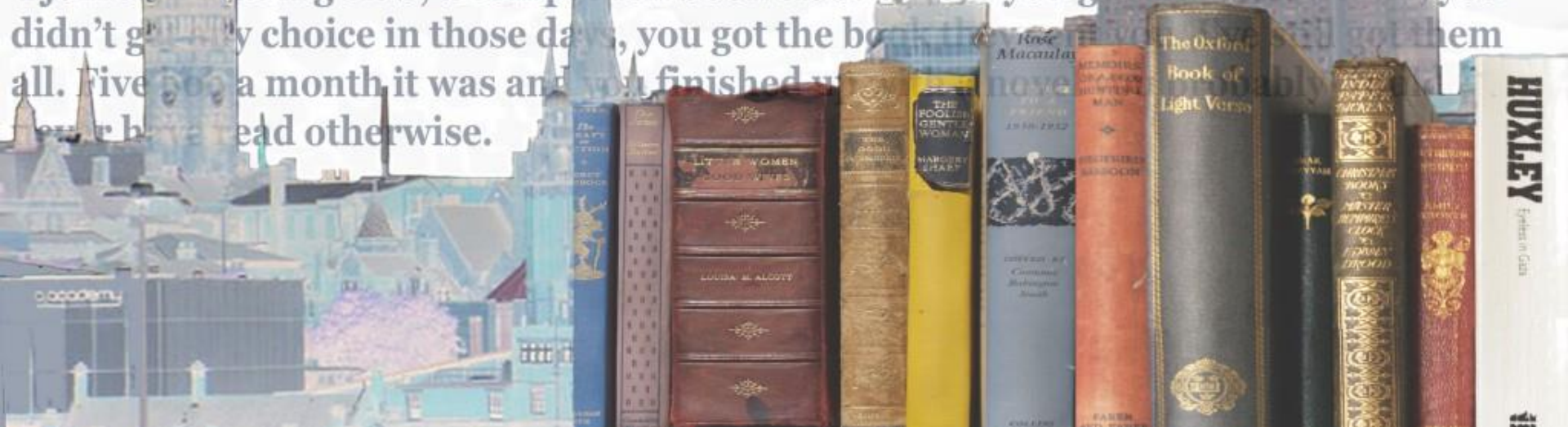


It's hard to imagine what it would have been like without books. So there is that aspect of reading. And I think there's the confidence that reading gives you actually. I think my life would have been less rich without reading. When I was about fifteen or sixteen I joined a reading club, a companion book club. Where you got a book a month, you didn't get a choice in those days, you got the book and you got them all. Five books a month it was and you finished with them. You never had to read otherwise.



‘Quite honest...and most carefully done’

A survey of children’s reading in Sheffield (1937-38)

www.readingsheffield.co.uk

Sheffield Libraries in the 1930s



Sheffield Libraries in the 1930s

Firth Park



Hillsborough



Highfield



Walkley

Junior libraries in 1937-38

The organisation and service of these libraries have as their aim the enrichment of the imagination of child readers, and every effort is made to create a sense of wonder...

- 6 specially designed junior libraries
- Junior sections in 5 more branches & 3 delivery stations
- 629,608 books issued, up 23,244 on 1936-37
- 25,715 junior borrowers (98,258 total – 19% pop)

Junior library activities

- Teachers' & parents' library
- 1,194 children trained in library use
- School libraries: 80,350 books issued, up 12,012. 96 boxes in 50 schools
- 363 story hours to 9,524 children
- 23 lectures to 2,623 children
- Plays and readings
- Magazines edited by children

A Survey of Children's Reading, 1937-38

- Looking beyond everyday stats to test assumptions
- 'Representative cross-section of library book use', based on consecutive issues over 10 days
- Librarians recording details of child and book; reasons for choosing; and reactions on returning
- Totals: 2,730 forms (500 from Central Library and 250 from each of 9 branches). Ages: 7 to 16

Breakdown

2,730	Fiction	Girls	67 book types e.g. air stories, school stories, fairy stories	Pre / post - WWI	Age
		Boys			
	Non-fiction	Girls	26 book types e.g. history, things to do, machinery, famous people	N/A	
		Boys			

Analysis

- Age (7 to 16):
 - Majority of readers, in both sexes, aged 10-12: 54% (582) boys and 53% (890) girls
 - Peak age was 10 years: 21% boys and 18% girls
 - Interest of girls declined more slowly than boys
- Gender:
 - More girls (1,644 – 60%) than boys (1,086 – 40%) at all ages

Analysis: Non-fiction

- Girls (332 books):
 - Poetry (90)
 - Plays (38)
 - Folklore (22)
 - History (20)
- 20 poetry and 15 plays borrowed by boys
- Imaginative non-fiction has 30% greater appeal among girls than boys
- Boys (430 books):
 - Machinery/engineering (72)
 - History (43)
 - Things to do (39)
 - Science (37)
 - Famous people (34)
 - Animals (30)
- ‘Girls...naturally less interested...’ - history (20), science (11), machinery (7)

Analysis

- Fiction or non-fiction?
 - Fiction more popular : 1,968 (72%) to 762 (28%)
 - Fiction more popular with girls than boys:
 - Boys: 430 non-fic / 656 fiction (35% / 65%)
 - Girls: 332 non-fic / 1,312 fiction (20% / 80%)
 - But 7 & 8 yr-olds prefer non-fiction
- Pre or post-war fiction?
 - Post-war is more popular but less than expected
 - Boys: pre – 166 vs post 490 (25% vs 75%)
 - Girls: pre – 234 vs post 1,078 (18% vs 82%)

Analysis: Fiction

- Boys - 656 books
 - Most popular:
 - Air (96)
 - Adventure (83)
 - School (81)
 - Sea (71)
 - Least popular:
 - Fables/allegories (0)
 - Science/invention (1)
 - Waifs (1)
 - Scouts (1)
- Girls - 1,312 books
 - Most popular:
 - School (454)
 - Fairies (286)
 - ‘Domestic tales’ (137)
 - Least popular:
 - Fables/allegories (0)
 - Child life studies (1)
 - Talking animals (1)
 - War (4)
 - Waifs (4)

Popular fiction titles/authors

- Hans Christian Andersen
 - Grimm
 - Aesop
 - Robinson Crusoe
 - Alice in Wonderland
 - Treasure Island
 - 16% of books read by boys and girls defined as children's classics
 - Others:
 - Angela Brazil
 - Pooh
 - Westerman*
 - Little Women
 - Milly-Molly-Mandy
 - Dimsie*
 - Wind in the Willows
 - Oliver Twist
- * = various titles

Reasons for choosing

- Not much faith in reasons.
- Children prefer to make own choices.
- Vast majority of children choose books because they like the author or subject (68%)
- Physical attraction of book (15%), especially among boys
- Other reasons: knowledge of subject from school, recommendations (parents/teachers /other children), library display, films/radio

Reviews

- 79% books finished; 21% not finished
- Not much faith in reviews. Many children unable or unwilling to give reactions
- Not much purposive reading
- Typical reasons: dull, not interesting, too hard, too old/ young, no time to read or no particular impression made
- Small print, use of 1st person

What Do Boys and Girls Read?

A J Jenkinson (1940)

- c. 3,000 children (1,570 boys, 1,330 girls) aged 12 to 15+ from secondary/senior schools
- Girls read more than boys at all ages.
- Girls read more: school stories, love stories, humour, essays, 'adult' books, children's columns, poetry & plays.
- Girls read fewer: crime, adventure, technical, bloods (except for the 'erotic'), hobby magazines, sport, newspapers.

Looking back

- A tale very much of its time
- Sheffield survey well-received
- But always 'experimental' and with shortcomings ('quite honest...and most carefully done')
- Revealing - no surprise - 1930s attitudes, e.g. 'domestically-minded girls'
- Comparisons difficult