

Reading Sheffield Annual Report 2016

The Reading Sheffield Website Launched

Our website, www.readingsheffield.co.uk, was launched at the Quaker Meeting House during the Off the Shelf Festival 2015. The launch was attended by 50 people drawn from many different groups: interviewees, interviewers, transcribers and people curious to find out what we were doing.

Lizz and Den Tuckerman explained how they had set up the website. Lizz has established the website and designed it. Den has uploaded the audio records of our interviews, editing out anything which interviewees would rather was omitted. We have been able to pay Lizz and Den by donations from Aviva Community Fund, Sheffield Town Trust and the Humanities Arts Centre of Sheffield Hallam University. This money also enables Lizz to visit our interviewees with members of the Reading Sheffield team to collect images of books and of the interviewees when they were first setting out on their adult reading journeys. We have made nearly twenty such visits in the last year and collected more images by post and email. This process is continuing.

Eleanor Brown read us a selection of the poems she is writing in response to the audio records of our interviewees.

Val Hewson explained what she would do as editor of the website and initiated a discussion about the shape the site could take.

Off the Shelf awarded us £100 to hold the launch event. We are hugely grateful to all our funders.

The website in action

The website includes: the blog; interview transcripts and audio (aka Readers' Voices); events; research; sponsors; artists; poetry; and background.

Val Hewson oversees content, with welcome technical support from Lizz. All the original interviews have been transcribed, edited and posted, thanks to sterling work from Mary, and audio files added where agreed. Val, Mary Grover and Thecla Wilkinson have all been contributing 'Reading Journeys' for the blog (interpretative pieces based on the interviews). Almost half of the interviews (26) have been covered to date, and we plan to do them all. Val is also researching and posting pieces about the context of reading in 20th century Sheffield (e.g. the public library service, popular books/authors) (about 12 done to date) and other colleagues are drafting or planning pieces.

If anyone would like to write a Reading Journey or a blog, please get in touch with Val (email below). Suggestions for developing the site and comments are always welcome (E: Val.Hewson174@gmail.com or E: Mkg0401@aol.com).

Mary and Val have also used Twitter (@readsheffield) to promote Reading Sheffield although awareness remains low. Mary has circulated information to various academic networks: Society for History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (SHARP), The Space Between (which explores history, art and writing between the two world wars) The Middlebrow Research Network, Sheffield University's oral history network, the University of London's Memories of Fiction project and SAPHIRE (the Scottish reading project). These networks have brought the website to the attention of those on their mailing list.

Art work

Lizz Tuckerman is working on 12 freestanding artworks in response to the images we have collected and the transcripts. We have been able to raise money for four of these from sponsorship and funds from the Humanities Research Group at Sheffield Hallam University.

Eleanor Brown's poems

Creatively adapted from the sixty reading histories gathered from readers now over 70 by Reading Sheffield, Eleanor's monologues reflect and celebrate the wide variety of ways in which readers found the books they read and developed their tastes. These highly personal accounts brilliantly reflect the individuality of the voices communicating what they looked for and found in books throughout their reading lives.

We have funded 24 of Eleanor's poems so far, having raised the money through sponsorship, by giving talks and through a donation from the Humanities Research Group at Sheffield Hallam University. Eleanor read a few of her poems at our last AGM and more at our website launch. They are posted on the website.

The Memories of Library Workers

Over the last few years we have gradually been collecting the memories of any library workers who have come forward to discuss their experiences with us. We are particularly grateful to Red Hat, the retired library workers' association which has helped us identify people who would like to share their experiences with us. Val is finding these memories invaluable as she continues her research into Sheffield library history.

Reading in 18th and 19th Century Sheffield

After the Community Libraries Colloquium of January 2015, at which Sue Roe and Loveday Herridge gave papers on the Sheffield subscription library and on the Sheffield Book Society and Sheffield Book Club, we responded to a request for papers for a volume based on the 3 colloquia. We are almost at the point of final submission of our work for a chapter for the book. Mark Towsey and Kyle Roberts, joint editors, have submitted a proposal to Massachusetts University Press. We are currently involved in a Peer Review - where all the contributors are invited to read and comment on each others' work - a new experience for Sue and Loveday. After that is completed, the chapters will go to external reviewers. It has been quite an enlightening and taxing experience!

Talks in the community

Mary Grover, Loveday Herridge, Val Hewson and Sue Roe are always available to give talks on various aspects of Reading Sheffield's work. In the last year we have given seven talks: three to branches of the Towns Women's Guild [MG], one to a Family History Group [LH], one to an elderly people's lunch club [MG], one in the Central Library [LH and SR], and one to the Victorian Society [LH and SR].

Most of these talks have attracted a donation. We would welcome more invitations.

Participation in academic conferences

Sheffield Hallam University: 'The Auden Generation and After. 17 June 2016

Everyday Reading and the New: Sheffield literary tastes in the 1930-1950 (MG)

'Even Edgar Wallace may be discovered...': The fiction policy of an English public library in the 1930s (VH)

The Oral History Society annual conference Roehampton University 9 and 19th July 2016

Who would have thought it? The Reading Sheffield project and its relation to the nature of its funding (MG)

Coming late to the Reading Sheffield party (VH)

Eleanor Brown reading her poems and talking about the connection between their form and their genesis in the spoken word.

Current Funding bids

Mary and Loveday have submitted a bid for £1000 to the Lady Neville Charity of the Skinners' Company to fund more of Eleanor's poems.

The Book

Val Hewson and Mary Grover are writing a book about reading in Sheffield 1920-1960, provisionally called *All the Books of Their Lives*. We think at this (early) stage that the book will be academic in tone, but of interest to the general reader. It will focus on our interviewees, but through them examine, for example, why people in 20th century Sheffield read, how they became readers and where they got their reading material from. The Reading Journeys and blog posts are research and preparation for the book.

Off the Shelf 2016

Sue Roe has researched possible venues for a poetry reading by Eleanor for the 2016 Off the Shelf Festival. There is now a limited number of community grants for which we will have to compete. We hope to hold the event in Fusion Café which is central, reasonably priced and a pleasant environment. Date to be announced.

Conclusions

We have been surprised and very pleased to see how our project has developed this year. It has been a period in which we analyse and share in various ways the riches of the memories that we have collected. The chief omission we are conscious of is that, as an organisation, we have not supported the campaign to support the city's libraries, to which our interviewees owed so much. If anyone would like to take a lead in this please contact us.

Thank you very much to everyone who has made the growth and development of our project possible. As always, the range of different resources in the team and the collaborative way in which we have worked together has made this possible.

Mary Grover (Chair)
Sue Roe (Secretary)
Loveday Herridge (Treasurer)

12 April 2016