

Writer in Residence 2017-18

Tal Gurevich a compilation



Tal Gurevich became FoWHL's second Writer in Residence (WiRes) when she joined us in October 2017. Born in Israel to immigrants from the Soviet Union, she was raised in Hampshire, and after studying Philosophy, Politics & Economics at Warwick University, went on to work as a consultant in London before joining a healthcare turnaround and management firm. She had lived in Miami and also sampled life in Limehouse and Balham before realizing that West Hampstead had the best coffee and the best library. At the end of her year as WiRes Tal was on the move again, this time to Yale University to embark upon a two-year Master of Public Health. Here is Tal's take on being the Writer in Residence for the Friends of West Hampstead Library.

October 17 2017

Another chapter begins...

FoWHL were looking for a Writer in Residence, so I put my hand up. In true millennial style it was really a digital hand, raised by email. And now, a few weeks later, I find myself in front of this white board; Ted's 'younger replacement', preparing to tell you a story or two.

Ted's are big shoes to fill, so I shall pick up where he left off by revealing some of my own 'librography'. That is, to paraphrase (while we wait for Ted's term to go viral), my experiences as a 'library user'. What first comes to mind are the evenings spent cramming for exams in the library at Warwick University, closely followed by happy memories of receiving notification that the books I'd ordered had finally arrived and were awaiting collection. I imagine that having children feels a little bit like that, minus the option to return them if you find you no longer need them for your essay.

But if university was where I spent the most time actually reading in a library, my relationship has changed over the years to accommodate my evolving interests. As a teenager, I spent countless hours in the local library in Farnborough, deciding which ten piano scores to borrow (ten being the maximum I could carry home on my bicycle, yet the minimum needed to make sure that my family wouldn't get sick of hearing the same tunes over the next fortnight). As a Sixth Form College student, you'd have found me in the foreign language DVD section, deliberating over an Almodovar or a Truffaut (the winner always inevitably depended on whether I had a French or a Spanish lesson the next day).

Fast-forward a few years and as an adult working and living around the world, libraries have become places to collect my thoughts, sneak a glimpse into the local culture, history and happenings, and, admittedly, take advantage of the free wi-fi while waiting for the internet to be installed in my new home. For these reasons, when I moved to Miami Beach, the Miami-Dade Public Library was my first port of call. Well ok, second. After the beach.

West Hampstead Library has already fulfilled many of these requirement in the few months since I moved to NW6, and now I look forward to discovering more of its secrets and meeting more of the library regulars over the next twelve months.

November 3 2017

Gouldman on song...

Confession time – I knew very little about 10cc's **Graham Gouldman** before he graced West Hampstead library last week. But as a procession of long-time fans filed into the building – I am strictly forbidden to use the term 'older' – promptly followed by children with a love for Graham's music as featured in the 'Guardians of the Galaxy', I knew this was going to be a special evening.

And so it was. Graham entertained the packed audience, interspersing anecdotes about his childhood in Manchester with beautiful acoustic renditions of some of his well-loved hits. His music career has not always been smooth sailing. His record label turned down the opportunity to record 'For Your Love', a song Graham wrote when he was just 19. However, in a twist of fate, he soon heard the song performed live on television for the first time – by The Yardbirds – during a recording of Top of the Pops, when he was there, coincidentally, as a member of the warm-up band, The Mockingbirds.

Graham's innate talent for writing timeless songs saw him compose many more hits, again for The Yardbirds (Heart Full of Soul), The Hollies, Herman's Hermits, and of course, 10cc. Great songs, like great books, stand the test of time (as became apparent, listening to most of the audience recalling each line of each song, faithfully and fondly). But it was not just a case of infectious melodies. Graham's lyrics often tell a story that's relatable and above all, authentic. Whether a song about a holiday in the Caribbean (Dreadlock Holiday) or the little habits that change after a breakup (No Milk Today), each conveys specific, real life experiences. As Malcolm Gladwell put it in an episode of his Revisionist History podcast, 'We cry when melancholy collides with specificity'.

One of the highlights of the evening was a reading by the event's host, Simon Inglis, of the lyrics to 'Bus Stop' – a song written by Graham and recorded by the Hollies that when read aloud, effectively transformed into a mesmerizing poem that took the audience on a ride from the beginning of a very British flirtation:

That's the way the whole thing started
Silly but it's true
Thinking of a sweet romance
Beginning in a queue

...through a movie montage of the burgeoning relationship...

Bus stop, bus goes, she stays, love grows
Under my umbrella

...ultimately, to a happy ending:

All that summer we enjoyed it
Wind and rain and shine
That umbrella, we employed it
By August, she was mine

It kind of made me wish it rained that little bit more.

Actually this bout of literary analysis rather took Graham by surprise, precisely because, as he put it, he never analyses or thinks of his songs in that way, and especially not as poems. He just sits down and writes, then worries about them later. In fact what seemed clearest of all is that for Graham, songwriting and storytelling remains a passion. He still tours, he still works on new material – a man who doesn't just like music. He loves it.

As did we.



Never mind the textual analysis – let's hear another hit! Graham Gouldman delights another capacity crowd at West Hampstead Library (photo by Janet Nabney)

December 4 2017

Season's Readings

As you may have noticed, December is upon us! The season of glittering lights, boozy office parties and re-runs of *Love Actually*. Now if these re-runs stir up the romantic fire in you, West Hampstead Library is more than able to keep feeding those flames. This week, for instance, I picked up a copy of Debbie Macomber's *Starry Night* (catalogue no. 813.6) from the library's Christmas bookshelf. It promised the gripping tale of a reporter assigned to track down a reclusive bestselling author living in the Alaskan wilderness, and delivered exactly that. I won't spoil it for you but will say that, despite the promise on the cover that 'at Christmas you find love where you least expect it...' the sceptic in me was tested throughout...

If romance is not your thing, Stella Gibbon's collection of short stories, *Christmas at Cold Comfort Farm* (823.912) set in the 1940s, offers a far more British take on the holiday season. With tales of family drama, murder mystery and miscommunications, it's a quick and amusing read. Perfect if you're looking for an excuse to take a short break from the extended family over the holidays.

Speaking of family, West Hampstead Library, as I discovered this week, features the works of two of the immensely talented Rossetti siblings, only a few shelves apart. Intrigued by the Pre-Raphaelites after the excellent "*Reflections*" exhibition at the National Gallery, I looked up Dante Rossetti's painting of the 'Girlhood of the Virgin Mary' in the library's Arts section. The girl Mary depicted in his painting is none other than his younger sister, Christina Rossetti, whose poem "Amen" I studied at school.

Giving in to a wave of nostalgia, I picked up *The Works of Christina Rossetti* (821.8 ROSS) and was soon glued to her mesmerizing poetry, so full of longing, hope and love.

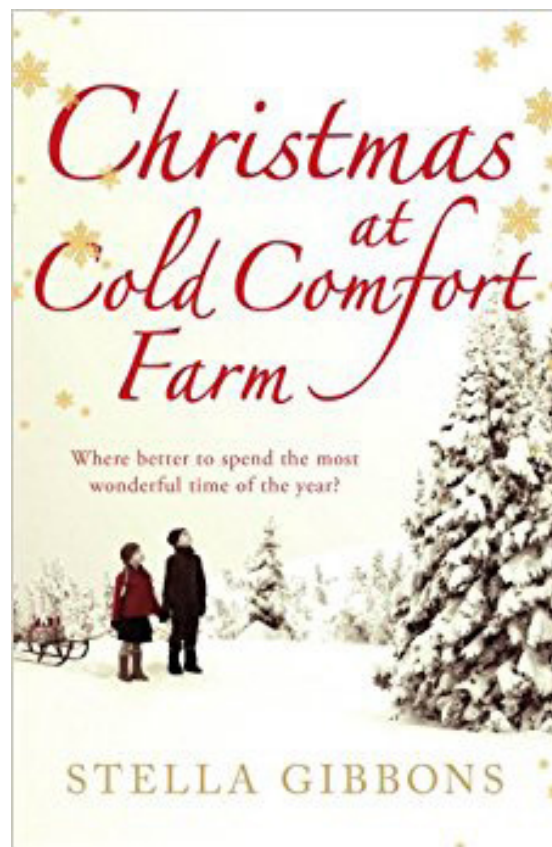
If you're in a festive mood, Rossetti's charming *A Christmas Carol* (In the bleak Midwinter) has been set to music and is one of the best loved Christmas carols. Here is the last, poignant verse:

What can I give Him,
 Poor as I am?
 If I were a Shepherd
 I would bring a lamb;
 If I were a Wise Man
 I would do my part,
 Yet what I can I give Him,
 Give my heart.

And in the spirit of the festivities, this year FoWHLers will no longer have to fight over copies of Christmas Carol as it is now available to download as an audiobook from Camden libraries. Just don't download the Camden Public Library app, as I did. That is a library based in Maine, USA, and your login credentials won't work, regardless of how many times you try...

Go to our own local downloading service, called **Libby**, instead.

And when you have a moment, in between celebrating Christmas, Chanukah or any other holiday coming our way, if you discover any other interesting family connections, like the Rossettis, amongst the library shelves, let me know @talagur.



January 8 2017

My blind date with a book

I love surprises. In fact my favourite part of opening presents is the excitement of those first few seconds spent rattling the neatly wrapped package trying to figure out what's inside. Unfortunately, since my siblings and I are all adults now, we no longer do presents, so this year I decided to get myself one.

In a **second-hand bookshop in Australia**, where I was visiting family over the holidays, I stumbled upon a '**Blind Date with a Book**'. All the books in this section were wrapped in brown paper, with a few choice clues as to what was inside. Fully intending to get one just for a friend, I also ended up getting myself one with the mysterious tagline of '*Girlfriends' secrets, illicit affair, predatory friendship, perversely funny, scandal*'.

I was excited – I got a book and had absolutely no idea what it was about!

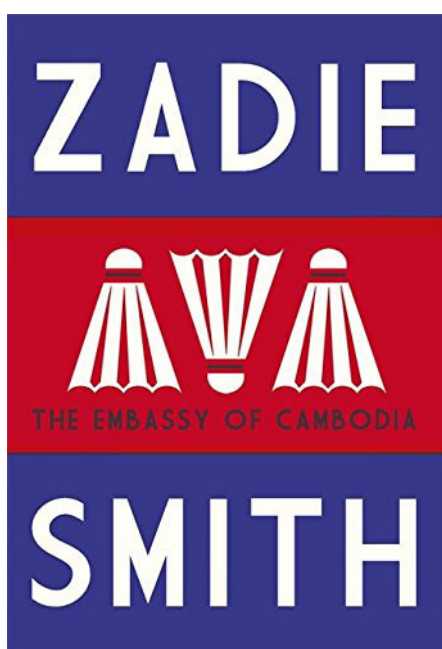


Upon opening the parcel on **Christmas Day**, I was pleasantly surprised to find that it was Zoe Heller's 2003 novel *Notes on a Scandal*, a book I hadn't read before. It is about a teacher who has an affair with a student, and I spent the next couple of days engrossed. I won't spoil it for you (pick it up from West Hampstead Library, for free - catalogue reference: 823.92), but there are a few dramatic scenes that take place in Hampstead Heath as well as an intriguing reference to a 'flagship Sainsbury's in West Hampstead'. I found myself thinking of home and making some New Year's resolutions.

Over the past few months as **FoWHL's Writer in Residence**, I have come to really appreciate just how much local talent there was and is. Almost every book I pick up seems to have a connection to the area – **Christina Rossetti** and **Stella Gibbons** (mentioned in December's blog) for example – were locals and are both buried at Highgate Cemetery. So, for this coming year I've made it my resolution to actively explore local talent. I will be delving into Zadie Smith's offerings and talking to some fantastic local authors and poets over the next few months.

In the meantime, if your resolution for 2018 is to read more, and if like me, you like surprises, you could always get your family or friends to pick out a book for you from the library.

While it won't be wrapped, it will mean that you won't have to wait another year for a surprise.



February 12 2018

Spreading the NW Love!

I can happily attest that, so far, I have kept up with my resolution of exploring local talent. I admit that with so many amazing events happening in and around NW London, this hasn't been difficult, but that is exactly the point. Here's a recent highlight, one which, inevitably, involved a book, good food and a cup of tea – because how else are we expected to get through winter?

You may recall that I wanted to sample the writing of **Zadie Smith**, an author born and raised in north west London. As soon as I put those words on paper, a new book club in **Willesden Green** popped up on my newsfeed. By happenstance, the book of choice for the first meeting was Smith's novella, *The Embassy of Cambodia*, describing the thoughts of Fatou, a young woman working as a domestic servant for a family in modern-day Willesden Green, on her tube journey to and from work. Frankly I felt a little frazzled trying to get to grips with the book's concoction of complex themes, heavy motifs and characters, and welcomed the prospect of sharing the efforts with other book clubbers.

That evening, over delicious South-Asian food, we discussed the narrative techniques Smith uses, switching between the perspectives of the main character and the omniscient people of **Willesden Green** to introduce the reader to the broad themes of slavery and genocide. How significant is Fatou's story? Is she courageous, a victim or both?

After an animated discussion, we walked to the actual **Embassy of Cambodia**, which is located just around the corner from the house where we had been discussing the book. As the building came to life on an eerily empty, cold night, I was left to wonder, who are the people in these seemingly ordinary houses, whose stories are hidden from our view?

Reading, discussing the novella and then seeing the 'set' in real life was mesmerizing, and of course such a discovery is not unique to this book. Pick up a **John Keats** or a **Sigmund Freud** and then check out their homes, a stone's throw away, where they spent the last few years of their lives. You can even read the **Harry Potter books** (yes, again!), watch the movies and then take part in a walking tour around some of the locations that inspired **JK Rowling**. Be warned, the street that inspired Knockturn Alley is just as spooky in real life!

While you are deciding on your next adventure starting at WHL, I will continue onto the next **Zadie Smith** book on my list, *NW*, and in the meantime plan on talking to some exciting, upcoming authors on our doorstep. We are surrounded by talent, it would seem, and by buildings and landscapes that lend themselves perfectly to story telling.

March 20 2018

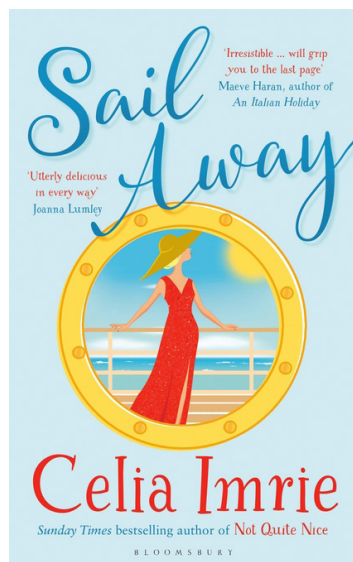
Sailing away with Celia

On **World Book Day**, I looked out at the snow lingering on the pavements of **West Hampstead**, and reluctantly put on hiking boots to brave the bitter cold and make my way to the **RADA Studios** in Bloomsbury. If **Celia Imrie** could spend the day crammed on various trains to make her way from Scotland to talk about her new novel *Sail Away* (coincidentally or not, published by Bloomsbury), the least I could do was trek a few miles across London to listen.

In truth I knew little about the award-winning actress except for her turn in *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (though older FoWHLers subsequently pointed me to her stellar TV work with **Victoria Wood** and **Julie Walters**). This, however, was probably a good thing, as it allowed me to consider Imrie first and foremost as an author.

Sail Away, her third novel, is the story of two women whose lives unwittingly intertwine aboard a luxury cruise ship, the Blue Mermaid. Suzy is an actress in her 60s (as is Imrie) whose agent finds her a job on the cruise after the Oscar Wilde play she was scheduled to be in folds unexpectedly. Amanda is a widow of 'a certain age', seeking to escape her woes, and her adult children, amidst the Blue Mermaid's luxury shops, spas, its numerous restaurants (featured at length – Imrie is a self-confessed foodie), and glamorous evening balls. Instead, a series of mysteries begin to unravel onboard as the ship sails directly into a violent storm in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.

Sail Away is unashamedly light-hearted. The suspense builds, slowly but surely. Imrie happily admitted that many of her characters are written from personal experience, and that she would love to play one of them when (she emphasised!) the books are made into movies. She then duly obliged us, and no doubt any film directors in the audience, by reading from a dinner party scene in *Sail Away*, bringing the characters to vivacious life in a series of French, American and British accents. Writing fiction, it became evident, has enabled Imrie to take control of the creative process to a much greater extent than is possible as an actress, and to bring strong female characters to the fore.



Sail Away is a testament to that determination, as is her recently released film *Finding Your Feet*, where she plays the free-spirited sister of a character played by **Imelda Staunton**, whom of course many of us know as a West Hampstead actress and strong advocate of the library.

On which note, I trudged home to seek out Imrie's other works on the library shelves: *The Happy Hooper*, a memoir of her (mis)adventures as a thespian, is available as a talking book (catalogue no: 920 IMRI); *Not Quite Nice*, her first novel is on the shelves at 823.92, and both *Nice Work if You Can Get It*, another novel, and *Sail Away*, can be ordered from other Camden Libraries (both also at 823.92).

Her writing, as I have discovered, is easy and engaging – in short, the perfect way to spend a dreary cold day as we wait impatiently for the snow to melt (again!) and for spring to finally arrive.

April 2018 Sleeping with Books

Despite being a 'writer in residence', I have of course never lived in a library. So I decided to give this a try recently by spending a weekend at the **Gladstone Library** – 'the 'UK's finest residential library', in **Hawarden**, a sleepy town bordering **Chester** in North Wales. Founded by the 19th century politician and avid reader, **William Gladstone**, the library holds over 250,000 books from his lifetime's collection, reflecting his interests in theology, history, culture and politics.

Joined by three friends – lured by the promise that reading sessions would be accompanied by rounds of hot chocolate and interspersed with country walks and pub food – we arrived at the Hogwarts-like, Grade I listed building late on Friday night, then spent Saturday morning exploring part of the archive in the breathtaking **Theology Room**. Slipped into many of the intricately-bound books were poignant, personal dedications from the authors to Gladstone. Displayed in the centre of the room, an early edition of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* showed Gladstone's annotations, offering a fascinating insight into how his perspective on women changed over time.

Just as I settled on some early volumes of **John Keats'** poetry, my friends signalled it was time to get some fresh air and explore the nearby **Hawarden Castle estate**, where Gladstone and his family had lived. Following the walk and having convinced ourselves that we'd done enough exercise, it was then off for a hearty lunch at the nearest pub, where a local couple furnished us with an extensive list of restaurants for dinner, in the unlikely event we'd be hungry by then.

Back in the Gladstone Library later that evening, we took up residence on cozy sofas in front of a crackling fireplace in the **Gladstone Room**, where, over the next few hours, we were joined by other guests who had been attending a weekend seminar entitled '*Blue Sky God: the Evolution of Science and Christianity*' and whose fiery scientific and religious debates we listened to intently, occasionally joining in. I also met a former journalist who was staying at the library to work on a novel, while a friend chatted to an inspiring 80-year old who had just received her pilot's license. That evening, the Gladstone Room played host to an intriguing mix of guests of all different ages, beliefs and backgrounds.

On Sunday, after breakfast in the Library's '*Food for Thought*' restaurant, we had to leave Hawarden and head back to London. I would love to have lingered longer, but am at least consoled that Gladstone's collection is in such good hands, and that while I may not be a writer in actual residence, I do have a library close to home. A library where I can order a copy of **Roy Jenkins'** biography of Gladstone and take it off to the nearby **Gladstone Park** for a good read.

For more on the Gladstone Library, visit: www.gladstoneslibrary.org



The Gladstone Library in Hawarden, North Wales, offers the perfect B & B for Bibliophiles – bed and books that is – in a cosy, convivial and inviting library setting.



May 30 2018

Who were the 'Bad Girls', and what did they do?

Originally known as the House of Corrections when founded in 1852, **HM Holloway Prison in Islington**, was the largest women's prison in western Europe until its closure in 2016. But who were the women in there, and what 'bad' things did they do? These were the questions that fascinated author and journalist **Caitlin Davies**, who grew up a mile away from the prison and came to West Hampstead Library on May 22 to talk about her new book, *Bad Girls: A History of Rebels and Renegades*, a captivating insight into the stories of Holloway's inmates over the course of its 164-year history.

Caitlin's talk focused initially on the suffragettes at Holloway, in commemoration of the centenary of the passing of the **Representation of the People Act** in 1918, which gave some women over the age of 30 the right to vote. With photos of the menacing prison building in the early 1900s as a backdrop, Caitlin read from her book's prologue, which describes two women's attempt to blow up the prison in 1913:

'Whatever their intentions that night, the two anonymous women had successfully bombed a building that symbolized everything the suffragettes were fighting against: a place where women were humiliated, assaulted and degraded, a prison that always had – and always would – punish women who fought for freedom.'

The suffragettes feature heavily in Holloway's early history since it became a women only prison in 1903. Caitlin described the prison's many firsts; from **Teresa Billington**, the first suffragette to be sent to Holloway, to **Constance Gore-Booth**, the first woman to be elected to the House of Commons (while still a prisoner at Holloway). She also painted a more colourful picture of the suffragettes' diverse experiences than the black-and-white images of force-feeding that are so often associated with them. Many, for example, used their time at Holloway to further the campaign for women's suffrage. **Sylvia Pankhurst** designed the 'Holloway' brooch, while **Olive Wharry**, a student imprisoned at Holloway, kept a scrapbook of poems, including one entitled 'Prison' (that would surely win any onomatopoeia-themed poetry contest on Instagram today).

Tramp, tramp of prison feet
Ring, rang of bells
Clash, smash of prison glass
Suffragettes in cells

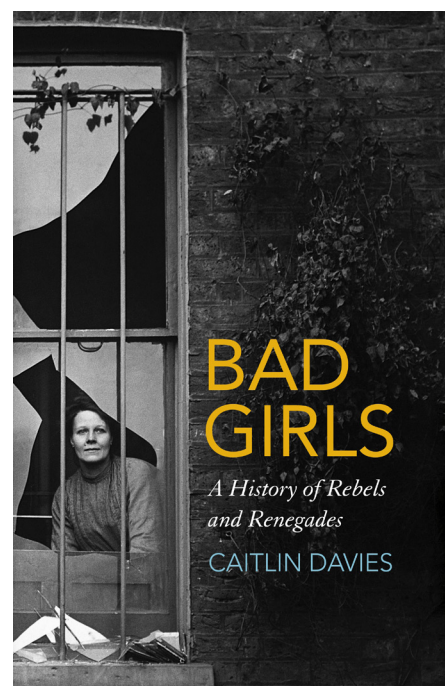
Thus Holloway inadvertently became, as Caitlin noted, a 'graduating university for militants'.

Caitlin then gave us a glimpse into another dark period in the prison's history – the incarceration of German Jewish refugees during WW2, for being suspected 'enemy aliens'. On many occasions families were separated and children taken away from their mothers. *Bad Girls* also reveals details behind many of the executions that took place at Holloway, of baby farmers accused of murder and of **Ruth Ellis**, the last woman to be executed in the UK in 1955.

As to what constitutes 'appropriate' behaviour for women (especially when compared with men) and what makes women 'bad' and therefore deserving of imprisonment, is a theme Caitlin probes throughout the book. Certainly this resonated with members of the audience, who shared their own stories of Holloway inmates and the debilitating effect prison had on them.

Although Holloway closed in 2016, as Caitlin pointed out, the debate is far from over. Given the ongoing campaign for local resident **Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe** to be freed from an Iranian jail, now is as good of a time as ever to question the role – perceived and actual – that prisons play in our own society.

You can now borrow *Bad Girls* from West Hampstead Library, along with other works by **Caitlin Davies**, including *Family Likeness* (2013), a novel about mixed race children born in the UK during WW2, and *Dido Elizabeth Belle*, Britain's first black aristocrat who resided at **Kenwood House**.



June 28 2108

The Future Library

Whenever I hear the word 'library' nowadays, my ears prick up and my eyes dart around, looking for the person who uttered the magic word. It happened earlier this month, only this time the speaker was **Margaret Atwood**, appearing at a sold-out **London Palladium** to discuss her childhood, her writing and environmental activism (and in the process inadvertently letting slip a few spoilers about Season 2 of the Channel 4 drama, *The Handmaid's Tale*). The actual words Atwood used were '**Future Library**', sadly words you don't often see or hear together these days with any sense of optimism.

As Atwood explained, the idea of the 'Future Library' – a concept launched by Scottish artist **Katie Paterson** in 2014 – is that each year, a different writer contributes one piece that will remain unread and unseen until 2114. Only then will the accumulated works be finally made public, printed on paper supplied by a forest in **Norway** that has been planted specifically for the project.

Atwood, we learnt, sent in the first manuscript in 2014. In an essay now available on the project website (see below), she writes, '...I am sending a manuscript into time. Will any human beings be waiting there to receive it? Will there be a 'Norway'? Will there be a 'forest'? Will there be a 'library'? It's hopeful to believe that all of these elements – despite climate change, rising sea levels, forest insect infestations, global pandemics, and all of the other threats, real or not, that trouble our minds today – will still exist.'

Author **David Mitchell** added a second piece in 2015, followed by **Sjon**, an Icelandic author, in 2016, and **Elif Shafak**, a British-based Turkish writer, in 2017.

I don't know about you, but I am incredibly excited about this, yet at the same time have so many questions. What will readers in the future find interesting? Will they be able to relate to what is written? Will our world as we know it still exist? Can we trust future generations to see this project through? Not to mention the technical challenge. As David Mitchell writes, 'We have to trust that "digital archeologists" will manage to get inside ancient USB sticks!'

Atwood's words at the Palladium have got me thinking about our library too. Will West Hampstead Library still exist when the Future Library opens in 2114? What form will it take and what purpose will it serve?

Of course we can't know for sure, but we can certainly shape that future, not least by campaigning to make sure the library stays open for the current generation, whilst educating and preparing our children to take on the role of guardians of inquiry and trust, so that they will pass the torch on to their great-great-grandchildren, the very ones who will be there, queuing politely and expectantly, at the opening of the Future Library.

I hope so anyway.

In the meantime, I can't wait to find out who the selected author is for 2018!

And if, like me, you're unlikely to be around in 2114 to read the new material by Atwood, Mitchell, Sjon, or Shafak, there is plenty of their 'old' material available via West Hampstead Library to keep us all enthralled until then.

To read more about the Future Library, visit: www.futurelibrary.no



In a forest outside Oslo, artist and project founder Katie Paterson plants trees for the Future Library (above), joined by Margaret Atwood



July 27 2018

Over Here! – the Americans of West Hampstead

The UK and USA. Are we two nations 'divided by a common language' or, as **Winston Churchill** put in a speech at Harvard University in 1963, are we united by the shared, priceless 'gift of a common tongue'?

What exactly is the difference between cricket and baseball? And has it become harder to be an American in West Hampstead since the election of you know who?

These were just some of the questions discussed on the **Fourth of July** by three longstanding American West Hampstead residents as an expectant library audience cheerfully tucked into Chicago-style hot dogs, popcorn, Budweiser and Coke.

Will Lashley, **Alice Leader** and **Naomi Shragai** – each 'Over Here' since moving to NW6 at various times since the 1980s – had mixed views about their adopted home. Will confessed that his initial expectations of England, based on **Alec Guinness** comedies, did not exactly match reality, while the main lament from the panellists seemed to be the Brits' legendary stiff upper lip. 'No one seems to say what they're really thinking over here', quipped Naomi, as the other panelists nodded.

There was also widespread amusement as **Jody Graham**, a Chicagoan and longtime NW6 resident, highlighted some of the words that had given her the most trouble. 'Sweaters are jumpers, pants are trousers, men's underpants are pants, women's are knickers. French fries are chips, chips are crisps, cookies are biscuits. Rubbers are erasers, closets are cupboards. Mail is the post, band aids are plasters, private school is public school and public school is private school.'

Jody's most embarrassing moment, she recalled, was being at a dinner at Mansion House and discovering that a 'fanny pack' is a 'bum bag'.

Sport was no laughing matter, however. As **World Cup fever** gripped the UK, loyalties were seriously tested. Naomi confessed that she had just watched an entire soccer match by herself, out of her free will, for the very first time. (On a personal note, I am now ok with using the word 'soccer', having heard from the evening's chair, **Simon Inglis**, that the word was originally a slang term from Harrow School, short for Association Football.)

Last year's Writer In Residence, **Ted Booth**, stirred us all with a reading from **AG Macdonell's** 'England, Their England'. Published in 1933, the book describes an American journalist, the splendidly named Shakespeare Pollock, playing in a village cricket match.

'An intensely active, alert, on-the-spot young man, Mr Pollock had been roped in at the last moment to make up the eleven, and Mr. Hodge and Mr. Harcourt had spent quite a lot of time on the way down trying to teach him the fundamental principles of the game.' Eventually, 'Mr. Pollock stepped up to the wicket in the lively manner of his native mustang, refused to take guard, on the ground that he wouldn't know what to do with it when he had got it, and, striking the first ball he received towards square leg, threw down his bat, and himself set off at a great rate in the direction of cover-point. There was a paralysed silence. The rustics on the bench rubbed their eyes. On the field no one moved. Mr. Pollock stopped suddenly, looked round, and broke into a genial laugh. "Darn me," he began, and then pulled himself up and went on in refined English, "Well, well! I thought I was playing baseball." He smiled disarmingly round.

"Baseball is a kind of rounders, isn't it, sir?" said cover-point sympathetically."

To which Will responded with sympathy, 'You lost me at "cricket"!'



Will Lashley (above right) dislikes the nanny state, but loves the NHS, while **Alice Leader** (above left) reminded us all of the promises behind the Declaration of Independence. Meanwhile the writer and psychotherapist, **Naomi Shragai** (below) still wished that the English were more forthcoming.



There was a further discussion about a previous American resident of NW6, the notorious **Gutzon Borglum**, the sculptor who went on to carve the heads of four presidents on **Mount Rushmore** but who was also a member of the **Klu Klux Klan**.

To end the evening, each of the panellists recommended a book with an American theme. Alice started off, aptly, with the '*Declaration of Independence*' and the Constitution. Will suggested *The Big Rock Candy Mountain* by **Wallace Stegner** (1943), which evokes the boundless aspiration of Americans, while Naomi recommended **Philip Roth's American Trilogy**.

Simon's recommendation was *That's the Way It Crumbles: The American Conquest of English*, **Matthew Engel's** call to arms against the American influence on British-isms.

Simon concluded with two quotes. **Gore Vidal** said that Britain couldn't be called a country. It was more like an American aircraft carrier, while **Earle Hitchner** said 'The difference between America and England is that Americans think 100 years is a long time, while the English think 100 miles is a long way.'

As for me, what I noticed most was that not one of the Americans in the room mentioned the weather, not even once.

August 30 2018

My Year in Residence

August is the time for holidays, ice creams and making the most of glorious weather. For me it is also the perfect opportunity to take a step back and reflect on my past year as FoWHL's **Writer in Residence** – a role that has given me the perfect opportunity to get to know West Hampstead Library, and its neighbours, past and present.

In December I familiarized myself with **Christina Rossetti** and **Stella Gibbons**, 19th and 20th century London-born poets and authors. In February a local millennial book club introduced me to the works of **Zadie Smith**, born and raised in NW. In November singer-songwriter and NW6 resident **Graham Gouldman**, discussed his life and music, while more recently **Caitlin Davies** talked about her book, *Bad Girls: a History of Rebels and Renegades*, a captivating insight into the stories of Holloway Prison's inmates over the course of the prison's 164-year history.

Like NW itself, West Hampstead Library certainly embraces a wide variety of subjects and events.

Libraries, as I have seen, not just in West Hampstead but through my various travels, are not just relics of the past.

Philadelphia Airport has a free, virtual library that gives anyone access to ebooks and author podcasts. **Tel Aviv's beach library** is growing, and this year, **Nashville's public library** was home to the outstanding *Violins of Hope* exhibit, telling the stories of violins that survived the Holocaust. Libraries can also save lives, as seen in TedMed's moving talk about one woman's journey to transform her local library into a tool to help fight the opioid crisis in the United States.

One thing is for sure. Libraries and books have a bright future. In June I described how **Margaret Atwood** has contributed a piece to the **Future Library** – a library that will open only in 2114 and is being grown in a Norwegian forest. If that is not an expression of optimism, I don't know what is!

Closer to home, the Libby app I discovered, now allows library members to download ebooks and audiobooks and listen on the go. I am also delighted that **Victoria Selman**, a long-time NW resident whom I had the pleasure of meeting, will be publishing her debut thriller novels early next year.



So, **Friends of West Hampstead Library**, I urge you to keep exploring and attending events. A library allows you to quietly curate your own learning in an increasingly noisy world, and as my own discoveries this year have shown, the possibilities are endless.

As for me, I am now heading **Over There!** (as FoEWHL's July 4 event was titled), to study for a Master's degree at **Yale University**, where the libraries will no doubt become my second home. I have loved being your WiREs and wish my successor all the best. **West Hampstead** will always have a special place in my heart, and for sure will always be represented, somewhere, on my bookshelves.

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