

Up!

ISSUE 8 MAY 2021

Books & Reading
Edition

Accentuating the Positive

Making the world a
better place -
one page at a time



Photo @Ruben

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Photograph by Pixabay

Up Front!

A very warm welcome to the latest edition of 'Up!' - the home of Hope. This month we've got words coming out of our ... erm ... pages! With a focus on Books & Reading, there are interviews with a globe-trotting writer and a bookshop owner, we've got book-themed features from our usual in-house writers, a piece on why we love libraries, a dog's eye view of a mad bicycling trip (you'll have to read it!), plus the best poems from you, our readers!



Now you may be wondering why Up! is proudly displaying the National Lottery Community Fund logo on our pages. Well, we've had a bit of lovely news as it happens ... oh no, we've run out of space! You'll just have to read the magazine all the way to the back page to find out.

Happy reading!

Bridget & Harry x

Writing Up!

PETER MORTIMER

Up! talks to an extraordinary writer and publisher about his work and his travels

Hi Peter, it's great to see a light at the end of the Corona tunnel now. How has the last year or so been for you?

As with everyone, it's been strange. Suddenly all my theatre activity was gone and a new play I had due on was postponed. No running theatre workshops, no reviewing theatre, no seeing it live. Plus the IRON Press book list was thrown into disarray and had to be rejigged. I realised the world was changing in such odd ways and wanted to reflect that somehow in diary form. Thus I began my daily column in The Newcastle Journal, *Planet Corona*, a sideways look at the pandemic. I wrote this six days a week before falling over after 75 columns and it then went twice a week but longer. It is now once a week but longer still (on Saturdays) and called *Beyond Planet Corona*. After The Journal, it goes on my Facebook page. *Planet Corona - The First One Hundred Columns* was published earlier this year by IRON Press, though no contact thus far from the Nobel Prize committee!

Looking back, what made a working-class lad from a Nottinghamshire mining town decide he wanted a different life away from what some people might see as a 'normal' 9 to 5 existence?

Like many things in life, it's not a sudden conscious decision but a gradual evolution. I grew up on Sherwood Council Estate in a family with absolutely no history of anyone having been involved workwise in cultural or artistic activities. Almost all my mates on the estate went to the local secondary modern.

My elder brother and I went to the local grammar



school which was unusual. We both did A Levels and I looked enviously at my mates who were out getting a proper wage as plumbers, joiners, electricians or whatever and thereby were much better prospects for young women. I was earning just a few bob doing a Co-op weekend delivery round. I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life, but spent four years in undemanding jobs.

My brother then broke the estate mould and got into Manchester University. When I visited him I was intoxicated (not literally); loads of interesting beautiful young women and guys who knew about things I didn't. I managed to get accepted for Sheffield University, three years which totally changed my life and where my buried instinct for writing finally emerged. It was what I knew I had to pursue from thereon, in whatever form. Like many writers, I first became a journalist, which for the next twelve years I did full-time, but my own work was growing in importance (at least for me!) and in the early 80s I gave up working for the man to concentrate more on my own writing. Journalism has been very important for me

Writing Up!

PETER MORTIMER

though; I love the printed page and seeing my work online gives me nothing like the buzz. I haven't a clue how I have survived financially, but somehow I have.

Here at Up! we're all about people following their passions. We know that your work has taken you all over the place for a wide variety of projects – the Yemen, Palestine, the North Sea, Holy Island to name a few. Give us some standout moments from your travels ...

The six extreme travel books just evolved, maybe from a number of peripatetic series I wrote for The Journal through the 70s and 80s. These saw me travelling the North country on horseback, in a covered wagon, with a dog and a pram, that kind of thing, writing longish daily pieces on the hoof as it were. Looking back, the books were a natural progression; I like the way these books sit somewhere between literature and journalism, responding to a day-to-day reality in early drafts, but later being honed to something with I hope a bit more substance.



My first foray into this area, book-wise, was *The Last of the Hunters* where I spent six months working out at sea with North Shields fishermen, on six different boats. It's an incredibly harsh and dangerous life which often I hated at the time. *Broke Through Britain*, where I walked penniless 541 miles from Plymouth to Edinburgh had a big effect on me and I never now take for granted the easy availability of food, shelter and a warm bed. The month-long experience all but broke me both physically and mentally, but I'm now so glad I didn't give up.



I think I was most scared when preparing for my book, *Camp Shatila*, where I spent two months living in a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon. I was strongly advised against doing this from all sides and felt totally out of my depth for the first few weeks. I stuck at it, managing to both write the book and also create a play with the young people of the camp, which we later brought to tour twice in England and Scotland. This was one of the highlights of my life.

To see those young people (12/13 years old) perform to great acclaim in the magnificence of Sage Gateshead and other venues – and in English – was a heady experience. These youngsters had grown up with the squalor, confinement and abject poverty of the refugee camp. Now look at them! How many professional actors can learn and perform a play in a foreign language? These young people did.

Writing Up!

PETER MORTIMER

Up! recently heard you described as 'a force of nature'. Do you think that 'get up and go' is an essential element for anyone who wants to make their living in the arts by essentially creating their own work?

I think it has to be. Though I know it's often hard, with little security and endless setbacks, I also know I would choose no other way of life. This makes me very lucky. L.S. Lowry put it well when he said 'the difference between artists and non-artists is that the former are only really happy when they are working while the latter are only really happy when they are not.'

We know you're always working towards the next project. So, what's next for Peter Mortimer, anything interesting coming up?

I've been collaborating with the artist Pete Shaw who has created graphic versions of four of my

previously unpublished short stories. We've been working on this for nearly three years. The book should be unusual as it will feature both versions of the stories - written and graphic. In November my play *Fire & Water, the Thomas Brown Story* will finally be produced at The Exchange, North Shields, a year and a half after originally planned.

Brown was the 15-year-old Shields lad whose bravery in helping rescue vital Enigma code documents from a sinking German U-Boat in 1942 helped shorten World War 11 by several months. His story has never been properly told.

It strikes me that the above makes it all sound as if I'm in constant demand. Whereas, along with the vast majority of working artists, the long fallow periods are just as much the norm. But we journey on!

**To find out more about
Peter's work
go to:**

www.ironpress.co.uk



Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow-mindedness

Mark Twain

Not until we are lost do we begin to understand ourselves

Henry David Thoreau

Bizarre travel plans are dancing lessons from God

Kurt Vonnegut

Book Up!

STEVE LOWE

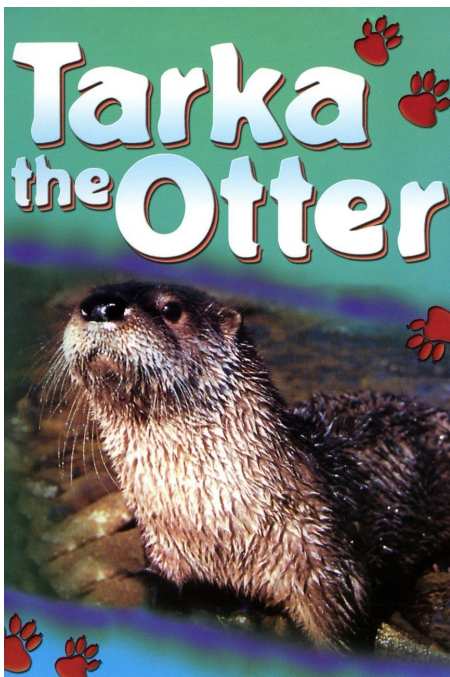
Up!'s outdoor man shares his Desert Island reads

Kes. That word invokes so many memories for me. Brian Glover being Bobby Charlton, the brutality of corporal punishment, the freedom of the sky and the bond between boy and bird. A perfect film based on a sublime book - *A Kestrel For A Knave*. It's one of many pieces of prose that have stayed with me during my entire life.

Books, mostly, that line my shelves, are treasures without which my life would be so much poorer. They invoke fond memories, artful word pictures of places, things or experiences I have shared, imagined or desired. An ever-changing bucket list and a comfort blanket on days of darkness.

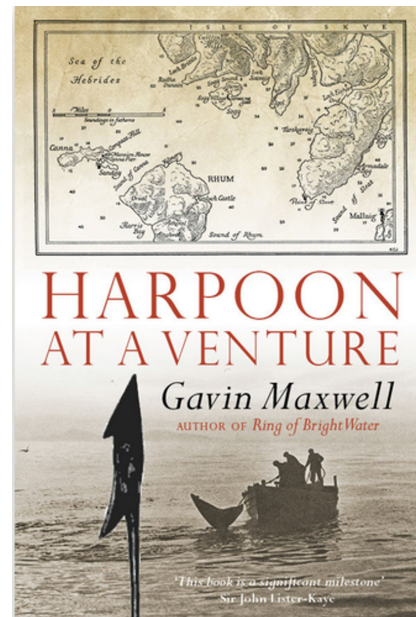
I have often wondered about making a short 'desert island' list, so here goes!

Of all the many splendid tales brilliantly crafted by Henry Williamson, including *Tarka the Otter* and



Salar the Salmon, it is the short story of a small seedling that creates a perfect tale of resilience and the impermanence of mankind. *A Weed's Tale* is one I re-read regularly and find something new every time.

A life hard won from the sea is the central theme of



another favourite, *The Silver Darlings*. Neil Gunn perfectly captures the hardship of communities turning to herring fishing following the Highland Clearances and this is an endearing 'coming of age' book, most lively in the tempestuous waters off Caithness.

If, like me, you think of Captain Birdseye when you think of cod, then read Mark Kurlansky's *Cod - A Biography Of The Fish That Changed The World*, a fantastic account of the fish that launched a thousand ships, and have your eyes opened to the role this 'staple' had on global history. Exploration, war, enslavement, discovery - it does what it says on the tin, in that this is the story of exploitation of the sea and the impact this has upon history and our environment. It's compulsive!

My penultimate book also covers a marine theme and is also a lesser-known work by a well-known writer, Gavin Maxwell. I could have chosen *Ring Of Bright Water*, a compulsive film that anyone wanting to escape the rat-race should watch. Instead, the Scottish islands, coast, sea and all its wildlife are vividly portrayed in *Harpoon At A Venture*, the true story of Maxwell's naïve and ultimately unsuccessful attempt to start a basking shark fishery. It's a romantic read, full of sea chases, adventure and 'derring do', with a good old dose of stiff upper lip for good measure. Marvellous stuff!

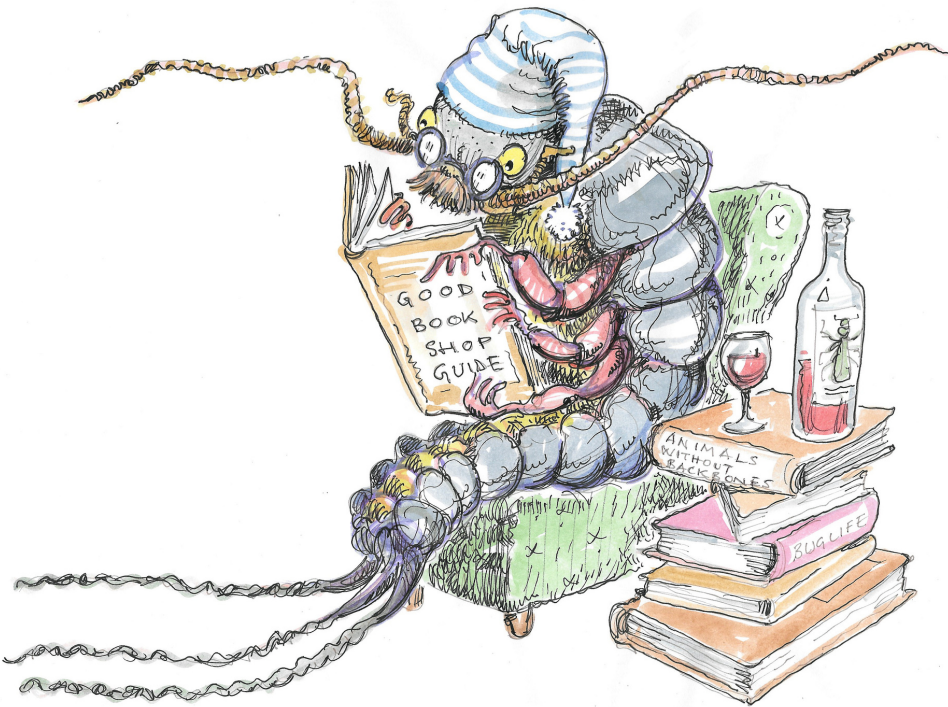
Book Up!

STEVE LOWE

My final read is a bit of a cheat as it's really an omnibus of travel books! But in my defence, John Muir and *The Wilderness Journeys* contains much of the drive and determination and an overall wonder for landscapes and nature that live within my own soul. A native Scot from Dunbar, Muir can rightly be considered a pioneer in protecting and caring for the natural world and wilderness, recognising the spiritual links our natural surroundings provide us. Without him, the UK and USA would not have National Parks.

My list would probably be different in a few weeks. Nature writing is a rich stream, as shown by the marvellous *Diary of a Young Naturalist* from Dara McNulty. Without books like *Wind in the Willows*, films like the aforementioned *Kes*, and even cartoons like Yogi Bear (stealing those picnic baskets in Jellystone Park!) - all based on nature writing in some form - who knows if I would be so invested in the natural world? I feel enriched by all the written genius available - so go explore!

Cartoon Corner



This month's 'toon, from resident artist John Pickin, features the Bookworm ...

At the end of a hard day, Bookworm (aka *Lepisma saccharinum* or the common silverfish) likes to settle down for a good read with a glass of Spanish Fly and a stack of starchy snacks. Bliss ...

John says: "I am and always have been a compulsive doodler. During April '20 I set myself the challenge of drawing an ape-a-day. And in January this year - renamed Buguary - the task was an insect cartoon each day. I just love knocking out those 'toons .."

You can contact John at pickinjohn@gmail.com

Word Up!

POEMS ON THE THEME OF BOOKS AND READING

Adventures in Mobile Librarianship

We packed up the books again but left the furniture and the children by the road with a sign saying *Free to a Good Home*, though we couldn't say what *Home* meant, let alone what made one good or bad. We thought we knew *Free*, though, and hit the road, letting the books make our choices for us, opening them at random and interpreting chance phrases as if they were tabloid horoscopes. When Gaston Phoebus told us that *in the kennel there should be a chimney to warm the hounds*, we headed for the silhouette of a factory that stood like an awkward cut-out on the horizon. When William Bottrell mentioned *monstrous head-pieces*, we turned left by an overweight man in a MAGA cap. When an anonymous Victorian ballad assured us that *The O.K. thing on Sunday is walking in the Zoo*, we stopped by a dog for want of wilder beasts. It was no way to lead a life, but no more reckless than any other, and when we ran out of road and the van broke down, rusted, and fell away from us, we used the books as stepping stones to lead us into the unknown sea. *Spirit and soul leave the old body. Fire makes everything porous and full of holes*. I sometimes wonder about the children, still sitting on a sofa at the side of the road, their tiny feet resting on a low table, reading the weather and each other's aging faces. *Out of debt, out of danger. Once upon a time. Once upon a time. Once upon a time.*

Oz Hardwick

Next month's theme is 'Art'

Send up to 3 poems (no more than 20 lines each) to:
TalkToUp@gmail.com

On Meeting Brian Bilston

I travelled by afternoon train
taking the last bus home
to find you, a Banksy-like poet;
your diary, well worth the roam.

I wondered, would you smoke a pipe
as I journeyed in anticipation.
To carpe DMs and duffle coat,
would I admit adulation?

Meeting you there, in Bookends,
no Morrissey-quiff in view,
I knew you deserved every retweet
and I think it was really you.

Janette Ostle

every book is a friend

books
were the friends
i had when
people were too taxing,
and they took me
to places and adventures
that made me hunger
for more;
until i fell into the pages
and felt deprived when i
spilled out of them
because every book is
a friend i never want to part from.

linda m. crate

Look Up!

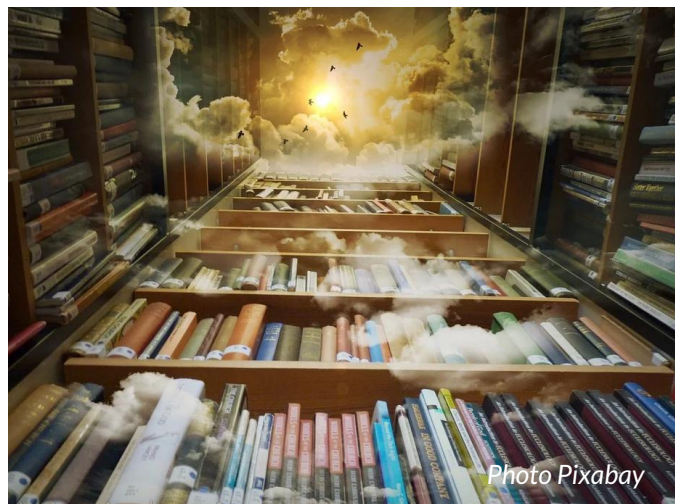
HARRY GALLAGHER

Get lost in a library!

'Libraries gave us power.' So wrote the *Manic Street Preachers*, and who am I to argue? Public libraries are such a British institution, up there with the NHS, the BBC and strawberries every rain-drenched Wimbledon, it feels as if they've been with us forever.

In actual fact Britain saw its first public libraries in the 1850s, thus outstripping those other venerable institutions by some distance. Perhaps that's why libraries are so close to the hearts of every keen reader - and I'll take the liberty of including you in that number dear Up-per, otherwise you wouldn't be reading this!

I remember my first experience of using a library as clearly as if it was yesterday. It was a little branch library some 200 yards (yes, it was that long ago!) from home. The floorboards smelled keenly of floor polish, giving it an old school feel, and in the late afternoons the sun streamed in through the windows, heating the whole building up to the extent that by 4pm the heat was stifling. But none of that mattered to me or my siblings because the place was full to the brim of hidden treasure: books - thousands of them!



I grew up in a traditional working-class environment. Our parents - Dad was a manual worker, while Mum brought us up, with the occasional part-time job squeezed in when time and circumstance allowed - were voracious readers, so the house always seemed to have books lying around. This being the case, it seemed natural that we were often packed off to this little library to explore. First the children's section and then when we got a bit older, to the town's Central Library - a grand, imposing building fully deserving of its capital letters.

I'm sure to many people the mention of libraries invokes that kind of imagery - old, forbidding, almost scary places where a grey-haired, cardiganed lady with glasses hanging on a lace around her neck will tell them off for breathing too loudly. This is such a pity, because the places can be absolutely transformative. More than anything else, what reading and using libraries taught me and my sisters, was that the world around us didn't stop at the end of our street. While our parents couldn't afford flash holidays or foreign travel, we knew about the wider world and about people who were different to us because we'd seen it in books. We'd read about social history and science and the

Look Up!

HARRY GALLAGHER

natural world, not because we were some kind of wunderkinds but because we had access to an extra-curricular education right on our doorstep – and it was free.



Over fifty years on since that first trip to dusty bookshelves, my local library here at Cullercoats – open again as we (*crosses fingers*) exit the pandemic – is one of my favourite places and it's right at the end of my street, just like fifty years ago. The staff (bereft of spectacles on string last I looked) are the most friendly, helpful folk I know and are a mine of knowledge on anything you care to ask about. This being the case I visited last week to see how they are getting along, and also to find out what's on offer these days, apart from traditional books. Are you ready for this?

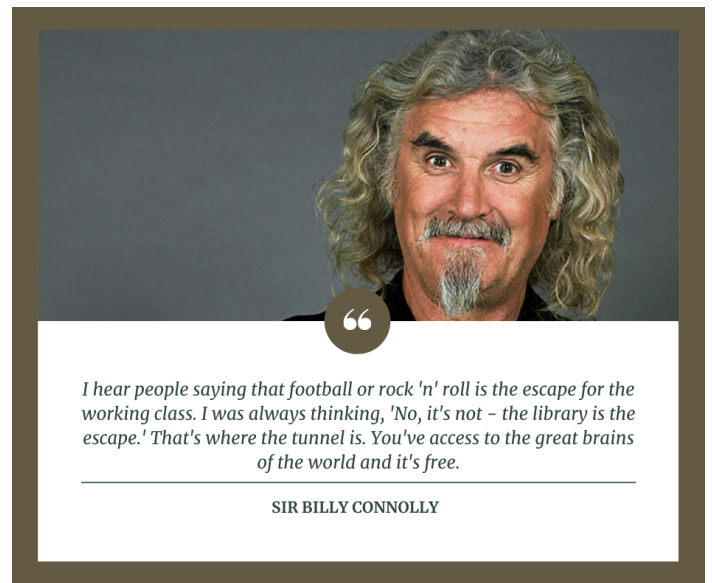
At North Tyneside libraries (and I'm pretty certain in every other library service in the country) you can now learn IT Skills, apply for jobs, access the entire Encyclopaedia Britannica, read hundreds of historical newspapers, trace your ancestry, take part in Mums & Toddlers sessions, borrow CDs and DVDs, learn crafts,

take part in gaming sessions, join reading groups and attend regular live readings by professional writers.

Some of our libraries have even hosted live theatre performances during the day! All this and *Vera* author Ann Cleeves, who lives locally, is sponsoring the employment of a reading coach to bring the joy of reading to people who may be struggling for one reason or another – what a wonderful idea!

And throughout the pandemic, who was there picking out and delivering books direct to the homes of the elderly and disabled? That's right – your friendly local librarian, an unsung frontline hero. Not that they'd have wanted recognition or any kind of fuss, because ... well, they're librarians, after all.

In these straitened times when so much of our social fabric seems to be moving from under our feet, our libraries are a lifeline, and arguably one of the best things about living in the UK. On every shelf is a little key with your name on it. Why not pop along and unlock a few doors?



I hear people saying that football or rock 'n' roll is the escape for the working class. I was always thinking, 'No, it's not – the library is the escape.' That's where the tunnel is. You've access to the great brains of the world and it's free.

SIR BILLY CONNOLLY

Cleaning Up!

A RUBBISH CYCLING ADVENTURE

Up! meets a collie dog on a mission

'Morning Dad ... Dad! Dad ... so what's the plan Dad, Dad?' I yawn in his face and continually pester him for a response. 'Come on, I'm awake now, when do we get going again?' All I hear from him is 'Urgh ... no ... no ... no!' as I begin to wake him up by licking his face.

He checks the time on his phone. 'Ruben, its only 5am! Look, even you're still yawning.'

'I know Dad but ...' I start, before he rolls back over to sleep, 'there's daylight now, look it's a beautiful morning, the sun is shining, not a breath of wind, nothing can stop us today, we're on a mission, remember!'



This has been the morning ritual for the last couple of weeks now, trying to get him out of the sleeping bag and off his comfy inflatable air mat (which I must admit I do sneak on throughout the night). This task is no mean feat, in fact by 7am I've



only just about managed it. Now officially up, awake and raring to go, we both peer outside the leaky and windswept tent that is practically as old in years as

I am in months, only to find that what seemed like a wonderful bright summer's day changes into that feeling of an early spring frost. It clings to every blade of grass that navigates the tent, bicycle and bags, everything that is not in direct contact with the morning sun's rays. There's no need for a weather forecast or temperature gauge; it's April and our breath visibly shows winter desperately grasping on to its end, whilst the spirit of spring begins forcing its way through with stunning blossom trees, crocuses adorning the grass verge and the early chorus of birdsongs as they tweet and chime.

We clamber out of the tent with a crunch underfoot and begin our important morning activities. I make sure the ball is where I left it, have a sniff and a ... er, well ... you know - do the thing that one has to do first thing.

'Hey Dad ...' I yell over.

'Yes Ruben?'

'Over here. I've er, done a er, you know what ... care to come and pick it up?'

'Oh good boy, who's a clever boy then, you've done a poo poo.'

I'm 18 months old now and he still talks to me like I'm 3. Some parents!

You see Dad and I are touring, living in a tent and travelling around on a bicycle. The Snail2, as Dad calls her, is a homemade cargo bike made out of a

Cleaning Up!

A RUBBISH CYCLING ADVENTURE



recycled old girl's mountain bike and a BMX, 'Frankensteined' together as he puts it (frankently silly if you ask me). It houses a dog carrier on the front for me and we pull a trailer on the back with all the essentials in it like dog treats, dog biscuits and dog toys. This combo is our home on two wheels, even though it has got four, go figure! And this idea of going on a cycle tour was cooked up by my very kooky dad and the more sensible me, Ruben, hence why I am writing this and not him, God knows what weird stuff he'd put on here.

This bicycle journey, an adventure of sorts, began with the thought of interacting with folk in a friendly, open manner - trying to regain time lost over the past year, reconnecting to likeminded people. Questions presented themselves. How were we going to be treated whilst travelling? How will people in different areas react? Suddenly movement became paramount to this adventure, and that's where our trusty homemade Snail2 comes into her own (still weird calling it a 'her'), being eco-friendly and slow enough to interact with passers-by and take in the wonderful countryside.

This led us to discuss the next phase of our adventure plan: where are we going? Are we travelling to Scotland, down to the south of England or abroad perhaps? To search out new life and new places, to boldly go where no collie has gone before ... apparently!

Great Britain has the 12th largest coastline in the world at over 7000 miles, a lot for such a little island, so a destination was planned. Circumnavigate the entire UK starting from and ending at our local city, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Approximately 5000 miles and a 6-month journey. However, as we discussed this on our walkies, there seemed to be something missing. What was the purpose, the Why? What was the message?



Then on one walkie, it came to us. We often carry a litter picker when we go out and have a clean-up on our route. Picking up bottles, cans, fast food packaging, well actually to be honest, anything else that fits in the bin bag. We get comments like, 'doing a good job there, mate' or 'never ending task that pal, you'll be at it forever'. Although we've never really thought of it like that.

For us it's all about the environment, the flora and fauna. Soil doesn't need plastic disintegrating into its structure, bags entangled into hedgerows, seemingly decorative hanging

Cleaning Up!

A RUBBISH CYCLING ADVENTURE

garments placed on to trees that reek of fellow dogs' doodah. Beaches don't need bottle caps embedded in the sand and wildlife can't wear disposable masks that now seem to be littered everywhere. No, nature needs none of this, yet it is continually being supplied rubbish on an ever-increasing scale. This became our way of helping out, of giving back to nature; perhaps pointing out that nature is not out to get us, but that the human race is fundamentally seeking to harm the environment. But if we all do a little bit to help, then littering, tipping and wastefulness will gradually be eradicated.

So we travel by bicycle, meet, engage and encourage others by circumnavigating the entire UK, and while we are at it we pick up litter on our travels. My Dad loves a plan, albeit a rubbish plan, but no in fact this is ... A Rubbish Cycling Adventure!



And with that, Ruben leads his dad back towards the tireless pedals of Snail2, to visit new places, pick more litter and make new friends, leaving us this message...

If you'd like to find out more about A Rubbish Cycling Adventure, what we get up to throughout the day, where we've been and how much litter we have picked up since leaving, give us a follow on facebook, instagram and/or YouTube [@arubbishcyclingadventure](https://www.instagram.com/arubbishcyclingadventure).

Or if you really would like to support our mission of cycling around the entire UK picking litter, then we are after 100 humans (sorry dogs and other animals, but you still can send me messages) to sponsor our mission on www.patreon.com/arubbishcyclingadventure. Here you can support us from £3 per month and you'll get to see video footage first before anyone else. You'll also be able to vote on our future destinations and have 1-2-1 conversations with me and Dad. Or if you feel that a one-off donation is more suitable, you can fund any amount you like: www.PayPal.Me/rubenandthesnail.

All the monies raised fund our litter picking supplies, treats, travel expenses and vet fees (for me obviously, Dad insists on regular check-ups) and er, more treats.

Love & licks
Ruben the Border Collie



Word Up!

POEMS ON THE THEME OF BOOKS AND READING

The Hierarchy of the Spine

A cavalcade of King
Jostle for position at the summit
Down below there is a grumble from the movies and
screenplays

All the usual suspects are there
Goodfellas, Easy Riders and Raging Bulls
All Empire Building in a race to the top

Underneath the Barkers is a ragtag jumble of genres and
bizarre stories

The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat
The Wasp Factory buzzes unnervingly next to The Kite
Runner

At the bottom lurk the Alien novels
Pulp sci-fi horror for the completest
Or literary masterpieces that outshine the movies?

Anyway there's another level, even further down,
It's where the graphic novels live
They're not really 'proper' books are they?
Just pictures and comics

But they hold prime position
They are part of the foundation
And without their roots
The whole damn lot will fall

Aaron Wright

Villanelle: reminder to self

It's good to read, if you want to write,
to stretch the mind beyond its limitation.
Allow your eyes to let in more than light.

One idea, born in darkness, will take fright,
disguise itself, evade examination.
It's good to read, if you want to write.

That lone idea can't set itself alight
blundering around in frustration.
Allow your eyes to let in more than light.

To breathe in Inspiration is its right,
yet breath will not suffice for its gestation.
It's good to read, if you want to write.

To read is to encounter words in flight—
a murmuring of language in migration.
Allow your eyes to let in more than light.

When light and breath align to fuel your insight,
breathe deeply, have the courage to be erudite.
It's good to read, if you want to write—
allow your eyes to let in more than light.

Flloyd Kennedy

Next month's theme is 'Art'

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(no more than 20 lines each) to:
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Opening Up!

BOOK CORNER SALTBURN

Up! meets independent bookseller,
Jenna Warren

If we begin at the beginning – like lots of good stories do – how did your relationship with books start?

I've always loved books and writing. I did an MA in Creative Writing at Teesside University. After graduating I wanted to work in a creative field, and I got a job in a commercial art gallery. I was made redundant when the gallery closed in 2013, and I spent a while looking for another job and deciding what to do next. I had enjoyed working in a retail environment, and I liked working with the public, so I decided I would like to have my own shop.

The only shop I really wanted to run was a bookshop, because I'm passionate about books. I opened Book Corner in 2014, with no prior experience of working with books, but I think this was a good thing because I had no real expectations!



At a time when many bookshops have struggled, your lovely wee bookshop in Saltburn is still going strong. Do you feel positive about the future of bookshops?

Yes. The last year has been tough, but new independent bookshops are still opening. I think it has been particularly positive over the last few years, as more bookshops have opened in Yorkshire and the North East.

I think bookshops offer a much different experience to shopping for books online. People like to browse and get personalised recommendations, so I think bookshops definitely have a place in the changing landscape of the high street. A lot of people chose to shop local last Christmas, for example, and I hope this will continue.

In these days of social media, the public can now talk to authors direct and connect with them in a way we never could only a few years ago. Do you think this is a positive thing?

Yes, definitely. I think it's possible to build up a readership as an author with the help of social media. Speaking from a bookseller's point of view, social media has helped me make connections with authors and smaller publishers which I don't think I would have made otherwise. I think Twitter is a brilliant platform to discover great books.

Opening Up!

What's the best thing about your job?

Discovering new books and talking to people about them!

BOOK CORNER SALTBURN

Two questions in one: What's your own all-time favourite read, and point us to an author you think we should look out for...

That's a difficult question to ask a bookseller, as I have so many favourites! I suppose the book I've returned to most often is *The Phantom of the Opera* by Gaston Leroux. It's a strange mix of genres: a combination of gothic novel, crime and adult fairy tale. But I love the story, and it's been a big inspiration for my own writing.

In terms of an author to look out for, I'm going to say Sarah J. Harris. I haven't read her debut yet, but I've read her second book, *One Ordinary Day at a Time*, which is out in June. It's a brilliant example of the up-lit genre, and follows two characters, Simon and Jodie. Jodie is a single mum who wants to study English Literature at Cambridge, and Simon is the former child genius who is coaching her. It's about the value of friendship, connection, and education. I found it very moving.

**BOOKS
ARE MY
BAG**

LOVE BOOKS, LOVE BOOKSHOPS

Last question. You're throwing a dinner party and can invite 3 authors, living or dead. Who's coming?

Gaston Leroux, Eva Ibbotson and Terry Pratchett. Should make for an interesting evening!

You can find The Book Corner at:

<https://bookcornershop.co.uk>

<https://www.facebook.com/Book-Corner-Saltburn-1506322029595573>



*You see, bookshops are dreams built of wood and paper.
They are time travel and escape and knowledge and power.
They are, simply put, the best of places.*

Jen Campbell, Writer

Check Up!

STEVE LOWE

What happened when we all stayed at home

Whilst we were all told to stay home and stay safe, the natural world continued to rumble on without us. Mother Nature heaved a huge sigh of relief for the respite, and wildlife strayed back into parts of the urban environment. It became more visible to many of us because we had the time to take note of the fox in the street, or the wren bathing in the puddles.

In reality, many of these animals were visiting to take advantage of the increased waste created because our supply chains couldn't deal with the unpredictable nature of the demand, especially when loo rolls were stockpiled (as if everyone was going to be feasting on curry and nothing else?).

So? Has the environment benefitted from our enforced absence? Well, it's a mixed picture really.



Certainly, air quality has benefitted from an absence of planes, roads have been much quieter and many more people took to two wheels

to show off their Lycra. This may continue for many, there has even been a shortage of new bikes! If everyone looked at second hand, that might have helped!

It looks as if the oil industry and airlines are currently floundering in this new world. That means that carbon emissions are falling fast, at least for a

while. Counter that with the increase in packaging waste and use of single-use plastic though (which partly fuels that demand for fossil fuels) and perhaps we still have a way to go.

I welcome the reduction in 'wasted' time travelling to meetings, but have already noticed an increased number of them because they are 'virtual'. Perhaps time will show if this is counter-productive?

There are also some encouraging discussions about climate change and some progress on targets, but the melting of ice caps and a return to manned space flight make me question the commitment.



There have been some unpredictable benefits. One that I am especially pleased about is councils cutting back on mowing services. This has the potential to benefit wild plants and the bees, butterflies, birds, bats and bugs that depend on them for survival.

This is something colleagues and I have been proposing for many years, and it also reduces fuel costs and removes an unneeded noise pollutant that manual labour could readily replace.

Being able to watch or listen to wildlife has offered many of us a welcome distraction. More importantly it's brought genuine happiness in rediscovering our innate connection with nature.

Check Up!

STEVE LOWE

I think many of us had misplaced this, and its rediscovery has helped improve our wellbeing; nurturing minds, and providing joy and creativity. A pause for thought, reflection and (for some) change?

Across the world, lockdowns may just be reminding us how quickly the natural environment can adapt and thrive in our absence, if given some space.

Or to put it simply, when we move out, nature can move in.

Can we use what we have learnt to create a safer world in which we can live better lives?

I think that the response to the pandemic has given us a glimpse that another world is possible, if we take the chance. I want to cling to that hope.



An experienced wildlife professional, Steve currently works freelance with Northumberland Rivers Trust as well as undertaking work with volunteers on local heritage and archaeology projects. His hope is to leave the world a better place.



Check out page 19 to see what we're growing at Up! Towers

Word Up!

POEMS ON THE THEME OF BOOKS AND READING

O sing unto the Lord a new term

crystalline fen morning
low sun gold- icing
the Chapel's mighty windows
as she whooshes past, one chill-
nipped hand gripping the handlebars

and suddenly
there's a book in her face, she's on the ground,
a bus screechstops two feet away
like a Loony Tunes elephant
and there's a blond scarecrow-headed boy
flustered
babbling

I'm so sorry are you all right I didn't see you what was I
thinking of reading in the street your coat look it's torn oh god
I'm so sorry let me buy you dinner –

yes, she says, to stem the flashflood of apology,
yes, all right, make it the Koh-i-Noor
tomorrow
OK?

*

she takes off her reading glasses,
leans over his armchair, strokes his hair—
still strawlike, still blond—
the Koh-i-Noor, love, you remember?
nineteen sixty-eight?

Mandy Macdonald

If my life were a book

I'm at the point in Anna Karenina
where Levin is in despair:
he thinks Kitty is lost to him,
that he'll never get over her refusal.

Every time someone reads the book,
eyes scurrying over the lines, pages
turning, he has to live through this,
then decipher the meanings of her riddling.

I am one of those who reads ahead.
I like to know how a narrative unfolds
then go back to savour slowly how it reaches
its destinations. I'd like to flick forward

in my life, find out how my plots work through,
so that I might know in advance and arrive with grace.

Rebecca Gethin

The Silver Age

They tripped me
in the library.
I was looking
for something else.

Then in every aisle,
on every shelf
and spine.
A tumult of knowing.

Fearless lives
bobbing
in a torrent
of Tsvetaeva's tears.

Ronnie Smith

Growing Up!

MEET CEDRIC THE SEED

Up!'s Bridget Gallagher comes home from the supermarket with more than just shopping

Now, you know by now how much we at Up! love an initiative to make things better for people – course you do, it's why we're here, after all! So when Up! co-editor Bridget Gallagher heard about the *Little Library* scheme run by the nationwide superstore chain Morrisons, we couldn't keep her away! She walked into our local store to meet their local Community Champion, the lovely Gaynor Drake-Browning who, in one of those bizarre turns of fate



we love, just happens to be a direct descendent of perhaps Cullercoats' most famous resident, the semi-legendary fisher-wife Polly Donkin.

<https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/year-old-polly-donkin-most-famous-of-the-cullercoats-news-photo/3404336>

Gaynor introduced us to their scheme to improve young lives – the Morrisons *Little Library*, which is now in their stores across the UK and aims to promote reading and literacy in children, particularly those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. There should be one at your local Morrisons now – just go in and ask. You simply bring along unwanted books to donate and any child, teenager, parent or carer can pick up a book for free.

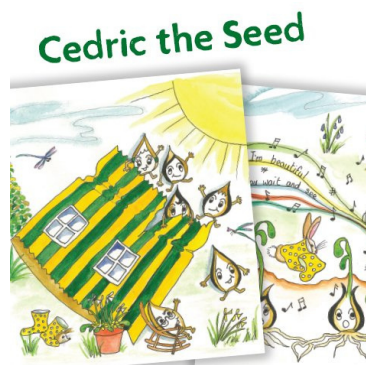
Books will also be donated through the initiative to local schools and community groups, via Morrisons network of Community Champions. How great is that?



But it doesn't end there. As part of their *Make Good Things Happen* initiative, to support children's literacy and learning they've created a new book for young readers - *Cedric the Seed*. (You can find an online

copy of it here -

<https://my.morrisons.com/blog/community/cedric-the-seed/>). Inspired by the Covid pandemic and how lives were changed in an instant, it's a story of hope for a brighter future. Morrisons have donated 50,000 copies of the book to local schools and community groups.



As if that wasn't enough, they've given out more than 2½ million packets of sunflower seeds to customers, as a gesture of hope as we all now look to climb out of the worst pandemic in

living memory. Here are Up! Towers we've already planted ours, and we'll keep you all in touch with their progress.

Is your local supermarket or a business you know, doing anything to help your local community?

We'd love to hear about it!

Just email us at TalkToUp@gmail.com, tell us about them and we'll do the rest.

Read Up!

VIC WATSON

Up!'s resident book expert on her favourite books for little ones

To celebrate the opening of *the bound*, Whitley Bay's independent bookshop from the fab folks behind Forum Books, I decided to share with you some of the best books for babies out there at the moment. As mum to an almost two-year-old, I've become pretty familiar with them over the last couple of years. Here are some favourites from our house.

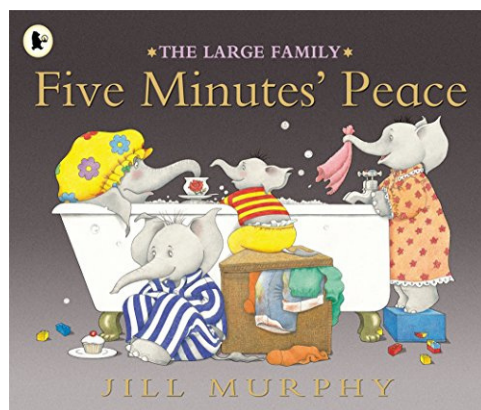


***Ten Little Fingers & Ten Little Toes* by Mem Fox & Helen Oxenbury**

Before having my son, I'd never heard of this book, let alone read it. However, after reading it soon after we arrived home from the hospital, it has become a firm favourite. *Ten Little Fingers ...* is a beautiful, melodic read that is, put simply, about racial diversity and international harmony. However, it's not preachy, it's utterly pure of heart. It's simple and innocent and celebrates the lives of children all over the world.

***The Detective Dog* by Julia Donaldson & Sara Ogilvie**

Young Peter's dog, Nell, has a keen sense of smell. She's always solving mysteries but spends every Monday listening to children read. When the books disappear from the classroom, it's Nell who takes on the case. *The Detective Dog* is fast-paced, fun and modern with lovely, bright illustrations. In Donaldson's inimitable style, this lovely book celebrates a love of books, reading and libraries.



***Five Minutes' Peace* by Jill Murphy**

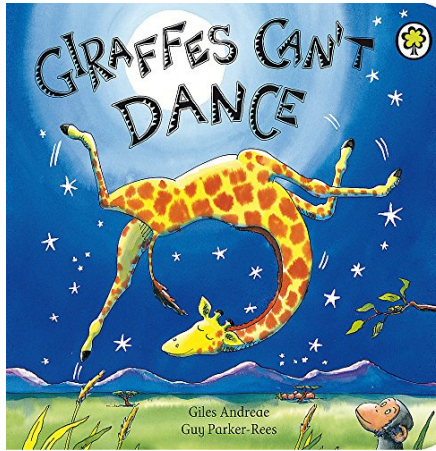
Poor old Mrs Large just wants five minutes' peace from her raucous offspring but she's not going to get off lightly. Maybe I feel a bit too much sympathy for Mrs Large now I'm a mum too, who knows. I was a mega Jill Murphy fan when I was a child and it seems my boy is going to follow in my footsteps - and who can blame him? This is a delightful read that, despite featuring a family of elephants, feels true to life.

***Dear Zoo* by Rod Campbell**

OK, this book is older than me but the reason behind its success is simple: it's perfect. Its illustrations are simple and colourful and the opportunity to make animal noises is pretty hard to resist. Children love peeping behind the flaps and discovering which animal the zoo sends next.

Read Up!

VIC WATSON

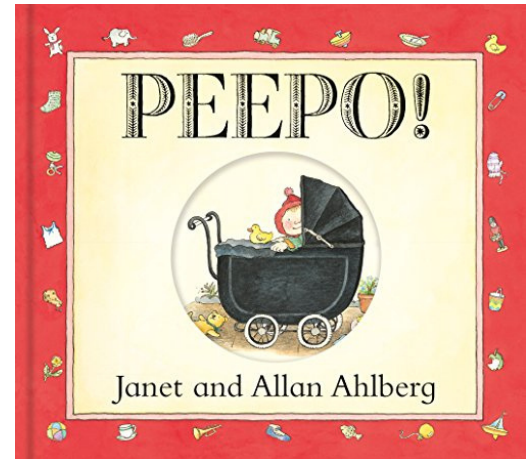


***Giraffes Can't Dance* by Giles Andreae & Guy Parker-Rees**

Gerald is a tall giraffe who wants to dance with the other animals at the jungle dance but they laugh him away, telling him giraffes can't dance. Of course, all comes right in the end. This is a wonderful, exuberant book about tolerance, self-acceptance and daring to be different. The joyous illustrations pop off the page and add yet more vim and vigour to this wonderful book.

***I Want My Hat Back* by Jon Klassen**

A bear laments his lost hat and visits a number of animals to ask if they've seen it. I was recommended this book by a bookseller just before my son's first birthday and when I initially read it, I found myself chuckling at it. It's another easy one to read in terms of word count but the magic in this book, for me, is in the pages where there's no text at all - the illustrations are so expressive that no words are required. Warning: you may want to read this one yourself before reading it to your child, as some may not be amused with the ending.



***Peepo!* By Allan Ahlberg & Janet Ahlberg**

A stone-cold classic, this one. There's so much detail put into the illustrations that you can find something new to discuss every time you read it. I had read this approximately hundred times before I noticed the Zeppelin in one of the pictures. My son loves sticking his face through the holes in the page, too, so it makes for hours of fun!



Victoria Watson is a writer, reader and host of Noir at the Bar in Newcastle, connecting readers and writers from all over the world. She runs creative writing groups through her business, Elementary V Watson.

She is also a copy editor and proofreader.

www.elementaryvwatson.com

Round Up!

AND COMING UP ...

And that's almost it. Huge thanks as always to all of our brilliant contributors – and of course to you, our readers.

This month we've got one more thank you to give out – and it's a huge one. The keen eyed among you may have noticed hints in recent issues about us planning for the future of our beloved magazine.

Well we're absolutely thrilled to announce that Up! is now supported by the National Lottery Community Fund. This means that we can continue to keep connecting you to the very best of everything happening out there.

So, a massive thank you to the lovely folk at the National Lottery Community Fund and to our wonderful committee for their encouragement and support.

See you next month for our special 'art' themed edition!

Much love
Bridget & Harry xx



As always, if you have any suggestions for future articles or features, we'd love to hear from you.

Just email us at TalkToUp@gmail.com