

Reading Sheffield Annual Review 2018

Introduction

Reading Sheffield was founded in 2011 to explore the part that reading has played in the cultural life of Sheffield. During the last year our Sheffield readers have inspired creative work that will help their stories be more widely known.

Thanks to the sponsorship of Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield Town Trust, Off The Shelf Sheffield 2017, individual sponsors and the fees generated by talks given by our team, we have been able to commission two works of exceptional quality by an artist and poet whose generous and imaginative involvement with every aspect of our project reveal the riches of the stories we have collected.

2017 In Praise of Libraries

Fine artist Lizz Tuckerman created this multi-media installation in collaboration with Reading Sheffield. The exhibition was based on the recorded reading experiences of Sheffielders who grew up during the 1930s, 40s and 50s and took place at Bank Street Arts from 6th to 21st October 2017 as part of Off the Shelf Festival of Words Sheffield 2017.

During the exhibition we collected reading journeys from visitors which will form the basis of new work. We hosted four events:

- **A special viewing** for the many people who have supported our projects throughout the last seven years.
- **A vintage tea-party** for our interviewees. Homemade cakes supplied by the Reading Sheffield team were consumed while Mary gave a talk illustrating the value we all attach to the interviewees' contributions.
- **An artist's talk** for the public. Lizz described her collaboration with Reading Sheffield, especially the pleasure she found in meeting the interviewees, the fascination of family photographs and the criteria she used when editing the voice recordings that form the core of the exhibition. To put the work in context she gave an account of her own artistic and reading experiences and a brief graphic history of book covers.

- **A visit from the Lord Mayor Councillor Anne Murphy.** This turned into a great closing event, an offer of a book launch in the Lord Mayor's Parlour and future work with Sheffield Institute for the Blind.

White Ink Stains

This year Bloodaxe Books is going to publish Eleanor Brown's second collection of poetry, working title *White Ink Stains*. Eleanor listened to the audio recordings of the Reading Sheffield interviews, and the core of this collection is formed of poems heard, found and made from the interviewees' accounts of their reading lives. The White Ink of the title refers in particular to the invisible, often unacknowledged, work of women introducing infants and young children to language and literacy. We hope to be able to celebrate Eleanor's book at this year's Off the Shelf literary festival.

***Before the Public Library: Reading, Community, and Identity in the Atlantic World, 1650-1850* edited by Mark Towsey and Kyle B. Roberts (Brill: 2017)**

Loveday Herridge and Sue Roe's study, 'Reading Sheffield: Sheffield Libraries and Book Clubs, 1771-1850' was published in *Before the Public Library* which explores the emergence of community-based lending libraries in the Atlantic World before the advent of the Public Library movement in the mid-nineteenth century. Sue and Loveday's chapter offers a remarkable insight into the ways in which libraries became the locus for the formation of different social groups in the rapidly growing northern industrial city of Sheffield in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Based on their archival research of the ledgers of Sheffield book societies, Loveday and Sue present a comparative study of four different library societies, looking at how questions of class, religion and gender shaped the composition of each library community, as well as their collecting tastes and policies, civic engagement and organisational forms. At a time when public libraries throughout the country are under threat, this examination of the roots of reading and book-borrowing in Sheffield illuminates the debate about how we decide who has access to books, what they should read, and how the 'public' should be defined.

We were delighted that Lord Mayor invited us to her Parlour on March 26th to celebrate the launch of this book. The backdrop to this event was an extensive exhibition of images and texts of the archives analysed by Sue and Loveday. Lizz Tuckerman and Jean Compton designed and mounted the scanned images and they were thoroughly explored by our guests. We were particularly grateful for the attendance of Dr Mark Towsey, Reader in Modern History at the University of Liverpool and co-editor of *Before the Public Library*, David Price, author of *Sheffield Radicals* and Clyde Binfield, author of many works on the history of Sheffield. Their participation in the debate following Sue's summary of the work that she and Loveday have done, contributed to a rewarding discussion.

The Reading Sheffield website: readingsheffield.co.uk

On this website, created by Lizz and Dennis Tuckerman, you will find all the 59 audio files with their transcripts. Over the last two years the website editor, Val Hewson, has developed the website, increasing the number and variety of blogposts, many derived from her own archival research on the history of Sheffield libraries. Val has also launched Facebook and Twitter accounts. We are delighted that Val is going to share some of her research at the Annual General Meeting.

Talks to community groups

In the last year Val and Mary have given numerous talks in the community to library groups, three separate branches of Townswomen's Guilds and the Parkinson Society.

Future interviews Sue Roe and Mary Grover continue to collect reading memories from those who grew up in Sheffield.

Running Down Eyre Street: The Story of Reading Sheffield

During the last year Mary and Val have been working on the book about our project and exploring the historical contexts of our readers' experiences.

Thank you to all of you who have supported our projects in such different ways. We are delighted that the nature of our engagement with Sheffield readers keeps changing in

response to the gifts that you bring to the team. We are hugely grateful to Sheffield Hallam Humanities Research Group for their continuing support without which many of our projects would not be sustainable.

Mary Grover
27 March 2018
Chair of Reading Sheffield