last piece, I wrote about a mobile library service in a far-away land, but a recent article has shown me a much nearer-to-home example of this service. Writing in *The Guardian Weekend*, Joanne Lacy recollected her time as a mobile librarian in Radnorshire, a sparsely populated mountainous area in Wales which has lots of snow and ice in winter.

She drove some 50 miles a day on a fortnightly rota. Mostly the service was used by elderly people who might not see anyone else for a week or two. She would get a cup of tea and presents of eggs, vegetables and flowers. (Are we treating our librarians well enough?) People could take out 20 books at a time, and if they lived at the end of long dirt tracks, as many of them did, the books were dropped off in a plastic bag in a hedge at the roadside. Joanne's reward was to stop in a layby for lunch, eating her sandwiches and looking out over beautiful mountains.

There is a salutary ending to her article. She writes: 'The mobile library service is still hanging on in Powys, but I don't know how much longer it will survive. Even then, it felt like part of a disappearing world.'

Have we turned the corner on austerity, will our own library survive?

August 2017

### Still here

'Gosh, is he still here?' you ask yourselves, and it is true that my tenure ended in June this year. However, the FoWHL committee have asked me to stay on until September while they find, as they tactfully put it, 'a younger replacement'. (This should not be difficult, as I am 79 this month.) So I find myself now as a sort of **Emeritus Writer in Residence**; my final article will appear in September and my final appearance will be at the library on September 13, when Flick Rea and I will be giving readings of our favourite poetry and prose.

In the meantime, I have been enjoying **John Banville's** *Time Pieces: A Dublin Memoir* (Hachette Books, Ireland) Like many writers of his age, Banville acknowledges his debt to the libraries of his youth. 'I was a very young man when I first fell in love with libraries. Frequently in my dreams I find myself visiting Wexford County Library.'

He recollects the wide linoleum corridors, the heavy wooden doors, the smell of floor polish, the spines of books and the assistant librarian's all-pervading perfume.



In an amazing episode, he admits to having sinned. He stole a book, *The Collected Poems of Dylan Thomas*. He hid it for months at the back of a shelf, and then walked out with it under his coat. In his shame, and to ease his conscience, he has after many decades left a small legacy in his will as reparation to the library. 'I wonder what books they will buy with the money,' he writes.

As now is the time for summer reading and summer borrowing, why not pop into the library and borrow a volume of Dylan Thomas or whatever poet of your fancy. Don't do a John Banville, of course, or you will have to re-write your will.

September 2017

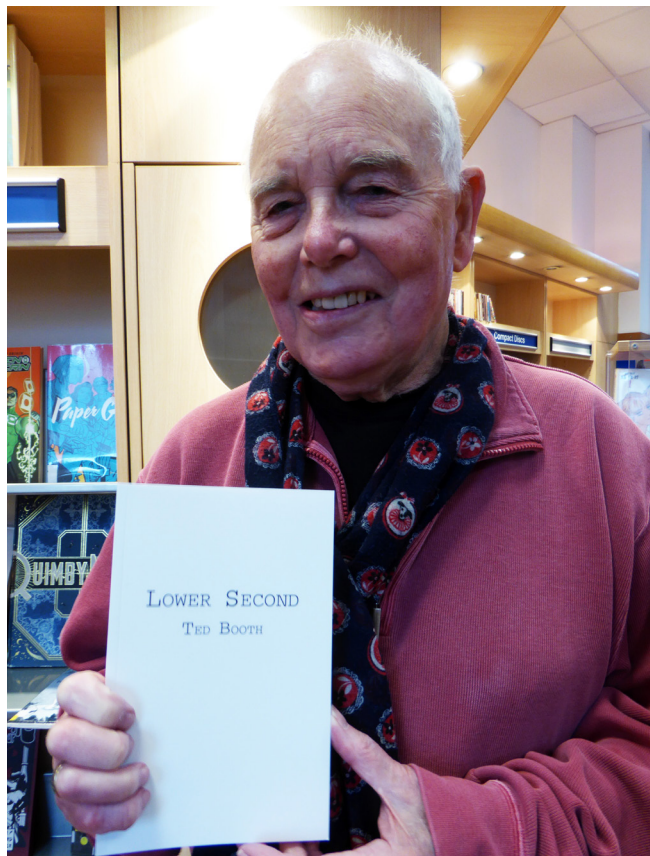
### And this is it

On May 29 last year, I became Writer in Residence for **FoWHL**. I felt very honoured and still do feel honoured. At the start of the year I jotted down a number of themes that I might take up as a writer involved in library practice and usage. One of these was my own experience over the years (more than seventy of them) as a library user. My '**librography**', if you like.

I started school in the middle of the Hitler war. Neither my first primary school in Yorkshire nor my second in SE London had a school library, and they were large schools. The first library I belonged to, run by Greenwich Council, was housed in a converted Georgian mansion on the edge of Blackheath, all wood and polish and floor-to-high-ceiling shelves. Only my mother and I were members; my father and brother were never into books. You could take out three books at a time, date stamped for a fortnight, and then the penny-a-day fines mounted up. Though I was in awe of the place with its 'Silence No Talking' signs, I remember it with great affection.

Once at grammar school in the early forms we had a Junior Library whose contents were donated by the older boys: **Biggles**, **Conan Doyle**, **Arthur Ransome**, sporting biographies, *Boys Own* annuals and prisoner of war escape stories by the cartload. There was an academic library in an old chapel, and each sixth form had its specialised subject library.

I left school for the LSE, which had an academic library you could get lost in and the **Shaw Library** for fiction, the arts, chess and music. At this point in time began my divorce from the public library except through my mother, who worked in one. For the next forty years until I retired, every college and university I worked in had massively endowed libraries covering academia, fiction, non-fiction, the media and visual arts.



So it wasn't until I retired and we moved to **West Hampstead** that I once again joined a public library. Even then, over these last twenty years I and my partner have been affluent enough to buy books and my love of second-hand bookshops has meant I seldom used my library ticket. This isn't meant to be self-confessional, but I must represent a trend, a sort of demography. What I hope is that a different sort of demography – using libraries in a variety of ways and valuing the public ownership and sharing of books – will keep the system alive.

Thanks to the **FoWHL committee** and all of you out there for bearing with me. When I have collected my stipend, a **bottle of claret**, I shall go into the library and take out a thriller, a biography or a book of poetry and go home, open the bottle of wine, prop the book up on the table and enjoy myself.

**Ted Booth (left)**  
**FoWHL Writer in Residence**  
**August 2017**