

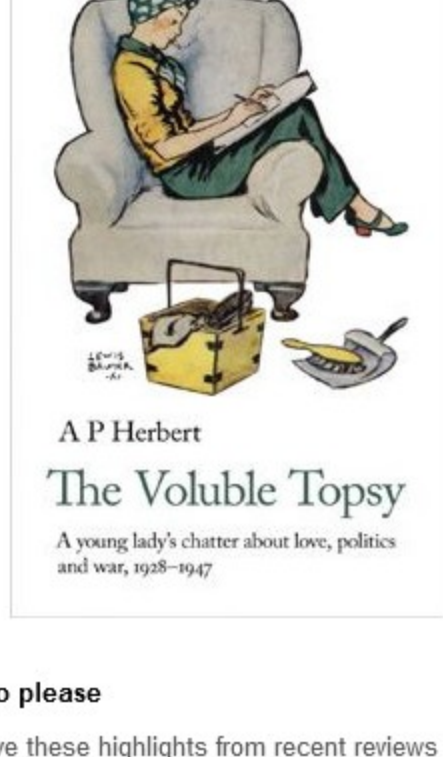
The Handheld Newsletter

July 2023

Topsy bursts upon the world

The Voluble Topsy is now out, and we have had a rash of delighted reviews, which you can [see here](#). Also, we've had some lovely comments from happy preordering readers via social media. 'An absolute hoot', 'perfect light reading for the long summer evenings', 'Her style of writing, full of malapropisms and italics, is hilarious', 'completely unfiltered' and 'funny, warm, charming, with a political twist'.

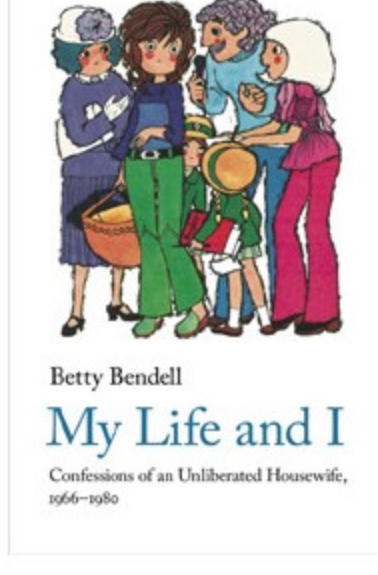
[Do buy your copy now.](#)



Betty Bendell continues to please

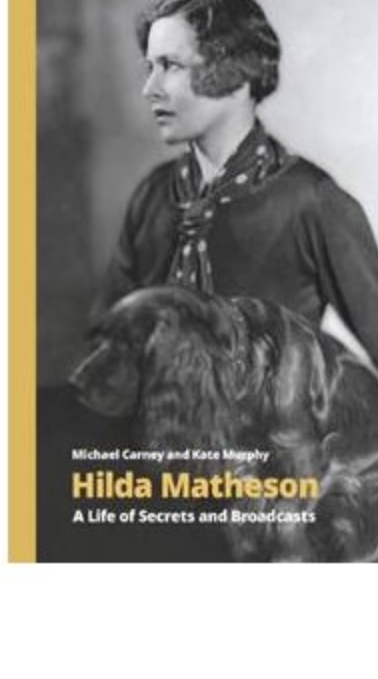
We thought we'd let you have these highlights from recent reviews of Betty Bendell's *My Life and I*: 'Astute and wildly funny', 'she's not afraid of laughing at herself', 'An absolute hoot' (again) and 'I loved the intelligence of the writing, so funny. I loved it'.

One of the interesting adaptations we've had to make with both Betty and Topsy is because they are so packed with goodness and healthy laughter they are also dangerously close to being over the weight limit for a Large Letter when sending abroad. Since we always wrap our Abroad Large Letters in cardboard, this has needed some adjustment. The normal card wrapper wraps one and a half times round the package, which for Topsy and Betty tips them both into Small Parcel range. A Large Letter costs £9 to post to the USA, whereas a Small Parcel costs £16 or more: you see the difficulty. So, for North American orders, we've ruthlessly discarded the catalogue and ripped off the last third of the cardboard, and our post office man smiles as the packages slide through the Large Letter measuring tool with ease. Pheew.



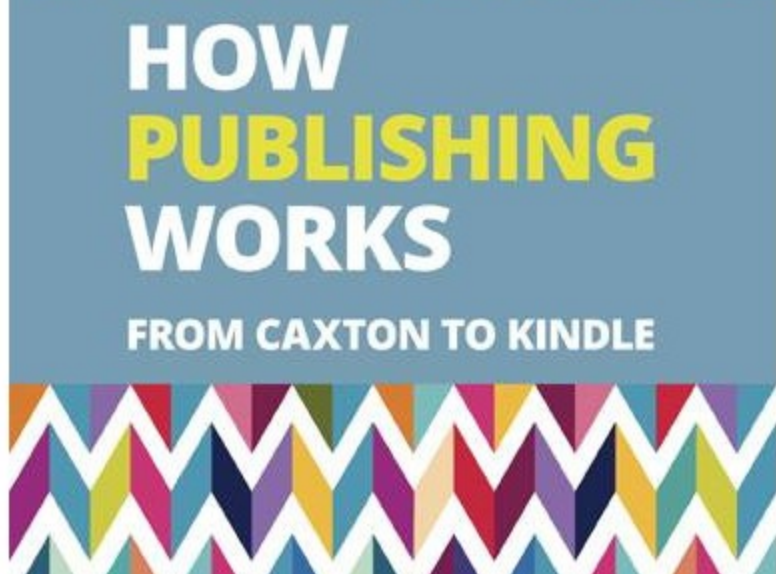
Hilda will also be reviewed (soon)

Our next book, the terrific biography of BBC First Lady [Hilda Matheson](#) due out in September, is going to be reviewed, so we hear, in the *Telegraph*. It was also considered for serialisation by another national paper but they thought maybe not, not this time. These requests were a surprise to us as we haven't even begun the early marketing for Hilda. However, then we remembered that the book was trailed in the *Bookseller* in early June, which just shows you what the national literary editors read these days.



A new project

Over ten years ago Kate was writing, recording, editing and releasing her own podcast series, *Why I Like This Book* (blog posts based on the scripts [can be found here](#)). She still has the podcasting itch, so we have devised a new Handheld Press podcast, to be released in September. Many of the talks Kate does explain how publishing works, so it seemed a good idea to talk to some experts about it. The first series of *How Publishing Works* will consist of ten interviews, and guests include Galley Beggar Press (the Publisher), Ingram Publishing Services (the Distributor) and United Agents (the Agent). Episodes also include guests from the worlds of audiobook production, printing and bookselling. We're looking for two more guests, the Marketer and the Reviewer, and the list of topics for future series is already enormous. But let's get the first series out first. Look for *How Publishing Works* in your normal podcast provider in mid September.



Our annual birthday discount free for all

It's July, so it must be Kate's birthday (David declines to have his birthday month used as a shameless marketing tool). This year we're having a website Summer Sale. From 21 to 23 July inclusive all our books will be discounted on our website, enabling anyone to shop wildly and extravagantly without needing a code or having to write anything about which free book you want in a three for two in the website order form. It'll be much easier, we hope. Put the dates in your diary now! And add an alarm on your phone too: you don't want to miss this.



Autumn talks

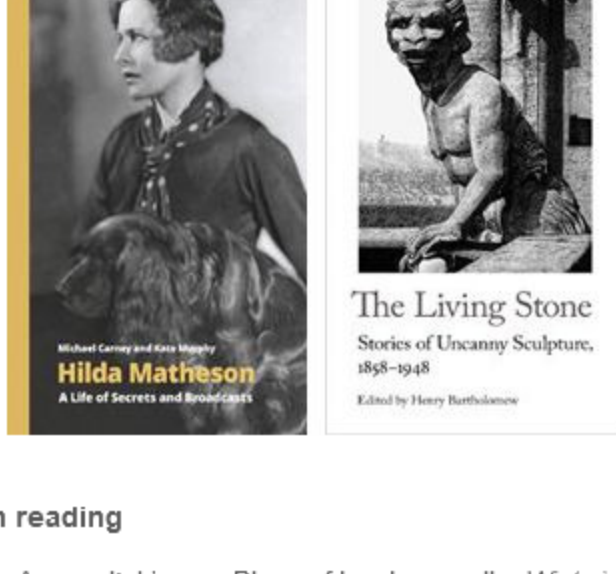
Kate has lined up four new online talks for the autumn with the Guildhall Library London. If they interest you do add the dates and times to your diaries now, though the registration links won't be live till August.

Tuesday 19th September, 2-3pm: Hilda Matheson: First lady of British broadcasting
Join Kate in conversation with Kate Murphy of Bournemouth University, discussing the life and work of Hilda Matheson. She was Vita Sackville-West's lover, Lady Astor's political secretary, the first woman to be Talks Director of the BBC, and worked in intelligence in both the First and Second World Wars.

Tuesday 31st October, 2-3pm: *The Living Stone: Stories of Uncanny Sculpture*
Join Kate in conversation with Henry Bartholomew to discuss their latest collaboration, a new Handheld anthology of classic supernatural short stories focuses on stone, marble, granite, rock, and other lithic materials, and how terrifying they can be under the wrong hands.

Tuesday 28th November, 2-3pm: Book cover art and how it works
In a repeat of her Clevedon Literary Festival talk, Kate explores how and how Handheld chooses its book cover artwork, with some forays into how book cover art works, trends and pitfalls in different genres and how a gorgeous book cover can disguise a terrible novel (obviously not any of Handheld's).

Tuesday 12th December, 2-3pm: Our changing tastes in reading. A journey along the library shelves
In a repeat of an illustrated talk given for the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution, Kate unpicks the mysteries of changing literary taste in twentieth-century British fiction, and reveals some unfortunate truths about the publishing industry. The collapse of the three-decker novel, the rise of the cheap series, and the passion for escapism all affected what and how our grandparents and great-grandparents read for pleasure.



What we've been reading

Kate gobbled up Ben Aaronovitch's new Rivers of London novella, *Winter's Gifts*, and has not been able to forget the scenes of a snow-covered lake with enormous shapeshifting snow creatures crashing through the ice trying to retrieve some nasty magical artefacts. Brrrr.

After years of it watching him from the bookshelf, David finally picked up the enormous historical novel *Hild* by Nicola Griffith, and thoroughly enjoyed wallowing in her rich story of Angles & Saxons. Just in time for its sequel!

Garden News

At the beginning of July we made an expedition into the garden at dusk to watch a newt hunting snails in the pond, and the emergence of another massive hawk dragonfly, still in larva form, hauling itself up onto one of the lily pads. That's the fourth dragonfly to hatch in the pond this year: the first one had a twisted wing so has now probably been eaten by the frogs. Yes, we had two frogs, though we've only seen them once. But all those amphibians mean that all the toadpoles have been eaten: not one baby frog or toad has been seen, and this time last year they were all leaving the pond in leaps and bounds.

In other wildlife news we spotted a field mouse in the front garden where some geranium and miscanthus stems were looking for seeds, in synchronised shivers. The mouse was climbing up and down the stems trying together, using its tail as a belay, and looking exactly like the drawings in *Brambly Hedge*, all big-eyed grey softness. It's tick season in the garden, so we are now once again expert at tweezing the wretched things out of each other's legs and arms, but no more than one a day at worst. Kate recommends Smidge for deterring them: she squirts her ankles with it every time she ventures out onto the grass.

The enormous feral raspberry canes have not produced any fruit this year, which is puzzling. The purchased courgette plants have both died, one rather more slowly than the other. But the tomato and cucumber seedlings supplied by Kate's WI friend in the village are performing perfectly. The first cucumber (fat and prickly) will be ceremonially picked in mid July, and the tomatoes will be ready in the end of the month. So, small gains, but pleasing ones, since we've never before managed to grow cucumbers without slugs taking notice.

Since we're not going to sell the house now (nobody wanted the garden, cannot imagine why), we've decided to be a bit tidier. A small shed has wanted, to hold all the gardening stuff currently cluttering up space inside and outside the back door, and a miniature canvas greenhouse is expected next week, for overwintering things that might need it, and for the seedling frenzy next year.

See you in August,
Kate

Handheld Press