

The Handheld Newsletter

February 2024

Yes, this is the real February newsletter from Handheld. The one you received earlier in the month was a special one-off, filed (at our end) in the Winding Down folder, since it was all about our announcement that Handheld will be winding down and publishing its last book in July this year. You might want to [pop back and have a look at it](#) if you missed it.

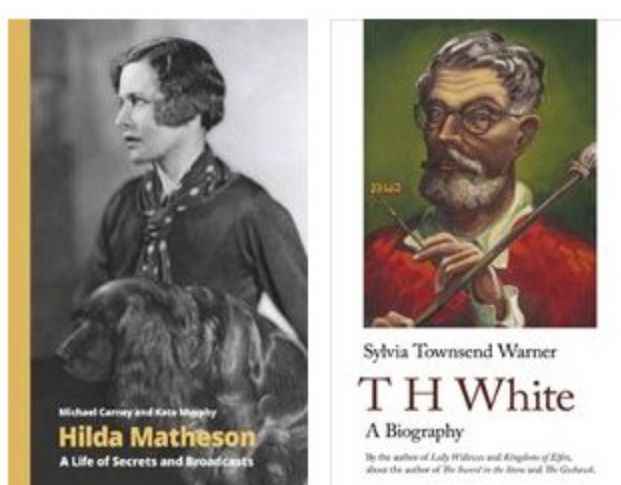
The response to our press release has been rather nice. We were top story on the Monday morning edition of *Book Brunch* (a book trade daily news digest), though we don't think any of the other press outlets paid attention. We were showered with lovely, warm messages by email and through social media, which were just delightful to read. Also a bit like hearing the eulogies or reading the obituaries at one's own funeral: not something that happens often, and the messages were truly heartwarming. Thank you, all.

And book orders surged like billy-oh. We definitely got the sense that people were panic-buying before stocks ran out. But, in the words of Granny Weatherwax, we ate'n't dead yet. We'll be selling Handheld books through our website until 30th June 2025, and through bookshops till December this year, at least.

It's been a big relief to get the news out, as we had decided that this was the way forward for Handheld back in spring 2023, and it's been a bit awkward batting away the ideas sent to us for good books that we knew we would not be in business to be able to publish. We've also been awkwardly aware that we haven't told you about any new books for months after, whereas in the normal course of things, we would have.

Reviews, glorious reviews

Shortly before the press release hoo-hah we had the rare pleasure of receiving two reviews for our books. But not just any old reviews, oh no. We wait months for a much-promised review in a heavyweight literary weekly (or fortnightly) to be published, and then two come along in one week. *T H White* was reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement*, and *Hilda Matheson* was reviewed in the *London Review of Books*. And we were very pleased with both.



Talks, so many talks

Just before you received this newsletter Kate interviewed Esther Rutter about her book, *This Golden Fleece*, for Westminster Libraries, in a woolly conversation about knitting, spinning and woolworking in Britain. Next week, on Tuesday 20th February Kate will be giving [a talk for Guildhall Libraries on books about textiles](#) from her own bookshelf.

Two weeks later on Wednesday 28th February you can enjoy hearing [Kate interview Nicola Griffith](#), author of *Hild* (2013) and *Menewood* (2023), about writing the Anglo Saxons from history, archaeology, archaeobotany and topography into superb historical fiction. This will also be a Westminster Libraries talk, which will be recorded, and will be on our YouTube channel in a month or so.



Writing the
Anglo-Saxons
Nicola Griffith
in
conversation
with
Handheld
Press



What we've been reading this month

Kate has been reading Rosemary Sutcliff's *The Shining Company* in preparation for her interview with Nicola. It's technically a YA novel, in that the savagery of seventh-century war is described in a slightly muted way. It's a fine novel, and very absorbing, based on *Y Goddoddin*, the heroic long poem in Welsh, supposedly by the bard Aneirin, about the British defeat at the Battle of Catreath in c. 600, against a much larger Anglo Saxon army led by Aethelfrith of Bernicia.

David usually prefers novels to short stories, but Michael Gilbert's *Game Without Rules* is an exception. A set of short stories about the elderly civil service spies Mr Behrens and Mr Calder, and the dog Rasselas, who work in the messier end of espionage some time shortly after the Second World War. Each story is enticing and neat and often surprising and worrying, as spy stories should be.

News from the garden

Snowdrops are dominant in the back garden this month. We can see definite evidence of worm action as the flowers keep coming up where they weren't last year. They are spreading mightily around the base of the ash tree and along both hedges. The eastern hedge snowdrops open first, as they get the sunset and the longer warmth and light than the western ones, who only get the sunrise, if they're lucky, before the sun moves around towards the back of the hill. And every day they get taller and stronger.

The rhubarb is coming up nicely too, and Kate is wondering whether to risk forcing some with her lovely rhubarb forcer, a gorgeous dome of terracotta that David bought her for her birthday about three years ago. The first rhubarb clump she put the forcer on top of promptly died, so it must have been too young and not nearly well-established enough. Now she's trying to remember which of the four available clumps this season are the oldest. This is where the garden diary, if kept up properly, would have been useful, but we have left undone those things that we ought to have done, and so we are reduced to guessing.

The hellebores in the front garden are simply magnificent: purple and pink and snowy white, great heavy flower heads bent over as if they've been drenched by rain, but always bouncing back when the downpour has stopped. Each year we think: we must plant more, and we never do. They propagate on their own.

See you in March,
Kate & David
Handheld Press