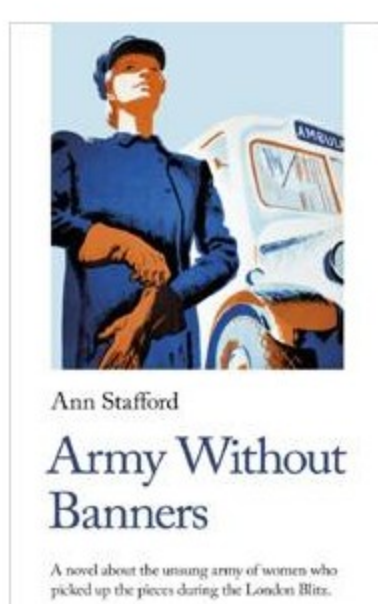


## The Handheld Newsletter

January 2024

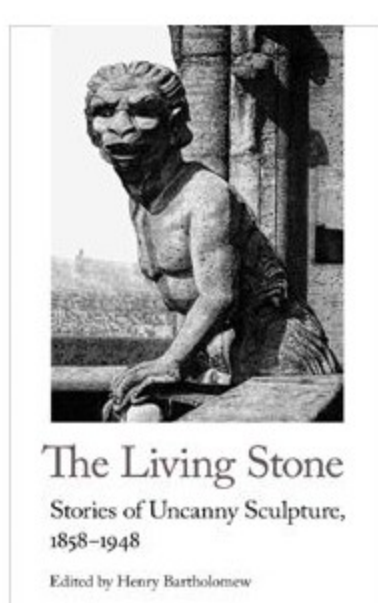
### Army Without Banners

If you're reading this after 16th January 2024, *Army Without Banners* is now published, and it's been a long gestation. As we think we mentioned some years ago, Kate discovered this novelised memoir of ambulance driving in the Second World War Blitz after we'd published *Business as Usual*, because one of its authors is the author of *Army Without Banners*. Ann Stafford was also an incisive sketch illustrator, and we think her novel and her illustrations bring wartime conditions back to life quite powerfully, the comic episodes aligning beautifully with the heartfelt, the tragic and the downright terrifying. To be read alongside *Blitz Writing* by Inez Holden, for a tremendous double act in wartime reportage by women.

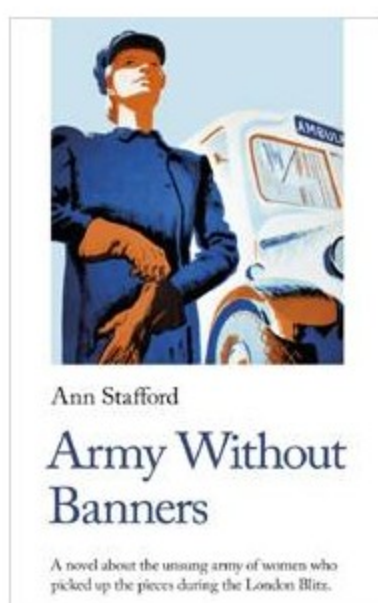


### A nice clutch of reviews

*Dead Reckonings* published a review of *The Living Stone*, edited by Henry Bartholomew: 'Another immensely successful publication from Handheld, with an erudite and fascinating introduction from Bartholomew. Not for every reader of horror fiction, certainly, but a delight for those of us who need to check, with a nervous glance, if the gargoyle illustrating the cover hasn't perhaps moved just ever so slightly'.



Sarra Manning, literary editor of *Red magazine*, included *Army Without Banners* in her Ten Best Books for January, which was delightful: 'A wonderful, inspiring novel about how ordinary people can do extraordinary things. A must-read for fans of AJ Pearce and Lissa Evans'.



Looking backward, we have an imminent review of our September title from last year, *Hilda Matheson*, in the *London Review of Books*, but we haven't seen it yet: to be trumpeted in the February newsletter.

And looking forward, the *Bookseller* praised our edition of Rosemary Sutcliff's *Blue Remembered Hills* which comes out in March: 'Acclaimed novelist Sutcliff's hugely entertaining writerly memoir of her childhood, youth, first love affairs and how Still's Disease impacted on her life and writing. Features a new introduction by Tom Shakespeare which understands Sutcliff's writing in terms of disability, pointing out how she "created, or chose to accentuate disabled characters in approximately one third of her books"'.



### Tatting + Mandolinata

We announced last week that we will be publishing Faith Compton Mackenzie's last novel *Tatting* in June. We've decided that because it's really quite a short novel, to give full value for money we will be including her first book, a collection of short stories called *Mandolinata*, in the same volume. Thus *Tatting* and *Mandolinata* will bookend Faith's remarkable life as an author almost completely eclipsed by the sheer volume of books and publicity that her husband produced on his own account.

*Mandolinata* is quite hard to get hold of, as it was published in a limited subscription edition in 1931, very expensively. Most of its fourteen stories were previously published in British and US magazines, and are marvellous reading, pulling us back into the 1920s in Capri, Rome and London. Faith's talent was for recording the speech rhythms of a historical period. As a former actress and as a musician her ear was attuned precisely for those details of character, and for describing social situations in a few, deftly chosen words. We've described *Tatting* as 'a novel about formidable women in a Cornish parish', and *Mandolinata* as 'fourteen stories about sex, love and bad marriages', which, indeed, is what they are.



### What we've been reading

Kate has been wading through the 1978 group biography of the Sitwells, *Façades*, by John Pearson. Knowing only a bit about Edith Sitwell and her poetry, and being bemused by the absolutely colossal memoirs of Osbert Sitwell, it was time to find out more. What an extraordinary group of people. Kate was initially enthusiastic and sympathetic, reading about their appalling father and bizarre home life, but the sympathy rapidly mutated into irritation and exasperation at their entitledness and vast sense of self-importance.

David has been enjoying *City of Djinn*s, a portrait of 1990s Delhi by William Dalrymple who, on a posting there immersed himself in the many-layered history and culture and made friends. A delight to watch him pull on loose ends and find relics at the end of each thread. There are horrors, but this is still essentially a happy book.

### News from the garden

The pond is still (or again) frozen, the grass is crunchy and white and the crows are competing with the squirrels for any seeds dropped by the birds. We had a few days of roe deer visiting but the herd must have moved off around the hill to a different valley. Early spring flowers are now showing: pale pink miniature cyclamen, white and purple hellebores, and some brave early primulas. We went to Cornwall in the first weekend in January and were shocked – shocked! – to see flowering daffodils and primroses already out.

In fruit and vegetable news at least one of the rhubarb plants is poking new leaves up through the frost. We bought some heads of garlic when we were in Athens in November, and it was already sprouting in a week. David planted the 14 bulbs in a large and deep tub and put it in the cold frame. By Christmas the shooting leaves were showing up against the cold frame glass, so he moved the tub to sit on the frozen ground of the vegetable bed where the leaves can't be nibbled by deer. The deer are trying their best to eat the strawberry leaves in Kate's new strawberry planter (birthday present), but can't reach the leaves on one side. So *something* is visibly growing in the garden.

Wrap up warm and think of spring,

Kate & David

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