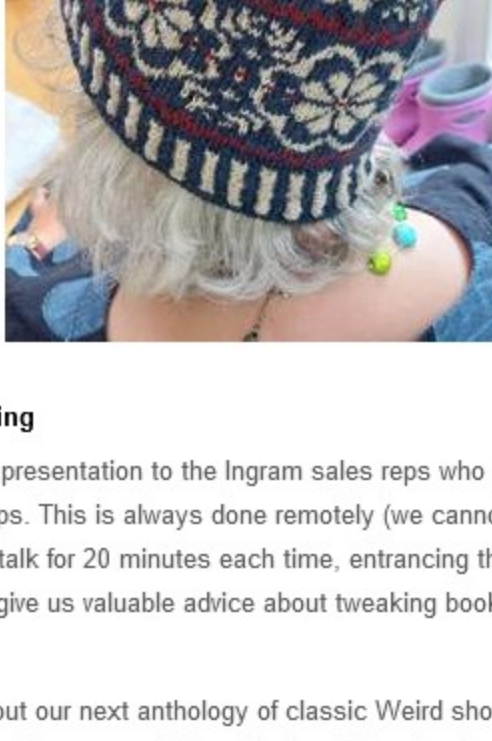


## The Handheld Newsletter

August 2023

Rather like the damp and chilly summer weather our mood is subdued this month. Probably because we need a holiday, just to get off the treadmill for a bit. We managed a road trip to Spain and Portugal in May and June (no-one noticed), and have some more short trips planned. Kate is going to Shetland Wool Week for the first time and has knitted her official SWW hat for it already. But running a business is never-ending, and although we have Amy to pack the book orders when we're away, the demands of the book trade don't stop.



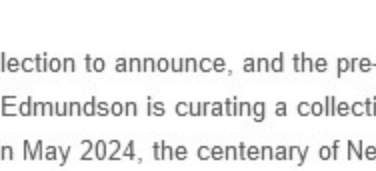
### Sales reps are demanding

Twice a year Kate does a presentation to the Ingram sales reps who sell our books in the US and in the UK to bookshops. This is always done remotely (we cannot afford to send her to New York twice a year to talk for 20 minutes each time, entrancing though her talks are), and each time the sales reps give us valuable advice about tweaking book covers and the timings of publication.

We had planned to bring out our next anthology of classic Weird short stories, *The Living Stone*, in January 2024, but the reps said No: this is a Hallowe'en book and needs to be brought forward four months. (Don't they KNOW what havoc that wreaks in a production schedule?) Anyway, we did it, and, as we type, *The Living Stone* has gone to the printers. It's going to be a tight race to get the books printed (by end of August), shepherded into the Ingram warehouse and out again in a despatch to our shippers in Basildon (a week), to get them across the Atlantic (four weeks, minimum) and on the road to Jackson, Tennessee (another week), in time for the US bookshop orders to be despatched in time for Hallowe'en. But that's what the sales reps wanted and perhaps that is why Kate is feeling so limp.

### The Living Stone

Kate will be in conversation with collection curator Henry Bartholomew on the stories and authors of *The Living Stone* on 31st October, with Henry beaming in from China where he is working. This will be a talk for the Guildhall Library from 2-3pm, and [you can register for the talk here](#).



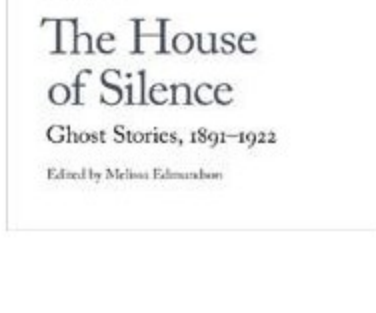
### A new Nesbit collection

We do have our next Weird collection to announce, and the pre-order page is now live. Our long-term collaborator Melissa Edmundson is curating a collection of the best of E Nesbit's ghost stories, to be published in May 2024, the centenary of Nesbit's death. *The House of Silence* will include a Nesbit story we've already published, 'The Shadow' from *Women's Weird 2*, because it is one of her best. If *The House of Silence* is to represent the best of Nesbit's writing, it has to be in there too.

E Nesbit (1858-1924) was one of the great British Edwardian storytellers, and a political activist who co-founded the Fabian Society, later to merge into the new Labour Party. She is best remembered now for timeless classic fiction for children, such as *Five Children and It* (1902) and *The Railway Children* (1906). She also wrote ghost stories prolifically for the high-paying magazine market, her imagination focused on the detail of the domestic to draw out horror, chills and delight.

Revel in the dark side of Victorian and Edwardian England, where visiting a house of strangers becomes a trial of nerve, and rediscovering the past leads you into strange and terrifying places. Stories include: 'John Charrington's Wedding', 'The Ebony Frame', 'The Mass for the Dead', 'The White Lady', 'From the Dead', 'Hurd of Hurstcote', 'The Haunted Inheritance', 'The Power of Darkness', 'The House of Silence', 'No. 17', 'In the Dark', 'The Violet Car', 'The Haunted House', 'The Pavilion' and 'The Detective'.

You can [preorder The House of Silence here](#).

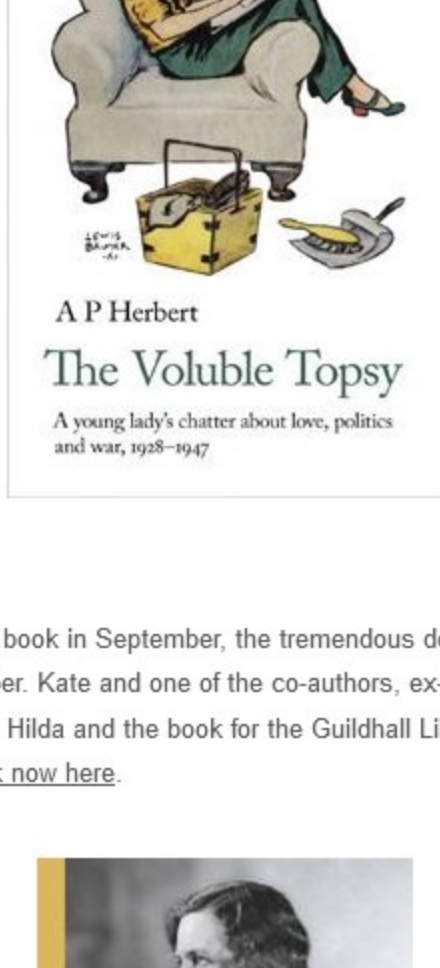


### Our Topsy

We've had some more reviews for our lovely *The Voluble Topsy* since the last newsletter:

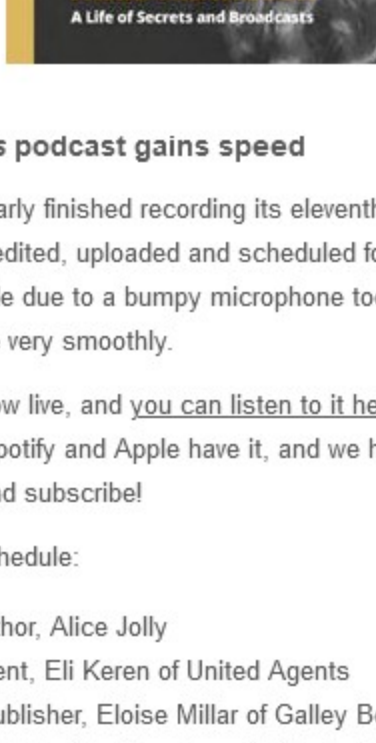
'Three cheers for Topsy!', from *The Oldie*, in the editorial no less.

'She briefly becomes a society columnist and a theatre critic (her critique of *Othello*, of which she's never heard, is possibly the funniest thing in a very funny book) ... sheer entertainment value, of course, but also a brilliant perspective not only on the world of early 20th-century society but also on the foolishness and inequities of the British parliamentary and legal system.' – *Shiny New Books*



### Our Hilda

We'll be publishing our next book in September, the tremendous double biography *Hilda Matheson*, on 19th September. Kate and one of the co-authors, ex-BBC producer Kate Murphy will be in conversation about Hilda and the book for the Guildhall Library that afternoon, and you can now [register for that talk now here](#).



### The How Publishing Works podcast gains speed

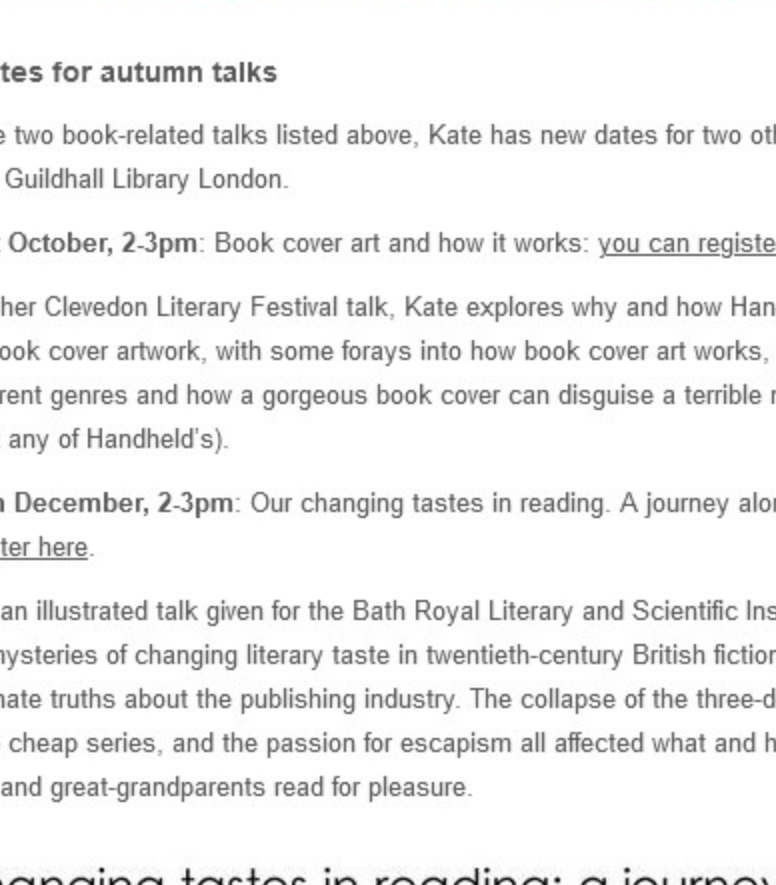
*How Publishing Works* has nearly finished recording its eleventh guest, and several of the episodes are now processed, edited, uploaded and scheduled for release from 1st September. We had to rerecord one episode due to a bumpy microphone too close to the guest's mouth, but otherwise things have gone very smoothly.

We'll be publishing the podcast is now live, and [you can listen to it here](#). It ought to be available in all the usual podcast providers: Spotify, Amazon, Apple, Google, etc. We heard this week that Castbox have it. Please do hunt for it and subscribe!

Here is the episode release schedule:

- 1st September: The Author, Alice Jolly
- 8th September: The Agent, Eli Keren of United Agents
- 15th September: The Publisher, Eloise Millar of Galley Beggar Press
- 22nd September: The Rights, Lisa Dowdeswell, Head of Literary Estates at the Society of Authors (who gives us lots of good advice)
- 29th September: The Editor, Simon Spanton of Angry Robot Books and Black + White Publishing
- 6th October: The Index, Dennis Duncan of University College London (author of *Index, A History of the*)
- 13th October: The Marketer, Ceris Jones, formerly of Sandstone Press
- 20th October: The Printer, Mark Couch from Short Run Press (who print most of our books)
- 27th October: The Distributor, Nick Parker, Head of Two Rivers, of Ingram Publishing Services (they distribute our books)
- 3rd November: The Audiobook, Arran Dutton of Audiofactory
- 10th November: The Booksellers, Janet Brakspear and Helen Simmons from The Corsham Bookshop (one of our locals).

Why have we done this? Well, it's quite hard to stop Kate when she's got hold of an idea and is running with it, but we think this is a useful public service for anyone who wants to know more about how publishing works (obviously), either to work in it themselves or to get their book published. And of course it might lead to a multi-season award-winning series with hundreds of subscribers, big-name lucrative advertisers and world fame. Or it might not. It's not really a vehicle for advertising books, but we might sell one or two more because of it. Anyway, we feel it's a good thing and we hope you enjoy it.



### Revised dates for autumn talks

As well as the two book-related talks listed above, Kate has new dates for two other online talks with the Guildhall Library London.

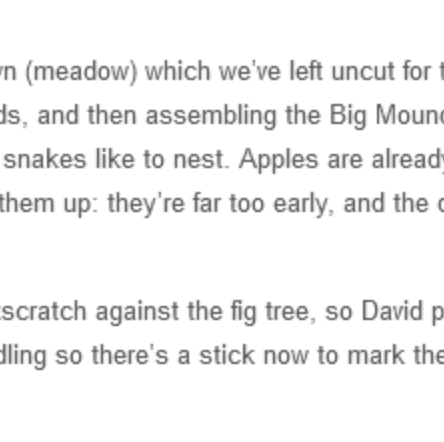
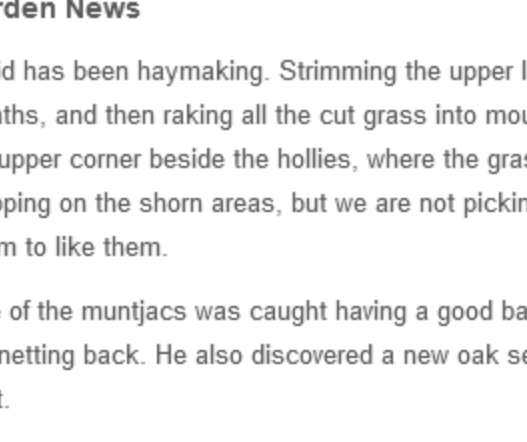
**Tuesday 11th October, 2-3pm:** Book cover art and how it works: [you can register here](#).

In a repeat of her Clevedon Literary Festival talk, Kate explores why 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 October, 2-3pm:** Our changing tastes in reading. A journey along the library shelves: [register here](#).

In a repeat of the 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.

## Our changing tastes in reading: a journey along the library shelves with Kate Macdonald from Handheld Press



### Yet more social media

Threads is the new social media channel that is endeavouring to replace Twitter, which we will not call X because honestly, no. We climbed on board Threads just as we clambered on board Mastodon, but to our mild surprise Threads is fairly good. Mastodon didn't suit us: it was very cliquey, like entering a party composed of total strangers and trying to make friends with them but being constantly told off for not adding alt text to images. Threads is certainly a chattier place, with the potential to replace Twitter, which is currently a dust zone, where posting is like shouting into the echoing void. Threads became rewarding when we got over 100 followers, and now we have a decent churn of posts coming through the feed, and actual meaningful interaction. Anyway, you can [find Handheld on Threads here](#).

And just when we thought, right, that's enough social media for one month, one of our loyal Canadian customers sent us the code for Bluesky! So we're in there too. That, we have to say, looks a lot more exciting, with all sorts of eyebrow-raising special interest feeds that give a hint of what kind of folk are populating it. We have joined the Discworld and Gardening feeds (by no means the exciting ones), and will see what happens next. You can find us on Bluesky at [handheldpress.bsky.social](#).

### What we've been reading

Kate is simultaneously reading a biography of the medieval biologist/poet/critic/novelist Helen Waddell by Dame Felicitas Corrigan, and *Mother Tongue: The Surprising History of Women's Words* by Jenni Nuttall, a history of the words used for women's bodies and what goes on inside and outside them. Both are excellent.

David has just finished *A Time of Gifts*, Patrick Leigh Fermor's account of the first part of his walk in the early 1930s from Rotterdam to Constantinople. Yes, he gets carried away in purplish descriptions at times, but the landscapes and the people he meets are a joy to read about. So much hospitality and kindness.

### Garden News

David has been haymaking. Strimming the upper lawn (meadow) which we've left uncut for three months, and then raking all the cut grass into mounds, and then assembling the Big Mound in the upper corner beside the hollies, where the grass snakes like to nest. Apples are already dropping on the shorn areas, but we are not picking them up: they're far too early, and the deer seem to like them.

One of the muntjacs was caught having a good backscratch against the fig tree, so David put the netting back. He also discovered a new oak seedling so there's a stick now to mark the spot.

We've had a young fox visit, halting rapidly as it hurtled onto the lawn while it chased a squirrel. It had a good stare at us, wondering what we were, and then trotted away. A young badger was spotted trailing up the stone steps, and a young sparrowhawk has been catching bluettits. We can always tell when a hawk is about because the bird feeder empties in a second, and the birds in the trees either make a huge racket or all shut up at once. The ravens are kronking away at the top of the hill, though we hardly ever see them.

In pond news we had sadly decided that all the toadlets had been eaten by the newts, until David found a little black one when haymaking. He put it back near the pond, but not in it, letting it make its own choices. And we saw an actual eel in the water, a young newt ready to leave the pond and consider terrestrial life for a change. A late dragonfly nymph has been seen climbing out of the water again, but it didn't look big enough to hatch. The weeds in the pond are growing mightily; we'll have to have another clear-out.

Nearer the house, David has begun terracing a border which was created twenty years ago by the developer when he added a long room to the back of the original 1920s cottage by digging into the slope of the hill. He threw builders' rubble into the border and planted it with the ugliest of municipal bushes. The soil is horrible, all yellow sticky clay and lumps of limestone and it's a nasty job trying to plant anything there, though we do try. Kate removed all the plants that she wanted to keep (not many) so David could excavate the soil and insert a bulwark made of railway sleepers. After removing the stones (one rock was the size and shape of a human skull, but it's definitely geological) and root debris, he was left with a small bag of reusable soil. The next step is to add a second terrace, fill the hole up with proper soil, and replant. It's a satisfying job but the constant rain is delaying each stage. Never mind. It'll look healthy in the autumn.

Hoping for just a little bit of sun before the summer ends,

Kate & David

Handheld Press