

Annual Report for Reading Sheffield 22nd April 2015

Reading Sheffield was formed in 2010 to gather oral histories which would help us understand how the reading habit was shaped and formed in Sheffield in the mid-twentieth century. By the beginning of 2014 we had completed 62 interviews with Sheffield readers who came to adulthood in the 1930s and 1940s. We have transcribed all but six of the audio records. The audio records were placed in Sheffield Archives in the spring of 2014.

Sheffield Reading in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

In the last year we have extended our enquiries. In January of this year Sue Roe and Loveday Herridge presented linked papers on Sheffield's first libraries and literary societies at an AHRC Research funded Network event, Libraries in the Community. Their expenses were funded by the AHRC. They have been invited to submit their papers for possible publication in the book prompted by the conference.

Flying off the Page: Children's Reading in Contemporary Sheffield



During 2014, thanks to generous funding from Sheffield Town Trust, we were able to explore and celebrate contemporary children's responses to reading. We held workshops in Weston Park Museum, Netherthorpe School, Stradbroke School and the Central Library. Jean Compton, a community artist, helped 30 Netherthorpe children create three-dimensional aerial sculptures celebrating favourite moments from favourite books. She also ran three drop-in workshops in Weston Park Museum to create Sheffield's first Story-telling Cloak made up of images created by a huge range of Sheffield readers across

generations. This sculpture was exhibited in the Winter Gardens during the week that the Christmas lights were turned on.

Ray Hearne, local poet and folk singer, ran two workshops with 60 Stradbroke children with whom he jointly composed the lyrics of the Ballad of the Spooky Books which you will find in Appendix A.

The sculptures and the ballad featured at the Reading Sheffield annual celebratory event held in October 2014 as part of the Off the Shelf Festival. During this celebration local poet Eleanor Brown ran a Word-Hoard Workshop with 90 participants drawn from our schools and Museum projects. The Carpenter Room was transformed by the sculptures and Jean helped us make more on the day.

Reading Sheffield Website

In 2015 we have returned to the reading histories which we first collected. Our future projects centre on making these available to as wide a public as possible and exploring their significance. We are setting up a website which will gradually unfold the story of reading in Sheffield from 1930 to 1960. Mary will introduce each of the 62 readers in turn, each reader being the focus of a short reflection on a general feature of Sheffield reading at this period.

A key feature of our website will be the creative responses of Sheffield artist, Lizz Tuckerman and poet Eleanor Brown. Both Lizz and Eleanor have won national awards for their work. Both have been inspired by the voices of our Sheffield readers to create new works of their own which will be shared gradually as the website develops. Lizz will design the website. In the year to come she and Mary will gradually upload the wealth of material that we already have and the imaginative responses being created.

To fund both artist and poet we are seeking sponsors from groups and individuals in Sheffield who value Sheffield reading cultures and are interested in the history of our city. Having launched our appeal at the end of March, we now have just over £1000 pledged.

Costs of Reading Sheffield Website

The website and integral artworks have been costed at £6,166: £1,366 for the setting up and design of the site; £1,800 for twelve artworks which will be framed to be exhibited independently from the website as well as being an integral part of the website itself; £3,000 for commissioning 60 poems by Eleanor Brown, each poem costing £50.

Invitations to sponsor website and associated creative responses

We have sent out 40 invitation cards, on watercolour paper, illustrating one of Lizz's artworks in response to a Reading Sheffield interview. We have also sent out 60 emails incorporating the image. In our invitation to sponsor we have included the offer of one of our three researchers or Eleanor Brown making a presentation

to any group that is able to sponsor us. We have had four acceptances of this offer so far.

The Book

In conclusion I am starting work on a book about reading in mid-twentieth century Sheffield. I will be helped enormously in this project by access to scholarly journals following my appointment as Visiting Research Fellow at Sheffield Hallam for three years. I am most grateful to Professor Chris Hopkins for supporting this application and for the generous support Sheffield Hallam has made in all sorts of ways, not least in letting us use its facilities for our AGM this year. Members of the Sheffield Hallam Reading Groups exploring the popular fiction active at the university have already helped me in bringing their knowledge of fiction to bear on readings of our transcripts. As always, Reading Sheffield is a collaborative set of projects and we have all gained immensely from the links between our various interests and our shared curiosity and our love of the culture of this city.

Mary Grover
Chair of Reading Sheffield
12.4.15

Appendix A: The Ballad of the Spooky Books

feel particularly lucky when they tuck
Me up, my nose stuck in a book...

CHORUS: Spooky books are great books, rattling with bats
Ravens croaking and creepy-crawly cats
A dragon in a dungeon or in a mucky nook
Some crooked looking witches duck, and I'm on tenterhooks

The 'Journal of a Zombie,' that was very good
As ugly as an ogre, he had to wear a hood
And the story of a goblin, glimmery and green
Who turned a king into a kidney bean one Halloween

I love the paranormal, the freaky and the weird
A wizard with a pointy hat and beetles in his beard
A goodie or a baddie, I'm very rarely fussed
As long as there's some blood and guts, that truly is a must

A greedy little vampire, starving underneath
A gloomy doomy bell-tower sharpened up her teeth
She couldn't wait for midnight, then on the very stroke
Of eight o'clock, she brushed and flossed, and buttoned up her cloak

A dapper little biter, proper claws and fangs
There's lots of them in Stradbroke, they hang about in gangs
Someone's got to fight 'em, but where we gonna start?
We'll have to google 'how to stick a stake in someone's heart'

Teachers can be monsters too, we know for sure
Particularly werewolves, there isn't any cure
A silver bullet sometimes fettle 'em they say
If anybody's got one, we could do with it today

Every house should have one, a boggart or a ghoul
Poltergeists are far more noisy as a rule
In your laundry basket or underneath the sink
Panicking your manikins and kicking up a stink

A cellar full of trolls I could never recommend
Though I've only read the version I borrowed from a friend
They guzzle up gazpacho, gulp your guacamole
And leave their smelly socks to ripen in the cubby hole

A cackling in the dark night, a slither and a hiss
A corridor of mirrors to a bottomless abyss
They're menacing behind me, all slimy up ahead
Malodorously vivid - it's the best I've ever read!