

The Handheld Newsletter

February 2023

A big splashy offer

Let's begin this month with one of our favourite offers of a three for two. Place an order for any two paperbacks in our webshop in the usual way, and in the Notes box, on the payment page, tell us which third paperback you'd like as a free gift, and we'll post all three to you. Offer ends on 28th February 2023. We caution our North American customers to read the paragraph below as this will affect how long your books may take to arrive. In the meantime, enjoy a splurge! (As will we, and goodness knows we'd like a little enjoyment in our lives right now.)

No parcels for abroad

On 10th January the Royal Mail suffered a ransomware attack that is still preventing parcels from being sent abroad from the UK. Letters can edge their way past the blockage, but parcels can't. At first we refunded payments from orders that had to be sent abroad, until we realised that Paypal was still taking its cut of £1.50 per order which we weren't getting back. We did start posting some overdue preorders to the USA by using the direct fulfilment service from our US distributor, but then we saw how much it was costing us and stopped that pretty quickly. So now we are accepting orders for posting to North America, but we have no control over when we can actually post them or when they'll arrive. This is stated on the website at the point where ordering happens, so we hope that will be clear.

Yes, it's maddening. If you are outside the UK and really need one of our books extra-pronto, please try ordering from your local bookstore. As soon as we can send parcels again affordably, we will shout it from our website and in the next newsletter.

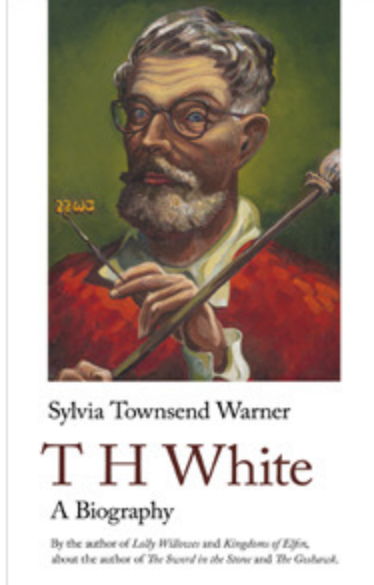
A new reading

Newsletter reader Sue from Canada has recorded a moving reading from the end of 'Night Shift', from Inez Holden's *Blitz Writing*. You can hear it [here on our YouTube channel](#). She kept having to start the recording again as the emotion kept overwhelming her ...



The book launch for *T H White*

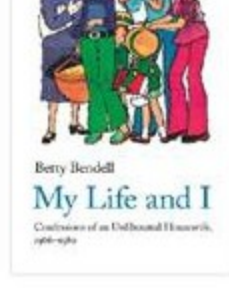
You can find the video for our hour-long conversation about *T H White* and *Sylvia Townsend Warner* [Warner](#) on our YouTube page.



New talks

We have been planning new talks, all now listed [on our Events page](#). Here is a summary: all links for booking are now on or will be added to our Events page.

- Monday 13th March, 7.30pm: online book launch for Algernon Blackwood's *The Unknown*.
- Tuesday 14th March, 2-3pm: online conversation with Kate and editor Henry Bartholomew about Blackwood's London stories, for the Guildhall Library London.
- Wednesday 26th April, 5-6pm: Kate and Sarah Lonsdale of City University, London discuss women in novels about journalism, and the history of women in Fleet St, online for Westminster Libraries.
- [There WILL be an online book launch in May for Betty Bendell's *My Life and I*, we just haven't arranged it yet.]
- Saturday 10th June: we'll be at the Clevedon Literary Festival and Kate will be giving an in-person talk about book covers.
- Tuesday 20th June, 2-3pm: Kate will be talking about Betty Bendell and her glorious magazine columns for *Good Housekeeping*, online for the Guildhall Library London.
- Wednesday 28th June, 5-6pm: join Kate and literary agent Becky Brown of Curtis Brown Heritage to talk about dead authors and missing wills, online for Westminster Libraries.



Betty Bendell's *My Life And I*, and *Good Housekeeping* in the 1970s



Our last title for 2023

We've opened the order page for our last title of 2023: Ann Stafford's *Amy Without Banners*, from 1942. You might remember her name as a co-author, and the illustrator, of our hugely successful *Business as Usual* from 1933. Both Jane and Ann drove ambulances for the London Ambulance Service in the Blitz, and Ann wrote a book about it, illustrated with her inimitable pen and ink drawings, dashed off in spare moments as she observed Londoners around her. The 'Army' of the title were the volunteers who kept the Home Front going: mostly unpaid, hardly unsung but certainly without flags, though uniforms abounded. The book is in turn very funny, very sad, heart-stoppingly frightening and above all uplifting.

We'll be publishing *Amy Without Banners* on 28th November, and are accepting preorders for it now.



A look at 2024

As usual, we've been scrambling to assemble our covers for the first three titles of 2024, for the US sales conferences that drive our publicity scheduling. Aren't they nice?

The Living Stone is a new anthology of (stop us if you've heard this before) classic supernatural short stories focusing on stones that are, frankly, quite alarming. The cover is an 1894 photograph of a gargoyle from Notre Dame, Paris. Henry Bartholomew, who edited our imminent anthology of Algernon Blackwood's writing, has curated this collection.

Tatting by Faith Compton Mackenzie, is the last novel by this distinguished biographer and autobiographer, in the tradition of Sylvia Townsend Warner and David Garnett, from 1957. Several people converge on an Edwardian vicarage in Cornwall and some very difficult women complicate everybody's lives. Faith Compton Mackenzie was the first wife of Sir Compton Mackenzie, living with him on Capri as neighbours of Norman Douglas et al in the 1920s.

The House of Silence is a collection of E Nesbit's ghost stories, curated by our long-standing editor of *Weird* Melissa Edmundson. We've published two of Nesbit's *Weird* short stories before, in *Women's Weird 2* and *British Weird*, and this collection will be published in the centenary year of her death.



New titles for 2024 from Handheld Press

What we've been reading

Kate has discovered Harold Nicolson's 1932 novel *Public Faces*, a political farce in which preventing a terrifying fate for the world depends on the private emotions and hurt feelings of a few rather too powerful politicians and their civil servants. She's just got to the page where the Foreign Secretary has gone off in a huff to his official residence for the weekend and hasn't yet opened *The Times*, whose headlines are going to cause chaos.

David has been ogling *A History of Britain in 100 Maps*, by Jeremy Black. It's a beautiful, magnifying-glass testing collection, but is let down by the text which seemed undecided whether to be a history of Britain or of British mapping.

News from the garden

We've been thinking about collecting together all the News from the Garden sections for the past five years as a sort of parade of the seasons from a Somerset hillside. Perhaps we'll actually do it, though it would be quite a slim volume. And who would buy it? Hardly anyone. So maybe not.

This month we've not been out in the garden at all as it's been so horribly cold or sopping wet. But now things are brightening up a bit. Our neighbour two gardens to the east has had some diseased trees cut down and a large floppy yew cut back. The work was done by an impressive team of tree surgeons, with helmets and belay ropes and everything, unlike the unnerving cowboys waving a chainsaw who savaged the top of another neighbour's apple tree two years ago. These chaps were a pleasure to watch at work, and the difference in the light we get is already a boost.

Snowdrops are littering the lawn (which is 80% moss right now), and the cream and pink hellebores are doing tremendous things in the front garden alongside the pale pink and deep burgundy miniature cyclamens. The daffodils are coming up in the old bonfire pit but the buds are biding their time, as are the tulips and narcissi Kate carefully planted in pots last autumn, and actually remembered to label. The pond is full of floating leaves; we must remember to check it for frogspawn as the toad and frog mating season is approaching.

Our neighbours to the west finally got a fencer in to replace the one that collapsed on their builders last August. He made an excellent job of it, and we can now finally raise one of the blinds in the dining room which we have kept down for five months so we don't have to watch the builders, or they us, while we eat. David painted our side of the fence a nice dark grey, and the mint is already starting to grow from underneath, just as it did from under the old fence.

Birds: they are always with us, thank goodness, always a pleasure and a delightful distraction at pondering moments. The nuthatch and blackcaps are very frequent visitors now, and the longtails and willow tits are getting braver. Bluetits and great tits are so common as to be ubiquitous, and the woodpecker muscles in now and again. Robins are simply everywhere, and Kate thinks she saw a wren scuttering into the hedge beside the compost heap. The compost heap has been turned over quite thoroughly by something with big paws, and shredded paper from the wastepaper basket is fluttering all over the garden. It's an excellent contribution to the health of the composting material, but it's rather visible when scattered over the upper lawn.

Cold snaps are on their way: bundle up!

Kate & David

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