

The Handheld Newsletter

May 2023

Inez and Anthony

Inspired by our Inez Holden titles *Blitz Writing* and *There's No Story There*, the Anthony Powell Society have published *Late Stories: Punch and Powell*, a collection of Holden's postwar short stories. These first appeared in *Punch* magazine in the 1950s during the period when her colleague Anthony Powell was literary editor of that magazine. They reflect many of the aspects of Inez's work that attracted readers to her wartime and prewar books, in particular her humour and character descriptions.

George Orwell described her earlier collection of stories *To the Boating* (1945) as containing 'accurate detail and remarkably lifelike dialogue.' Biographer and literary critic Hilary Spurling described the *Punch* stories as 'a series of brilliant short stories by Inez Holden, some of the best work she ever did.'

None of the *Punch* stories have previously appeared in book form. *Late Stories: Punch and Powell* includes memoirs of Inez by Powell and her literary executor Celia Goodman as well as their previously unpublished correspondence and introductory essays about Inez from the editors. You can [order the book online here](#).


A quiet time

Since we're only publishing six books this year our production schedule is considerably less busy. This is partly rather nice, giving Kate more time to do other things (she has an article coming out soon in the *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society Journal*, about her research on a 17th-century Quaker marriage certificate that emerged recently in the Wiltshire Museum), and partly disconcerting, because for six years she has accustomed herself to working at full speed for ten hours a day (we exaggerate slightly), so to not have the usual workload is ... odd.

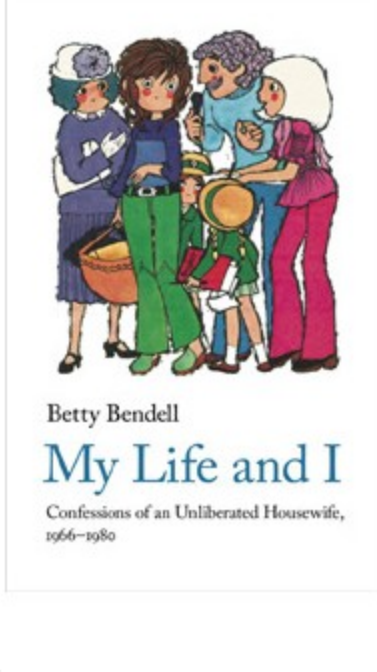
At the moment she is finishing off the proofs for Ann Stafford's *Amy Without Banners*, which will go to print in July. She is waiting to begin marketing for *The Voluble Topsy* for July, and has been collecting ideas for publicising *Hilda Matheson* for September. The text for *The Living Stone* is expected at the end of July. And she's been prepping in-person talks and online events: see below! David has been trying to understand Print on Demand pricing in the US and wrangling a shipment of new titles and backlist from the UK to the US.

Betty Bendell is out!

We've had a great review of *My Life and I* from Red Magazine. Their Literary Editor Sarra Manning selected Betty for her [10 Best Books for May 2023](#), saying that *My Life and I* was 'a glorious collection of writing from one of Britain's leading and funniest magazine columnists in the late 1960s and 1970s ... astute and wildly funny ... a heady mash-up of *Diary of a Provincial Lady* and *Bridget Jones's Diary*'.

The next day we held an online book launch for *My Life and I*, with Sarah LeFanu interviewing Kate and Anna, Betty's daughter, about Betty's writing and what she reveals to us about 1970s domestic life and expectations. The video for this will be posted on our YouTube channel soon.

And Kate will be doing a talk about her research for *My Life and I* and how she put the book together, on Tuesday 20th June, 2-3pm, for the Guildhall Library London, online. [You can register for your free ticket here](#). The Guildhall don't record their talks, unfortunately, so this will only suit those of you who can tune in for 2pm UK time.


The art of the book cover

We will have a stall at the [Clevedon Literary Festival](#) on Saturday 10th June, south of Bristol, selling and chatting about books. Kate will be giving a talk about book cover art and how gorgeous covers work to disguise terrible novels (obviously not ours), at 10.00am in the Clevedon Friends Meeting House. [You can buy your ticket for the talk here](#).


Why and how our reading tastes changed

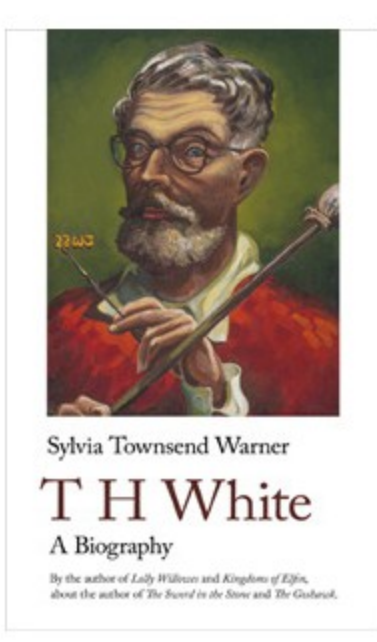
Kate will be giving a talk at the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution on Monday 19th June at 7.30pm, on why and how our reading tastes changed. This will be a hybrid event, so [you can buy your ticket for it here](#), and view the video later if you are otherwise engaged.


Literary agents and dead authors

On Wednesday 28th June Kate will be in conversation with literary agent Becky Brown of Curtis Brown Heritage for Westminster Libraries to pick over the bones of literary estates, and discuss why and how authors don't leave a will and how difficult it can be to find a lost estate. [You can register for your free ticket here](#), and this event will be recorded (though we have no control over when the recording will be posted).


White review

We had a nice surprise with an enthusiastic review of our edition of *T.H. White*, in *Shiny New Books*. T.H. White was a complex towering eccentricity of many of the greatest writers as well as deep griefs and a very dark side, and Sylvia Townsend Warner, one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century, understood him and recreated him vividly in a work that draws on her powers as a fiction writer as well as her scrupulous scholarship. The result, this book, has rightly been described as a classic of biography and remains as fresh, engaging and melancholy as ever in this new edition published by Handheld Press.'


What we've been reading this month

Kate has been reading *A Sultry Month* by Alethea Hayter, a 1965 group biography about a few hot weeks in London in the summer of 1846. If you want to know what Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barrett (about to elope together), Tennyson, Dickens, Sir Robert Peel and many other literary and political types were doing in the weeks while the failed painter Benjamin Haydon worked himself into a desperate state of mind about his debts, this is the book for you.

David went *Deeper into the Wood* with Ruth Pavey. This is a sequel to the story of her buying a small Somerset wood, some 20 years on. A gentle year's diary, observing and sketching woodland life.

News from the garden

Late April saw the arrival of the cuckooflower, its slender pale pink flowerheads emerging from the wet grass all over the top lawn. The apple trees are finally in leaf, and the cowslips are out. The bluebells are doing what the daffodils did last month, flowering in the actual grass which we've never seen them do before. At the end of April a miniature plantation of lily of the valley began to appear in a border where a lupin used to be, very unexpectedly: we have no memory of lilies of the valley being there before (and a quick check of the last two May newsletters confirms this).

Kate spotted the female roe deer eating her favourite rose bush in a pot, the one we protect by parking a garden chair in front of it, which the deer was not fooled by at all. She stormed up the hill to haul the pot into the wheelbarrow and the rose bush has now been moved to a safer place much nearer the house down some steps where the deer don't go. It is severely chomped, but recovering well.

The camellia has died. We don't know why; it was doing very well over the winter in its pot in a sunless area down the side of the house, but after we moved its pot to a warmer position for spring and gave it a feed it went all limp and its flowers and leaves shrivelled. We tried so hard with that shrub, but I don't think we'll get a new one. And all our salvias have died, both those in the ground and those in pots, so we think it must have been the hard frost and the snow that did for them, which is very disappointing.

There's a wood mouse living in the hedge, flat-faced and small-eared, which is showing quite astonishing bravery by foraging in the shrubbery under cover of the dense mat of woodruff that covers that border. It's running around as if it's never heard of cats (we have no local cats at the moment) or owls (they haven't been heard calling since December).

But the big excitement for May Day was the return of the toads: we have a fine nursery of toadpoles in the pond, with different thicknesses of tail suggesting that several broods are in there. We also have at least one newt, seen eating pondskaters. And the sinister presence of a dragonfly nymph has been spotted, rising up beneath the toadpoles from the deep, its angular head suggesting some powerful jaws.

Listen out for the cuckoo!

Kate & David

Handheld Press