

The Handheld Newsletter

June 2023

Middlewick in the sunshine

We began June selling books in a borrowed gazebo that threatened to fly away, with a card reader that insisted on a firmware update on very rocky 4G halfway through the day when 200 other stall holders were mopping up the supply. We were at Middlewick Open Gardens for a fundraising weekend for Wiltshire Air Ambulance which was well attended by fans of Pink Floyd (the drummer owns the house) and classic car club members all parking their vintage Jags in the field behind the manor house (which the drummer bought from the present Queen). We sold a very acceptable amount of books to a rather well-heeled crowd. We have never taken payment for books from a Coutts card before. Swallows were everywhere, there were donkeys and some Gloucester Old Spot pigs and we had very friendly stall neighbours. And the house Labrador decided we were really there to throw sticks for him so he just lay down and waited till we were ready to play.



A sixth birthday treat

Handheld is now six years old, according to Companies House. We began with six people (Kate, David, Nadja our designer, Mike & Sharon on website and data, and Judith as the backroom publicity assistant). Judith has now left us for PA work elsewhere, and Amy has replaced her. We began in a living room, and we are now in a back bedroom (with a much nicer view). We've published 40 books so far. 40! It seems unbelievable, but they're all on the office shelves, winking at us.

So what did we do to celebrate our birthday? The bosses went to a concert. Nadja probably went wild swimming. Amy may well have been on a horse. We believe Mike and Sharon had an allotment to attend to. But you? What will YOU do?

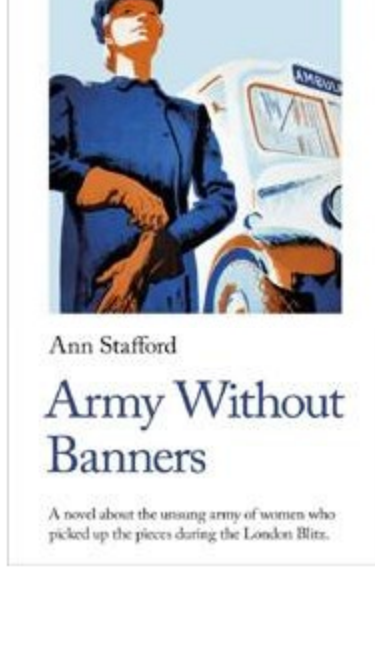
Go shopping! Celebrate Handheld's sixth birthday with one of our lovely discount offers. For six days, from 9 to 15 June, [use code SIXER in the Handheld shop](#) and enjoy £2.99 off any title, whether backlist or frontlist or not yet even published.



Some shuffling of books behind the scenes

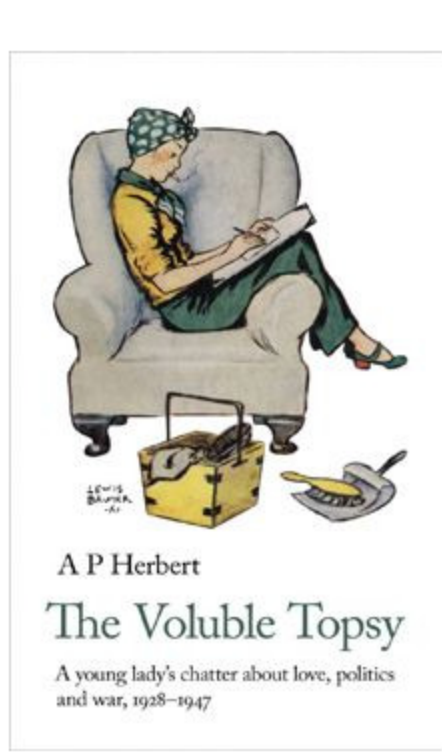
We've reorganised two of our future books, deciding that *The Living Stone* (formerly to come out in January 2024) will do much better in autumn 2023, with its new publication date is 31st October 2023. Those of you who have already preordered *The Living Stone* will be happy to see their books arriving in mid September. As a consequence of this, and to balance our workload, our former November title, Ann Stafford's *Army Without Banners*, will come out on 16th January, and preorders for that will be sent out at the beginning of December.

We've also changed our minds about the cover of *Army Without Banners*. The previous design, using a photograph by John Hinde of an exhausted but still lipstickked ambulance attendant during the Blitz, has been replaced by a slightly more upbeat image from a Civil Defence poster, in blue and orange. We hope this will do well.



Our next book

Topsy is nearly upon us. Our nice fat omnibus edition of the three classic novels by comic genius A P Herbert, *The Voluble Topsy*, will be out on 11th July. We are still very fond of the cover, which uses the original artwork by Lewis Baumer for the last Topsy novel, *Topsy Turvy*, with the kind permission of his family. We also have a nice stack of promised reviews to come, which we can tell you about next month. You can buy your copy [here](#), as we are well past the preordering deadline, and are sending orders out now.

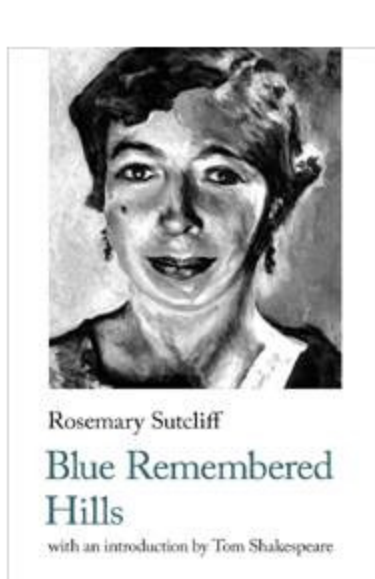


Rosemary Sutcliff is here!

We are very happy to announce the release of the preorder page for our March 2024 title, *Blue Remembered Hills*, Rosemary Sutcliff's classic memoir of her childhood and youth as a young girl living with the aftermath of Still's Disease. This form of juvenile arthritis put her in and out of hospital for much of her childhood as the doctors tried to repair the damage done to her joints and muscles. Sutcliff used a wheelchair as soon as her mother stopped trying to make her walk to build up her strength, and used a specially adapted desk to accommodate her foreshortened arms. Leaving school at 14, because the teachers agreed there was nothing more she would learn there, she entered Bideford Art School in Devon where she did a three year foundation course in art. She became an accomplished painter of miniatures. But writing and stories were her secret passion, and in 1950 at age 30 her first novels were published. She went on to become one of Britain's best loved writers of historical fiction.

Disability campaigner and sociologist Tom Shakespeare has written the introduction to this new edition of *Blue Remembered Hills*, and the cover drawing is by artist Wendy Bryant. She created this pen and ink drawing from a now lost photograph of Sutcliff taken in her twenties, which Wendy described as being like Proper Art Homework. You can still find the original photo on the internet, but the original print and negative have been lost (it's not even known who the photographer was), so we decided the best way to be able to use the image was to commission a copy.

Blue Remembered Hills is a glorious memoir about Sutcliff's young life and passionate engagement with people and nature. It has a great deal to discover about her by reading between the lines and by noticing connections between events in her life and in some of her books. It's also a remarkable memoir about endurance, and growing up as the only child of a difficult though smothering mother, whose bipolar personae ranged from Lady Macbeth to Titania, Queen of the Fairies. You can order your copy [here](#).



What we've been reading

Unsurprisingly, Kate has been reading another Rosemary Sutcliff, *The Mark of the Horse Lord*, which she has in a first edition but doesn't think she has actually read before. Whoops. It's one of Sutcliff's more mature novels for older readers, about the Caledones and Dalriads in Roman-era Argyllshire, and the terrible sacrifices two clashing belief systems demand of a freed half-Pictish gladiator looking for new purpose in his life. Brilliant, classic Sutcliff, with Charles Keeping's stunning illustrations.

David read Jan Morris's *Spain*, first written in 1964 then updated in 1979. It doesn't feel out of date, partly because this is a very personal set of recollections of Spain. In that sense it is gossipy, informative but also deliciously unreliable; you just know that some stories are merely myths, ancient and modern.

News from the garden

You will all be glad to know that the toadpoles are currently living their best lives in the pond, wriggling and gathering in clusters around the warm shallow stones of the pond as they grow their tiny feet and learn to eat bigger things. Other wildlife seen in the pond last week includes a shy but sturdy palmate newt (spotty brown sides), and a very large dragonfly larva still encased in its black shell, tumbling out of a clump of weed fished out of the water. Dark red and turquoise blue damselflies flit over the water's surface in pairs and water snails trundle around the bottom.

We had a lot of flowers. The blue and yellow irises are nearly over, but one magnificent white bearded iris is really only just getting going in a shady spot by the hedge. The peonies, dark and light pink, are all coming out at once, and the golden yellow broom bush shows no sign of stopping. Kate sees the greenfly on the seven rose bushes every other day so those flowers are looking quite splendid. Both tubs of hostas are about to flower profusely, and the potentilla will probably follow them.

In fruit news our strawberry bed has been extremely productive, letting us collect a small bowlful every day. While the asparagus bed experiment has definitely failed, the gooseberries are doing very well, and the rhubarb has picked up, so perhaps we are destined only to have soft fruit up there in that part of the garden. We have planted tomato and bell pepper seedlings donated by a friend in tubs near the house, so we hope they will survive. And we have some new baby trees to fuss over. Kate found a walnut seedling growing in a rose bush pot, obviously planted by an opportunistic squirrel, though there aren't many walnut trees in these parts. Two self-seeded sycamores in a salvia tub survived the vicious beak of the mother blackbird looking for worms, so we've repotted those. But with the really hot weather on the way, we have to be more vigilant about regular watering.

For anyone wondering whether we managed to sell the house, we took it off the market in early May, as no-one wanted to buy it. David also wants to try some engineering works in the garden, so we'll try again next year.

Stay suncreamed,

Kate & David

Handheld Press