

The Handheld Newsletter

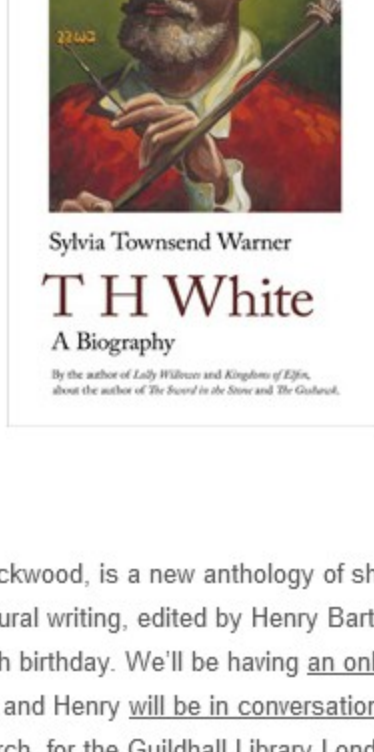
January 2023

New year, new books

We begin the year with our seasonal greetings to you all, and to thank you for continuing to read this newsletter. We get very few unsubscribers, so we're clearly writing what you want to read. There are over a thousand of you now, so we'd better keep publishing books for you to read! Here are our 2023 titles, to remind you what you have to look forward to this year.

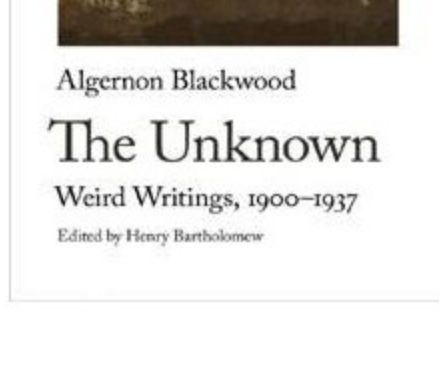
***T H White*: 17th January**

T H White, by Sylvia Townsend Warner, is her classic 1967 biography of the great writer of fantasy and imaginative literature (*The Sword in the Stone*, *Mistress Masham's Repose*, *The Goshawk*), in a new edition with an introduction by Gill Davies. Kate will be giving a [free talk online](#) about White and there is [the online book launch](#) in the evening, both on the 17th.



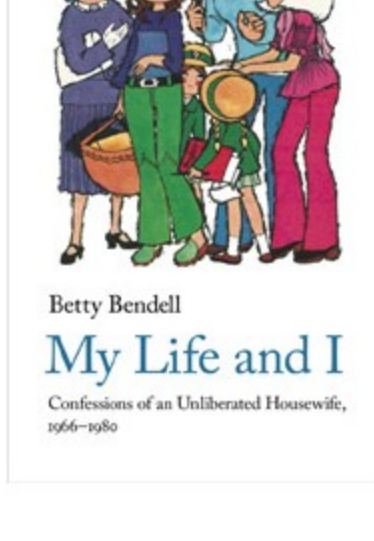
***The Unknown*: 14th March**

The Unknown by Algernon Blackwood, is a new anthology of short stories and prose pieces by this towering figure of supernatural writing, edited by Henry Bartholomew. To be published on what would have been his 154th birthday. We'll be having an [online book launch](#) on the evening of the 13th of March, and Kate and Henry [will be in conversation about Blackwood and some of his London stories on 14th March](#), for the Guildhall Library London.



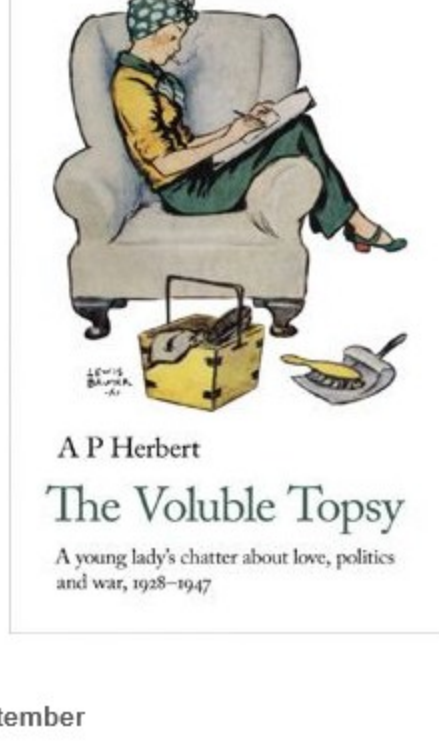
***My Life And I*: 2nd May**

My Life And I by Betty Bendell is a complete change of tone and mood. Over 80 comic, perceptive and devastatingly truthful columns from *Good Housekeeping* and other British magazines, from the late 1960s all the way to 1980, by Betty Bendell, about her daily routine, family, home, animals and everything else that filled her life. This is a female perspective on the domestic history of the 1970s, and each column was carefully selected because it made Kate laugh out loud. (Or, once or twice, shed a small tear of sympathy.) There will be an online book launch, when we've organised it.



***The Voluble Topsy*: 11th July**

The Voluble Topsy is an omnibus edition of three collections of uproarious letters from Lady Topsy Trout to her best friend Trix, from 1928 to 1947, about her life, parties, young men and remarkable adventures as she looks for purpose in her life and gets elected to Parliament, has twins, and survives the Second World War. Her creator, the comic librettist and campaigning MP A P Herbert created her as columns in *Punch*, for which he was a staff writer for decades. Again, this book is an absolute joy, and our designer reported that she had never laughed so much at a book when doing its layout. There will be an online launch, and maybe an actual in-person event, to be announced when organised.



***Hilda Matheson*: 19th September**

Staying with the Parliamentary theme, we are now full steam ahead in production on *Hilda Matheson: A Life of Secrets and Broadcasts*. This astonishingly influential woman worked for MI6 in the First World War, was Lady Astor's political secretary when she took her seat as the first woman MP, then was poached by Sir John Reith to become the fledgling BBC's first Talks Director, which changed the BBC into the people's broadcaster. After that Hilda led a massive political and cultural survey of the African continent, which began the process of imperial decolonisation, and then worked for MI5 running a media propaganda unit in the Second World War. All this while being Vita Sackville-West's lover, operating at the heart of the British political and intellectual establishment. She died during a routine operation in 1940, far too young. We're republishing Michael Carney's short biography of Hilda, and commissioned a long essay from former BBC producer Kate Murphy on the Astor years, and commissioned a long woman's issues BBC producer *Hilda Matheson* is available for pre-order, and there will be a launch, to be announced in the summer.



***Army Without Banners*: 28th November**

Those of you who loved *Business as Usual* by Jane Oliver and Ann Stafford will be excited (we hope) to see a new title from Ann Stafford on our list: her Second World War memoir, lightly novelised and including more of her inimitable illustrations, about women volunteers in London during the war. She and Jane Oliver both drove ambulances during the Blitz, and this memoir is stunning for its attention to detail, and the terror it evokes, as well as the comic and the desperately moving moments. It'll be available for preorder in the next few months.



A taster for 2024

Publishers are not always focused on the present day. Yes, *T H White* comes out tomorrow (at the time of writing it), but mentally we let go of that wonderful biography about four months ago when we sent it to the printer. We couldn't do any more to it after that, except tell the world, repeatedly, how good it is. Instead we have been busy negotiating contracts, scheduling and sorting out covers for 2024. Here's what you can expect so far:

January 2024: an excellent anthology of supernatural stories on a (secret) theme, again curated by Henry Bartholomew

March 2024: a wonderful novel by the wife of a great British literary institution, who was herself acclaimed for her perfect writing style in her memoirs and novels. If you like the writing of Sylvia Townsend and David Garnett, you'll love this.

May 2024: a superb anthology of rather chilling ghost stories by one of the best-loved names in British literature, edited by Melissa Edmundson.

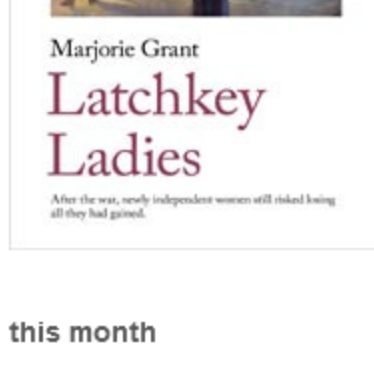
July 2024: a new edition of a classic memoir by one of the great British writers of the 20th century, with an introduction by Tom Shakespeare.

September 2024: a fabulous novel of France and England in the Second World War by a totally forgotten English novelist whom we are proud to rediscover.

There will be one more, we just haven't found it yet ...

And finally ...

In last month's newsletter we asked whether any Newsletter readers would like to record a short section of one of our titles, for our YouTube channel. We've had a rush of volunteers, and [the first reading is out now from Latchkey Ladies](#). (The reader wishes to remain anonymous, but her voice is mellifluously good.)



What we've been reading this month

Kate has been gobbling up [Embertide](#), the third Fallow sisters novel by Liz Williams, about a family of four sisters who chat to their dead grandfather in the churchyard of their Somerset village, and see things that most other people don't. The eldest, Bee, is having an affair with an Elizabethan sailor, for instance, and Serena the dress designer is prone to temporal slippages. Stars (Arcturus, Aldebaran etc) live in their house, and odd things and people pass through. Liz is a great storyteller, and her deep knowledge of the occult and pagan practices give this wonderful fantasy series the authority that most other novels about magic don't have.

David read Andy Weir's *Artemis*. Weir made his name with the strength of the science and engineering in *The Martian*. *Artemis* has a whole textbook full of them. In very short sentences. Like a user manual, perhaps. Oh, and in the first person. Which undermined the tension. Even if there was one twist after another. Interesting, entertaining but not really gripping.

News from the garden

We've had February Fill-the-Ditch a month early, and the Avon valley is spectacularly flooded, with the seasonal lake at Bathampton Meadows quite visible from our top front window. The valley is admirably shaped for flooding, and the waters come up and down without harming any property. Our grass is squelchy but there's no standing water. Daffodil shoots are coming up in the soft nutritious ground where the bonfire used to be, so Kate dashed up there in a brief 10-minute break in the rain to hammer in canes for their fencing: the deer are back as well. No snowdrops yet, which is odd, they usually precede all the other flowers. It's ridiculously early for daffodils, but they're out even in Herefordshire where we visited last weekend. The camellia is covered in tight white buds, and the little hazel has fronds of golden brown up and down its small branches. The catkins on the big hazel are large and packed with pollen. David put some in his hat when Morris-dancing on Plough Sunday at Horningsham in Wiltshire, quite the most pagan church service (the blessing of the plough) we have ever attended.

At the end of December we had friends round for lunch to teach them how to play [Wingspan](#), and Susan saw a large fox moving purposefully through the garden, which was unusually bold of it. We're experiencing a chaffinch takeover at the bird feeder now, a species we've hardly seen in the garden before. The rook family come to visit often, identifiable as the same individuals by their partial albinism. The squirrels are wrestling daily with the nut feeder which they can actually reach, it having no baffle beneath. They're quite ferocious, even the woodpecker jibs when it sees a squirrel already spreadeagled over the nut cage, and flies to take the seeds instead from the other bird feeder.

At the end of the autumn David collected the fluffy cardoon seed heads and put them in a stray plant pot, and left it on the potting table before going to do something else. The pot then assumed invisibility, as things often do on that table, and now we discover it's sheltering a small family of something furry.

Keep your wellies handy,

Kate & David

Handheld Press