

Spring 2015

CLIS Christians *in*
Library *and*
Information
Services



CHRISTIAN LIBRARIAN

CONTENTS INCLUDE

- ***LIVING LIKE HEAVEN ON EARTH***
 - ***FAITH IN BAHRAIN***
 - ***THE NARNIAN CHRIST***
 - ***TELLING OUR STORIES***
- ***A NEW STRATEGY FOR CHRISTIAN FICTION***

EVENTS AT A GLANCE

●SATURDAY 18 APRIL 2015: ANNUAL CONFERENCE

**YMCA, 7 East Street,
Leicester, LE1 6EY.
Speakers: Diana Edmonds
and Emmanuel Oladipo.
Details: p. 8.**

WEDNESDAY 13 MAY 2015: VISIT TO BOOK AID

**Bromley Hose, Kangley
bridge Road, Lower
Sydenham, London, SE26
5AQ. Details: p. 11.**

SATURDAY 17 ANNUAL 2015: ANNUAL PUBLIC LECTURE

**Gallery, First Floor,
Salisbury Library, Market
Place, Salisbury, SP1 1BL,
from 2.30.p.m. Speaker:
Kevin Carey, Chair, *Royal
National Institute for Blind
People*. Details: p. 11.**

PRAYER NOTES FOR SPRING 2015

PLEASE PRAY FOR

●Our forthcoming activities including our 2015 Annual Conference in Leicester and Annual Lecture in Salisbury.

●The CLIS Executive Committee and its individual members. Pray, for those who are hoping to join the executive committee and those who are retiring from office.

●Current plans for *Workplace Sunday* as announced by the *London Institute for Contemporary Christianity* with support from the *Evangelical Alliance*.

●The work of Dr. Jill Barber and the *Englesea Brook Chapel and Museum of Primitive Methodism*.

●Library staff in an era of cutbacks, budget restrictions, redundancies, privatisation and other challenges.

●**Tony Collins, Penelope Wilcock**, *Lion Fiction*, and others involved in the writing and publishing of Christian fiction.



FOUNDED IN 1976 AS THE LIBRARIANS' CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

An organisation 'in liaison' with the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals.
Affiliated to: Christian Research Association; Christians at Work; Evangelical Alliance; Transform Work UK; Universities' & Colleges' Christian Fellowship. Web Site: www.christianlis.org.uk

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THE FIRST WORD

EDDIE OLLIFFE notes a “lesson to self” after attending a Christmas Eve service in his local Parish church

LIVING LIKE HEAVEN ON EARTH

I attended Christmas Eve Holy Communion in our beautiful old Parish church. Sat directly behind me was an elderly Surrey parishioner who grumbled his way – quite loudly – right through the midnight service. For starters, the Scripture reader had pronounced the word, ‘*Lin-e-age*’ as ‘*Line-age*’, and even worse, had read the passage from one of the modern translations. Then, not only was the Vicar wearing brown shoes, but they also looked quite scuffed! All of these comments were made in a stage whisper. I had to stop myself from turning around and asking the gentleman quite why he had come out that evening. When the ‘Peace’ was offered, I did turn around and offered my hand, but the man in question sat there implacably with arms folded, and it was left to his wife to take my hand ‘in peace’!

What a shame. My friend had missed so much of what was a delightful Christmas service. He had singularly failed to see the good in those around him, as he sought only to focus rigidly on what may well have been good in its time; older language and external correctness. Was he right in his comments? Possibly. Did *he* lose out that night? Absolutely. As he left the Church, I felt a sense of sadness towards him. I prayed that he might be

able to transcend his annoyance and come to see all that I had seen in the church that evening – the deep mystery, and the sense of God in the thought-provoking lyrics and readings, and in fellow human beings. I took it as a *'lesson to self'* as I myself get older – to try to be positive in the midst of change, to encourage youthful input, and especially to welcome new ideas and different ways of doing things.

MT magazine said recently, *'Work with and talk to positive people, their attitude will rub off on you'*. Their advice is spot-on. Surrounding yourself with positive people is vital. I've been fortunate in my career to have worked with many colleagues in that category. I'm blessed to have such a team now at *Christian Literature Crusade UK*. It makes a considerable difference to what can be achieved. Negativity kills. It eats up too much time in unproductive discussion.

These inspiring words were written by Mother Teresa: *'What you spend years building, someone may destroy overnight. Build anyway'*. And this powerful, but probably anonymous verse has been attributed to various writers: *'Dance like there's nobody watching, Love like you'll never be hurt, Sing like there's nobody listening, And live like it's heaven on earth'*.

Whatever you face in this coming year, I hope that you'll always aim to find the best in the people around you.

Eddie Olliffe is President of CLIS and Consulting Editor for ***Together*** Magazine. He blogs at <http://eddieolliffe.wordpress.com> and is on *Twitter* at <http://twitter.com/eddieolliffe>

THE SECOND WORD

LOUISE MANNERS has to remind herself that she is not in the United Kingdom when visiting an Anglican Cathedral many miles from the home country

FAITH IN BAHRAIN



A multi-racial congregation extended a warm welcome to visitors, prepared for '*Nine lessons and carols*', sold ties for charity and knitted woollen squares for *St. George's*, Baghdad. Several times during the service at *St. Christopher's Cathedral*, Manama, Bahrain, consecrated in 1953, I had to remind myself that I was not in the UK. Bahrain also has a Roman Catholic church, a building with both Roman Catholic and Anglican congregations making a second Anglican church, and a second Catholic church and at least three Orthodox churches (including Indian and Syrian). King Hamad bin Isa al Khalifa has provided land for the largest Catholic church in the Persian Gulf to be built.

After coffee and cake in the hall I entered the souk. After the quiet of the cathedral, the experience was like an explosion of vibrant colours, noise and aroma. The greeting and haggling noises grew louder and the food aromas stronger as I

progressed through the souk. Carpets and rugs, shirts and robes made to order, shoes made to order and Turkish lanterns were all for sale. Bahrain also has a Tree of Life. A thirty-two foot tall tree aged about four hundred years stands in the desert and flowers twice a year. There is no apparent source of water.

A taxi took me to the Bahrain National Museum. The museum charts the history of Bahrain, formerly part or the entire Dilmun or Holy Dilmun, from Stone Age man, pre-Islam, Islam, the first drilling for oil to the present day financial and services centre.

Dilmun, mentioned in the ***Epic of Gilgamesh***, was a trading centre and the capital of an empire. The exhibits range from archaeological finds, photographs and descriptions of ancient burial mounds and small items from them, data on the preservation of ancient monuments, social history description and tableau to culture. Some exhibits feature horns of and images of the oryx of the Arabia Peninsular, now extinct but re-introduced from the wild. There is a display space for current exhibitions. Mannequins wear Bahraini traditional clothing and feature in tableaux representing events such as weddings, birth of a baby and the baby being taken home to its father's house.

I very much enjoyed sitting on the terrace by the museum café watching the power boats cross the bay, birds land and take flight again and listening to the chatter from the other tables.

Louise Manners, *DipLib, MA, MCLIP*, serves as Chair of the Executive Committee of *Christians in Library and Information Services*.

NEWS

***SATURDAY 18 APRIL 2015, from 10.30.
a.m.***

***THEATRE, YMCA, 7 EAST STREET,
LEICESTER, LE1 6EY.***

***“CHALLENGES AT HOME
AND OVERSEAS”***

CLIS Christians *in*
Library *and*
Information
Services



SPEAKERS:

DIANA EDMONDS

Head of Libraries, Greenwich Leisure Ltd.

EMMANUEL OLADIPO

Formerly International Secretary, Scripture Union

SPEAKERS AND SUBJECTS

Challenges at Home and Overseas is the theme of the **Christians in Library and Information Services (CLIS)** Annual Conference which is to be held on **Saturday 18 April 2015** in the **Theatre, YMCA, 7 East Street, Leicester, LE1 6EY**, from 10.30.a.m. – 4.45.p.m.

Diana Edmonds, Head of Libraries at *Greenwich Leisure Ltd.* (GLL), who currently run the public library services in the London Boroughs of *Greenwich* and *Wandsworth*, will be speaking on the controversial topic of library privatisation and outsourcing.

Emmanuel Oladipo, formerly International Secretary for *Scripture Union*, will be speaking on *Famine in the African Church: Books, Libraries and Information Services*.

Emmanuel points out that early Christian missionaries were pioneers in education all over the continent, and the African church, by and large, has made a good effort to build on that tradition. Current challenges, however, make the whole issue of Christian literature very much an uphill task. Are there ways, perhaps, that an organisation such as CLIS can

partner with visionaries in the African Church to make a difference?

As a librarian, **Diana Edmonds** has worked in a variety of roles, in academic libraries, public libraries and in specialist libraries like the *Tate Gallery*.

Prior to joining GLL as head of libraries, Diana established an information company called *Instant Library*, and worked in the business both as a consultant and as Managing Director, working internationally in the oil industry and the rail industry. She sold *Instant Library* in 2001, but stayed with the business until 2004, going on to join *Haringay Council* in the role of Assistant Director, Culture, Libraries and Learning.

In *Haringey* the library service had failed an *Audit Commission* inspection with “no hope of improvement” but visits to the libraries increased by over 300% in subsequent years and issues increased by 150%. By 2011 the service had become one of the most popular in the country and Diana was awarded an MBE for her work.

Emmanuel Oladipo worked with the *Fellowship of Christian Students*, an affiliate of *Scripture Union*, in northern Nigeria for fifteen years before being appointed Africa Regional

Secretary, based in Nairobi and responsible for the work in some forty African countries. He moved to the UK in 1992 when he was appointed to lead the worldwide work as International Secretary. After taking early retirement he worked for some years as Africa Co-ordinator for Rev. John Stott's *Langham Preaching Ministry*.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of *Christians in Library and Information Services* will be held on **Saturday 18 April 2015**, from 11.20. a.m at the **YWCA, Leicester**, as part of the annual conference programme.

Nominations for office and notice of any motions to be put to the meeting should be in The Secretary's hands not later than *Saturday 21 March 2015*.

Nominations for the following executive committee posts are invited: Chair, Secretary/Publications Editor, Treasurer, Overseas Secretary, Web Site and E-Newsletter Manager, Library Assistance Manager, Recruitment Secretary, Scottish Secretary, Minutes Secretary, Member Without Portfolio.

Each nomination will

require a proposer and seconder and each candidate should indicate their willingness to serve in writing.

A formal agenda for the meeting will be circulated to members not less than two weeks before the meeting.

CONFERENCE BOOKING

Attendance is *not* restricted to members of CLIS and the organisers are looking forward to a good attendance. The booking fee for the day is **£26.00**, including lunch and refreshments, with a reduced rate of **£21.00** for unwaged delegates, all cheques payable to *Christians in Library and Information Services* please.

For Inter-City travellers Leicester is on the London St. Pancras – Sheffield line and it can also be easily reached from other regional centres. The venue is close to the main railway station and more details will be sent to all registered delegates.

For bookings, or further details of the Conference, please contact Graham Hedges, 34 Thurlestone Avenue, Ilford, Essex, IG3 9DU. Telephone 020 8599 1310, E mail secretary@christianlis.org.uk
Web site www.christianlis.org.uk

CLIS

Christians in
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NEWSLETTER

From The Secretary:

Graham Hedges, Hon.

FCLIP, MCLIP, 34

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If you (and friends) would like to join this visit please book a place with CLIS Prayer Secretary, Karen Hans, 14 Callendar Road, London, SE6 2QD, telephone 07936 849906, E mail ktedhans@aol.com Please indicate whether you will be joining us for lunch so that a table can be booked

ANNUAL LECTURE

VISIT TO BOOK AID

CLIS will be making a return visit to **Book Aid** at 2.30pm on **Wednesday 13th May 2015**. We will be visiting the London Bookshop which is located at: **Kangley Bridge Road, Lower Sydenham, London, SE26 5AQ**. We will enjoy a tour of the operation - a charity which sends books abroad to needy pastors: www.book-aid.org - and refreshments.

Those wanting to meet for lunch beforehand will do so at 12 noon at *La Pizza Italia* in Catford, London SE6: <http://www.lapizzaitalia.com/location.php> from there we will walk to Catford Bridge Station and take a train one stop to Lower Sydenham Station.

This year's **Annual Public Lecture** is to be held on **Saturday 17 October 2015** in the **Gallery, First Floor, Salisbury Library, Market Place, Salisbury SP1 1BL**, from 2.30.p.m.

Our guest speaker will be **Kevin Carey**, Chair of the *Royal National Institute for Blind People*, and author of the **Third Testament for the Third Millennium** series of novels. Mr. Carey is a Reader in the *Church of England* and his interests include disability, information technology and fiction writing. His talk may deal with all, or any, of these topics: watch this space for more information.

ASK FOR PRAYER

The CLIS web site now includes a form which members and others can use to request prayer for particular matters. This could be used to request prayer for work-related issues or for other matters which are of concern.

Those who request prayer can either remain anonymous, or give their names, and the requests will be forwarded to our Prayer Secretary, Karen Hans. A small team of volunteers will pray for any matters submitted in this way.

To access the prayer form visit www.christianlis.org.uk/get-involved/ask-for-prayer

Those without access to the Internet will be welcome to submit prayer requests to Karen at the postal address above. Karen will also be pleased to recruit further volunteers to the prayer team.

E-NEWSLETTER

CLIS members and personal subscribers with e-mail addresses are entitled to receive our **E-Newsletter**, sent out between issues of our printed magazine.

We have e-mail addresses for many, but not all, members, and some members with access

to e-mail have opted out of receiving the **E-Newsletter**.

We have no plans for dropping our printed publication. However, in an electronic age, e-mail provides an opportunity for disseminating information quickly without waiting for the next printed issue. We would, therefore, encourage all of our members with e-mail facilities to sign up for our e-mail list.

If you are not already receiving the **E-Newsletter** but would like to do so, please inform our Web Site manager webmaster@christianlis.org.uk

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL NEWS

Our member **Andrew Parker** continues to appear in dramatic productions at the *Lantern Arts Centre*, Raynes Park, alongside his daytime duties as Higher Library Executive at *the House of Commons*.

Andrew's last appearance was in a production of ***Miracle on 34th Street: the Musical*** staged during December 2014. His main part was as a Judge in Act 2 but he also appeared as an ordinary New Yorker and briefly dressed up as the Tin Man from the ***Wizard of Oz*** in Act 1.

KEEPING UP THE MOMENTUM

David Cameron was an unexpected visitor to the *Transform Work UK* stand at a Christian youth event last summer – although this was only a cardboard cut-out of the Prime Minister prepared for a session on Christians and Politics.

Our friends at TWUK spent a total of ten nights under canvas representing Christian workplace ministry at two major Christian festivals. *Momentum*, an event for students and people in their twenties and thirties, was arranged by the organisers of the *Soul Survivor* event and held at the *Bath and West Showground*, Somerset, between 22 – 26 August 2014. This was followed by *David's Tent*, a worship event for young people held in Steyning, West Sussex, between 28 - 31 August 2014.

Transform Work UK members were present to meet young people who were interested in the link between their Christian faith and their (present or future) daily work and to promote the work of Christian workplace and professional groups (including our own organisation which provided leaflets for display). The result was many valuable conversations and a total of ninety-two filled in “*Keeping in Touch*” forms.

You can find more information about TWUK, and its activities on the web site www.transformworkuk.org or contact 1, Christie Drive, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, PE29 6JD.

WORKPLACE SUNDAY

The *London Institute for Contemporary Christianity*, with support from the *Evangelical Alliance*, is encouraging churches to set aside at least one Sunday each year as a **Workplace Sunday**. This does not have to be a particular date in the calendar and churches can choose a suitable date to fit in with their own programmes. It is suggested that by celebrating God's gift of work and supporting working people when churches gather on a Sunday, we can recognise that our work is worship. Every day is God's day and our daily work can be acknowledged as a vital part of God's big mission.

The LICC is making resources available for workplace services including sermon ideas, song choices, and a promotional video clip. The LICC web site also lists other organisations that can provide resources for working Christians including *Christians at Work* and *Transform Work UK*.

I have already taken this idea to the minister of my own church and he has agreed to include a workplace service in our 2015 programme. I hope that other members of CLIS will do the same. Who knows, this might even provide an opportunity to mention CLIS or libraries during a Sunday service!

Churches are asked to let the LICC know that they are planning to organise a **Workplace Sunday** service. I would also like to know if your church is getting involved, so that I can monitor the involvement of CLIS members and their churches.

You can find more information at www.licc.org.uk/forum/events-courses/workplace-sunday or contact St. Peter's, Vere Street, London, W1G ODQ.

FROM THE SECRETARY'S MAILBAG

Comments on the role of retired librarians in an earlier issue drew the following response from our Stourport member **Geoff Warren**.

"I was interested to see your short piece on retired librarians in Christian Librarian, Winter 2014.

It is now over five years since I retired and although I

resigned from CILIP membership at once, I have remained a CLIS member, albeit a very inactive one.

I understand your points about "collective memory", supporting (including financially?) CLIS so it can continue to exist and praying about its ministry.

These have been the main reasons why I have not let my membership lapse.

However I can only think of three things in the last five years or so that have re-engaged my interest in my former profession – these being the death of Bob McKee (that stirred many happy memories of times when his path and mine crossed) and the opening of two landmark library buildings in which I had some involvement or interest (Library of Birmingham and Worcester's Hive).

If in retirement we choose (as I did) to seek out new and different interests (in the Church or the community/society) it is inevitable that the world of work we once inhabited will become increasingly distant as time goes by. I suspect the role of CLIS tribal elder you envisage is only going to apply to those who maintain an active involvement in the profession itself.

I have never been busier with Church, family and charitable activity and I have little or no time to spare for anything extra but if having people like me paying in their subs once a year and

praying is helpful (as you imply) I would want to remain in membership”.

FAMILY HISTORY

During 2014 I had the interesting experience of meeting my cousin Rhys of whose existence I had previously been unaware and whose wife was researching the history of my family with a view to writing a book on the subject.

This research has now been completed and ***Hedges History*** by Jillian Hedges has been written and published by the *Stone Quarry Press* of Oxford, ISBN 978-0993144004.

The book includes a section on my own branch of the family but also includes much fascinating information about cousins and ancestors that I never knew I had dating back as far as a John Hedges who was born around 1614 in Watchfield.

I had always assumed that I was the only librarian in my family but I now know that I am related to Alfred Hedges (A.A.C. Hedges, 1916-2001) who was the County Borough Librarian of Great Yarmouth and the author of many books including ***Yarmouth is an Ancient Town***, a history of the town available for many years

in an updated edition.

Jillian Hedges, the author of the book, is also a former librarian.

Another interesting member of the family is my great-great grandfather, William Hedges (“Shepherd Hedges”, circa 1831 – 1919), who worked as an itinerant shepherd in various parts of the country before ending up in Chipping Campden.

In 1909, Cecil Sharp, the noted authority on English folk music, ‘discovered’ William as a repository of folk songs and wrote down nine of the songs sung to him by William. These are now available in *Cecil Sharp House*, North London, the home of the *English Folk Dance and Song Society*.

Have other CLIS readers researched their family histories and made any interesting discoveries, perhaps even including “long lost” relatives who worked in libraries? Please let me know and I will mention your discoveries in a future issue.

JANICE PAINE enjoys a visit to Lee Abbey and considers important questions about how we read stories

THE NARNIAN CHRIST

“How C.S. Lewis re-imagined Jesus for today” was the theme of a course at Lee Abbey in Devon last November. The speaker, Rev. Dr. Jeannette Sears, has a passion for C.S. Lewis and Tolkien and has led previous courses on Lewis’s fiction, *The Hobbit* and also Dorothy L. Sayers.

Dr. Sears gave five talks looking at how different aspects of Christ and his work were re-imagined as Aslan and in themes in the *Narnia* stories.

1. Who is Aslan?

Lewis saw the need to re-present Christ for a new culture and generation. He ‘translated’ theology by using fairy tales which act as parables to introduce

ordinary people to a ‘God-figure’, using animals as analogies for God, such as “like a lion”. Dr Sears noted Lewis’s love of furry animals, and in a delightful phrase she described his version of the incarnation as the “in-fur-ation” of God!

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* [LWW] (a “beast fable”) there are clear references to Aslan as the Christ figure, e.g. as creator, judge and sacrifice. Lewis was writing after World War II and challenging false twentieth century invented versions of the claims of Christ.

2. What did Aslan do?

The great theme of atonement can be seen working out in the characters in LWW. Lewis used four metaphors to help our understanding.

- *The slave market.* Aslan volunteers to pay the ransom for Edmund, enslaved by the witch (and by pride

and addiction to Turkish Delight!)

- *The legal system.* Different theories of penance and compensation were described. There is a scene like a law court when the witch confronts Aslan.
- *The altar of sacrifice.* When Aslan offers himself as a substitute, we are shown that sin is something that separates the sinner from God and not just other people; saying sorry is not enough.
- *The battlefield.* Christ is shown as a military captain who triumphs over death by rising to new life. Aslan breathes life onto the stone figures, kills the witch and crowns the children.

3. Belief in Aslan

Prince Caspian concerns a war between the Old and New Narnians. A main theme is belief in Aslan or denial of his existence. Faith in him

leads to guidance by him and obedience to him. The renewal of Narnia starts with Lucy's deep encounter with Aslan; but those who don't believe become polarised.

In ***The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"***, we follow the children and King Caspian as they take on more of Aslan's characteristics: Caspian frees the slaves, Eustace repents of his pride, Edmund speaks of Aslan's saving work.

4. Obeying Aslan

In ***The Silver Chair*** we follow Eustace and Jill as Aslan gives them the task of seeking the lost prince. The story shows the working out of divine providence, as the characters learn to trust Aslan; even their mistakes work out for good.

The Horse and his Boy includes stories dealing with the relation of other faiths and belief systems to Aslan, who appears 'in disguise' as other lions and cats.

The Magician's Nephew takes us back to the creation of Narnia; Aslan gives the

animals Love, Reason and Speech. By an act of will, Uncle Andrew corrupts himself; in the rest of this story Lewis shows the need to use free will to obey the Creator.

5. Aslan the Judge of all

The Last Battle deals with the questions: who will be saved, why and how?

Some important themes are:

- *Heresy*: the false god Tash is said to be Aslan.
- *Last things*: Tash appears and is sent away in the name of Aslan; Emmeth is saved although he doesn't know he is a follower of Aslan/Christ.
- *The finality of heaven and hell*. Dr Sears outlined the debate concerning the theology of universalism. Lewis believed in free will and "hopeful universalism" [see ***The Great***

Divorce for Lewis's discussion of free will and hell].

- *Judgement*. In the final scenes of the book, the dwarves are in a prison of their own mind and Aslan cannot help them. All creatures come to Aslan and look into his eyes; they then either disappear into the shadows or come up and in to the real Narnia. Then the 'real' story begins!

This course was an encouragement to look for Christian and ethical themes when [re-] reading 'Narnia' – and in other works of fiction. Do we just read to enjoy a good story – or do we try delving further in for underlying worldviews or Christian themes?

Janice E. Paine, MCLIP, serves as Membership Secretary on the executive committee of *Christians in Library and Information Services*

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

News from the Membership Secretary:

**Janice Paine, MCLIP, 22
Queensgate Gardens,
396 Upper Richmond Road,
Putney, London,
SW15 6JN. Tel. 020 8785 2174
e-mail
members@christianlis.org.uk**

A warm welcome to two new members. Also listed below are those who have renewed their membership since October. We would like remind current members that subscription renewals are now due for 2015. It would be greatly appreciated if payment could be sent **before the end of April**. Minimum subscription rates for 2015 are: £27 (full rate), £17 (retired, unemployed and students), £17 each for two members at the same address; overseas (outside Europe) please add £5 for postage. If you have **changed address, job, etc.**, please let us know as soon as possible.

NEW MEMBERS

BARKER, Mr Peter D., 5 Peel Road, Wembley, HA9 7LY - Info. Asst., Aberystwyth Univ. Tel: 07456 863994 - Email: peterdbarker@yahoo.co.uk

OLORUNKOSEBI, Mr Daniel O., P.O.Box 27490, Agodi Gate, Ibadan, Oyo State 000234 Nigeria - Temp. Libn., Ibadan House. Tel: +2348033502505 - Email: ariseeagle@yahoo.com

CHANGES TO MEMBERSHIP DETAILS

JOHNSON, Dr Rachel E., 30 Fitzgerald Close, Ely, Cambs CB7 4QD - Assoc. Researcher, International Forum for Research into Children's Literature; Asst. Libn., Tyndale House Lib. Tel: 01353 968564 - Email: wanderinglibrarian56@gmail.com

STOCKBRIDGE BLAND, Ms Clare, 18 Hall Green Lane, Hutton, Brentwood, Essex CM13 2QX - Tel: 01277 223761 - Email: freaking@btinternet.com

WICKENDEN, Mr John A., 13 Fernhill Close, Hawley, Blackwater, Camberley, Surrey GU17 9HD - Tel: 01276 32913 - Email: wickenden@outlook.com

LATE RENEWALS

NEIL, Mrs Eleanor M., 563B Mahurangi East Road, Algies Bay, Warkworth, 0920 New Zealand - Libn., David Yaxley Memorial Lib., Lifeway College. Tel: - Email: librarian@etelligence.info

TEBBUTT, Mrs Lydia S., Torch Trust for the Blind, Torch House, Torch Way, Market Harborough, Leics LE16 9HL - Publications Leader. Tel: - Email: lydiat@torchtrust.org

ARTICLES

MARY BARKER introduces an initiative which she describes as “the best thing since Banoffee Pie”!

LISTEN WITH MOTHER FOR ADULTS

If you ever catch the faintest whiff of a ‘*shared reading group*’ in your vicinity, sniff it out instantly! It’s the best thing since Banoffee Pie. The ingredients are a short story followed by a loosely related poem, read by a trained facilitator, to the group who listen and follow the text, with pauses for discussion and comment. This recipe, cooked up by the English Department of *Liverpool University*, is the brain child of the *Reader Organisation* (Google them) Their basic premise is that shared reading of good quality literature improves emotional, mental and physical wellbeing. This contention is not just anecdotal but supported by research from the Neuro Sciences Department, at *Liverpool University*.

Fortunately for me, the Head of Library Services in Monmouthshire is a Liverpool graduate and the scheme was piloted in Libraries in this area just as we moved to South Wales. I have belonged to ‘*traditional reading groups*’ around the country for years and although I have always enjoyed them, I and other members frequently seem to be guilty of not completing ‘*homework*’, i.e. reading all of the novel chosen for discussion.

Good news! No homework for shared reading. An ‘*unseen*’ short story is read to the group and each session is self- contained. You get to sample the work of writers and poets you might not

otherwise encounter and enjoy wildly 'off piste' discussion about other topics and authors as they occur to members of the group.

The *Reader Organisation* has published an anthology ***A Little Aloud*** which helpfully gives reading times for these carefully chosen short stories and poems. Our group can spin out a story designated for fourteen minutes reading for an hour and a half with discussion, and then struggle to squash in the poem before being forcibly ejected for the staff lunch hour!

We meet each week in the library, usually at least 12/14 of us, not always the same people. The membership list had to be closed and we are now planning to split the group and meet in a very attractive day care/respice care facility in a suburb of Abergavenny. There is another group which meets in the library and a teenage group, and one which meets in *Usk Prison* as well as other groups around the county. It is the sort of enterprise which impresses local government threatening cuts to library provision as it can be a real force for good in a community.

The scheme has been enthusiastically received in Monmouthshire so do start demanding it in your area. I tell Library Staff about it when I pop into a local library on holiday elsewhere in GB! Yes, I know that is rather sad, but in Wales you can surrender your home library card and receive a visitor's card to use for holiday reading! If only I were as evangelical as this about my Christian faith and CLIS!

Mary Barker, BA, serves as Library Assistance Manager on the executive committee of *Christians in Library and Information Services*.

Dr. JILL BARBER celebrates the witness of a significant Christian movement and introduces the work of the Engelsea Brook Chapel and Museum of Primitive Methodism in Crewe

TELLING OUR STORIES

My Story

My career began in 1974 as one of six enthusiastic young children's librarians in the *London Borough of Newham*, under the inspirational leadership of Miss Gribble. What an exciting time to begin a career in librarianship. Out in the community, creating access to the exciting world of books for those who had few, if any, in their homes.

Later on, in 1993, welcoming students at Aberystwyth station is a memory I will always treasure. Coming for the very first study school as part of a new distance learning degree in Information and Library Studies, we were all buoyed up by the excitement of this new opportunity. Access to career development for those unable to attend a traditional course.

In 1995 I encountered the thrill of working close to the hub of the nation's life. *Westminster Archives* gave me the opportunity to exploit my PhD research into using and interpreting historical sources for local and family history. As Education Officer, what fun we had discovering women's history, protest movements, African Caribbean heroes and heroines such as Mary Seacole and Olaudah Equiano. I saw stories changing lives in primary schools across the city.

Libraries, Archive and Museums began to work more closely together during the all too brief era of the MLA. As Head of Heritage Services for *Hertfordshire* from 2006, I delighted in the community benefits that could be achieved through a range of HLF funded projects: Hidden Talent, Hidden Histories, Making Memories, Out of Sight Out of Mind. The clue is in the name - creating access, revealing new avenues to explore, valuing the story we each have to tell.

Now I find myself as Director of a small and unique heritage project, with a chapel, a museum, some archive material and a library. *Englesea Brook Chapel and Museum of Primitive Methodism* is one of four heritage for mission sites supported by the *Methodist Church*. Looking at the past, questioning the present, and shaping the future.

What have I learnt? It is exciting to bring the strengths of three professions together. Archives preserve records, museums tell stories, and libraries create access, helping people to use the records to discover stories for themselves. All are important, but that is why I am a librarian!

Neil Hudson called us '*guardians of stories*', but I believe we are called to be more than keepers of the keys. Our role is to unlock the stories, to tell our stories, and encourage people to find their place in the continuing story.

Englesea Brook Chapel and Museum of Primitive Methodism

What is the Englesea Brook story? As well as the exhibitions and displays, the books and the archives, the conversations which open up in the tea room are an important part of what happens here. It is above all a place of encounter. A place of challenge and questions. More than one visitor has announced that they are '*anti-God*'. Many are attracted by the ethics of faith,

of democracy and justice. For Christians there is the challenge of what it means to go back to the basics of the early church.

'What is Primitive Methodism'? In 1739 John Wesley, an Anglican clergyman, began field preaching as a way of reaching people outside the church. His followers were nicknamed *'Methodists'* for their practice of prayer and Bible Study. It was a movement committed to the poor and marginalised, visiting the sick and those in prison as well as converting souls. Salvation was for all, through the unconditional love of God, in Jesus Christ. After Wesley's death, the movement's emphasis on education and holiness meant that Methodists began to move away from their humble roots.

In 1799 a carpenter named Hugh Bourne was converted through reading Wesley's sermons. He and others engaged in open air preaching, wanting to follow Wesley's example and reach out to ordinary working people. Old Methodists (Wesleyans), looked down on those who sought to reconnect with the enthusiasm and simplicity of early Methodism. More democratic, valuing inclusion and equality, Bourne's followers became known as Primitive Methodists. In 1932, the Wesleyans and Primitives united to form the Methodist Church of today.

A Working Class Movement

It has rightly been said that the Trade Union movement owes more to Methodism than it does to Marx. Primitive Methodists took their faith into the workplace. Through the chapels they learnt to read, to lead small groups, and go out and preach, often to hostile crowds in the open air, facing imprisonment as they dared to challenge the status quo. The gospel message shared by these brothers and sisters, was that only God is our Master. Women and children were called to preach as well as men. In 1816, Sarah Kirkland became the first woman minister, paid as a full time itinerant preacher. She had a tremendous ministry

across Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and up into the North East. Many of the early trade union leaders were 'Prims', as were the first working class MPs, such as George Edwards, whose autobiography, ***From Crow Scaring to Westminster***, makes inspirational reading.

Today, the stories of these men and women, like Tommy Hepburn and Jim Simmons, Dorothy Ripley and Elizabeth Evans, raise questions about faith and community. How do we live out our Christian witness? How do we engage in contemporary issues relating to the poor and marginalised? Who are those who are not included in the church today? What does it mean to be a Christian in the workplace? Should Christians be more involved in politics?

The Power of the Press

Hugh Bourne was very aware of the power of the written word. Converted by reading, he had a vision to use the written word to spread the gospel, and empower the growing 'connexion' of new Christians. In 1821 he and his brother James bought an Atlas printing press from London, at the cost of £384, and set it up in the barn of the family farm at Bemersley, near Tunstall.

From 1821 to 1842, an astonishing array of Primitive Methodist literature rolled off this press. You can see the press today in *Englesea Brook Museum*, one of only four known to survive. An early bestseller was Hugh Bourne's ***Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs for open air meetings and revivals***, so popular that at least eight pirated editions were produced by 1823. Among the examples of tiny publications in the Library at *Englesea Brook*, all bound by hand by local girls, are children's magazines, sermons, autobiographies, and my favourite, ***Family Receipts***. Sold at one penny, this four page tract includes the recipe for Mrs. Bourne's breast ointment, and how to cure a cow choking on a turnip!

My Primitive Methodist Ancestors

Many visitors come to *Englesea Brook* in search of their family history. Hundreds of thousands of people have an ancestor who was a Primitive Methodist. A complete run of the ***Primitive Methodist Magazine*** (1819-1932) is a goldmine for the stories of obscure lives. Obituaries of women, working men and children spring out of its pages. A mission tool then and now, they recount the joy of coming to faith, the assurance of salvation, and the importance of dying a good death. They are full of glimpses of life as farm labourers, miners, fishermen and servants. Many are illiterate, there is a one legged soldier, women dying in childbirth, a father who took his young family to America. *'For five years amid the heat and cold of Canada, he struggled with the trying conditions of a settler's life'*, before returning to his native land, *'on the eve of a terrible civil war'*. Other stories are of men drawn to the Gold Rush in Australia, and the ministers sent out to help them.

The descendants of these pioneers in faith often have no connection with the church today, but are thrilled to discover how faith shaped their ancestors' lives. While not sharing that faith, they recognise that it gave them courage, taught them to love, and overcome impossible odds.

In 2014, *Englesea Brook Chapel and Museum* won a national award for the Best New Community Archive Group. Volunteers are helping to set up a one-stop shop for information about Primitive Methodist people, places and topics, www.myprimitivemethodists.org.uk. It is exciting to see comments and stories added daily by people all over the world. A favourite moment was receiving a photo from Equatorial Guinea of the grave of a Primitive Methodist minister who died in 1901 in Fernando Po (now Bioko Island).

Finding Our Voice

This year I face a new challenge. In June I will be inducted at the Methodist Conference in Southport as Vice President of the *Methodist Church* for 2015-16. With the President, the Rev Steven Wild, Chair of the Cornwall District, our theme will be *Mission and Heritage*.

In 2014 I was interviewed by Quentin Letts for a Radio 4 programme, '*What is the point of the Methodists?*' Again and again I have been asked, where are the voices of Methodists today? As Christians, we need to find our voice. To be passionate advocates for the Kingdom of God wherever we are. To speak out for those who have no voices. To create access to the hidden treasure in our libraries. To share the inspiring stories of people who have lived with courage and conviction. To tell our own stories.

Hugh Bourne was a very shy man, who put much store in the '*conversation sermon*'. In going for a walk with his cousin he was able to share his conversion story, which led Daniel Shubotham to his own experience of the love of God. In our conversations, may we learn how to tell our own faith story appropriately, and enable others to share theirs.

Dr **Jill Barber** is currently Director of *Englesea Brook Heritage for Mission project*. If you would like to visit the Chapel, Library and Museum, go to www.engleseabrook-museum.org.uk. She is Vice President designate of the *Methodist Church* for 2015-16. She trained as a librarian at *Aberystwyth University*, and has worked in libraries, archives and museums in the London Boroughs of *Newham* and *Barnet*, the *City of Westminster*, *Cambridge*, *Aberystwyth*, *Hertfordshire* and *Cheshire*.

TONY COLLINS and PENELOPE WILCOCK introduce the recent Lion Fiction imprint and suggest some characteristics that need to be present if novels are to succeed as art rather than propaganda

A NEW STRATEGY FOR CHRISTIAN FICTION

The Christians in Library and Information Services Annual Lecture given on Saturday 18 October 2014 in the Meeting Room, Central Library, Harpur Street, Bedford, MK40 1PG

Tony Collins

I have 'two hats': I am the publisher of *Monarch* books, which I started in 1988. Much more recently in March 2013, under *Lion Hudson* we started *Lion Fiction*. I am responsible for those two imprints within *Lion Hudson*, a company based out of Oxford. *Lion Hudson* itself, to give you some background, is a wholly Christian publishing company; it is independent and privately owned as a PLC by its shareholders. We release about two hundred titles per year, of which more than one hundred are full colour children's books, and we are working currently with publishers from all over the world – in two hundred and ten languages. Approximately 12% of our turnover is in Brazilian-Portuguese. So when we are publishing books in the UK we are not just publishing for the UK, we are truly publishing for the world.

Lion published, under the 'old' Lion identity before it became *Lion Hudson*, quite a lot of the novels of Stephen Lawhead, which I am sure you are familiar with. At one point, Stephen Lawhead had his own shelf at W.H. Smith. So it is entirely possible that you can penetrate, with novels that have a Christian core, right into the heart of the general marketplace. It

is not a specialist area.

Lion Hudson was then formed through the merger of Lion and another publisher, *Angus Hudson Ltd* in 2004. At that time the *Monarch* imprint, which I was responsible for, generated about four to six Christian novels per year. That continued for quite a long time but, while we met with some success, the problem was that we needed to raise our output to be taken seriously, because the fiction buyers at W.H. Smith and Waterstones, Bertrams and the other big stores were not prepared to give time to our representative on the basis of half a dozen novels per year. We decided that we would have to turn on the tap properly and so as result we started the *Lion Fiction* imprint in 2013.

So what is the environment in which we are publishing Christian novels?. Fiction has been a massive component of the output of Christian publishers, in the United States at least, for decades. Pioneers such as *Tyndale*, *Bethany* and many others, have turned tracks of virgin forest into Christian romance, Christian history and Christian suspense. Some of it has been excellent, although one has had to ask on occasions if it would have given more glory to God in its original form or if it was turned into a book. (I sometimes joke that the Lord designed it as a tree and he knew what he was doing.) The fine ones, such as those by Francine Rivers and Jan Karon, are genuinely excellent, and one of the novels which we publish with great success is ***Redeeming Love*** by Francine Rivers. It remains our no. 1 seller.

There is then a flood of material coming in from the US, and this brings certain challenges because much of it has sprung from the evangelical wing of the church in the US. It has become a staple diet for many church bookstalls across the Atlantic, and this means that the strengths and weaknesses of that branch of the faith – that is to say confidence and energy, but perhaps also a certain narrowness of outlook - have been part of the fiction offering. However, most of the sales of these books have been in the US and selling this form of Christian fiction in the UK has sometimes been difficult. Partly this is because most of the books have been written by Americans and sometimes the language, culture and assumptions are simply unfamiliar. But it's also the case that the experience of Christians elsewhere in the world is very different from the US: it is entirely possible in the States to spend your life in a Christian bubble. Your week revolves around church; your cultural life is drawn

from Christian speakers and Christian musicians; your political judgement is determined by the faith statement of that particular politician rather than his or her social and economic views; your faith affects everything you see and do and it can be quite strange to see this from another perspective. Alastair Campbell, when he was Tony Blair's press secretary, had said to the press: "*We don't do God*". Now from an American perspective you have to do God – it is a very different world. America is a big complex energetic culture and so is the American evangelical world, and in that context it makes perfectly good sense for your leisure time to be occupied by Christian reading and listening. So to a large degree your perspective of the world is seen through 'Jesus-coloured' eyes.

In the rest of the world where there is a strong Christian component of the culture, in say Britain, or Australia or New Zealand or Singapore, this sense of living among the redeemed is less common because men and women of faith feel themselves to be in some degree culturally on the back foot. If your church has ever tried to offer a service to a local council in Britain you are likely to know what I mean. People regard you with a great deal of suspicion. Are you looking to evangelise? This experience translates into all sorts of other areas. For example, our journalists and TV commentators and our opinion-formers will pass by on the other side and won't recognise the Christian perspective. A particular example of this was the Scottish Referendum where we heard that the issue had galvanised people and that it was being discussed in schools, youth clubs, bars and so on. Virtually every church in Scotland was focussed on the event as well, but the Christian contribution scarcely got a mention at all. It is as if that particular corner of our culture, our world, gets painted out. In the UK, at least 15% of the population goes to church once a month, but it is as if we did not exist. There is an assumption of irrelevance.

The situation though is not quite as dire as it used to be. At *Lion Hudson* we have had some genuine success in getting authors featured in the mainstream media. In particular, we sell children's books in significant quantity to W. H. Smith and M&S. If you will forgive the shift from literature for a moment, you may have noticed that the *Real Easter Egg Company* has had significant success in penetrating into the confectionary market, and they are doing a Christian advent calendar this year, for example. In 2015 their easter eggs will include a booklet telling the real Easter story, produced by a company that I represent.

Nevertheless the statistics of church decline do not make for glorious reading. A piece of research produced by *TearFund* a few years ago described the kinds of people least likely to be in church. If you were young, poor, or male you were very unlikely to be in church, together with one other category – Christian! So many people had left the church in the previous two decades that quite a significant proportion of the sample were people who used to go to church but didn't any longer.

However, there are some genuine glimmers of hope, and there is one in particular I am pleased to be able to report: George Lings at the *Church Army Centre* in Sheffield has done some research into '*Fresh Expressions*' and has found that as a consequence of this initiative in England alone, the numbers who have joined *Fresh Expressions* are the equivalent of four additional dioceses in the *Church of England*. There are forty-four dioceses in England, so this is a significant increase. That is just the *Church of England*. *Baptists, Methodists, Salvation Army* etc have their own initiatives, and there are also non-affiliated groups who are aligning themselves with *Fresh Expressions*.

Last autumn I walked the four hundred and ninety miles of the Camino de Santiago. That's the same distance from Hastings to Edinburgh. It took me thirty-three days. I was not alone. Last year, 215,000 people walked enough of the Camino to obtain a certificate of pilgrimage. Relatively few were active Christians but a lot described themselves as '*spiritual*'. So the door is open and that is the context in which we need to talk about Christian fiction.

There are other green shoots. The Black churches are showing fantastic growth in London in particular. In the south of England the Catholic churches are booming, especially with the influx of Polish migrants. However, it is also true to say that not everybody is pleased by this development. Someone whose name rhymes with Hawkins would be especially horrified, I think! Next year we are publishing under the *Monarch* imprint a new volume by Dr. Sean Oliver-Dee, who is a Fellow of the *Royal Historical Society*, called ***God's Unwelcome Recovery: why the new establishment wants to declare the death of faith***. There is real evidence that there are a lot people who would like to keep this news under the carpet. We ain't dead!

So how does this relate to Christian fiction? One consequence of this long season of alienation, a gradual draining away from as far back as the 1920s but in particular since the 1960s with a falling off of energy and poor demographics, has been that many Christians – and particularly perhaps on the evangelical side - have become both committed and defensive. Christian fiction with its assumptions of faith and at times cosy prose, has felt rather irrelevant. Sometimes it has been perceived as too frivolous for the task in hand: if your back is against the wall you won't necessarily want to turn to a novel.

However, I believe passionately that this is a profound error, for the following reasons. First of all, a lot of people like reading fiction. You will know from your work as librarians that fiction remains astonishingly popular, and there is huge choice. To be able to give pleasure is a great gift, and to a degree people will open their doors to a good story-teller. Secondly, once you are absorbed in a story you begin to dismantle your defences; you entrust yourself into the hands of a story-teller, start to suspend judgement, and become open to new ideas. Thirdly, fiction is one of the areas in which values are formed and allegiances are developed and I believe that Christians should be out there sowing seeds, battling with the best tools available. Fourthly, the best fiction is always about truth whether it's Christian fiction or anything else: a really good novel will have a core of truth.

We were talking earlier about C.S. Lewis. After 1947 C.S. Lewis published no more material in the fields of theology and apologetics. Instead he focussed on devotional, fictional and biographical material. In 1949 he wrote to Carl F. H. Henry, who was the first editor of the American magazine ***Christianity Today***, because Henry had asked Lewis to write an article for the fledgling magazine. Lewis refused, and wrote to apologise, with the words: *"If I am now good for anything at all, it is for catching the reader unawares, through fiction and symbol. I have done what I could in the way of frontal attacks but I now feel quite sure that those days are over."* Eloquently he wrote elsewhere of the task of the teller of tales: *"I thought I could see how stories of this kind [e.g. Narnia] can get past a certain inhibition, which had paralysed much of my own religion in childhood. Why did one find it so hard to feel as one was told to feel about God or about the sufferings of Christ? I thought the chief reason was that one was told one ought to. An obligation to feel can freeze feelings. The whole subject was associated with lowered voices, almost as if it was something medical. But supposing all these things were cast*

into an imaginary world, while stripping them of their stained glass and Sunday School associations one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency. Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons? I thought one could.” The Narnia stories were written between 1950 and 1955, so there was Lewis in 1949 setting out his stall and the Narnia tales were part of the result of that train of thought.

In the context of a sceptical society, the task of ‘*stealing past dragons*’ has never been greater. As I said, good fiction focuses on the truth about the human condition; it rings bells. Any truly satisfying novel will do this whether it is Christian or not. But the Christian novelist, I believe, has several advantages: compassion for the human condition, for example; a taste for health; a truth sense; an eternal perspective. This does mean however, that any Christian novelist like any man or woman entrusted with a divine commission must be walking the road of blessing, because you cannot offer what you do not know.

The next question which faces anyone in the world of books, particularly those of us who have to make choices about which books to publish, is the issue of genre. I’ve just returned from the *American Christian Fiction Writers’ Association* in St. Louis, where six hundred novelists were present, and they were awarding prizes in two categories: the *Genesis Award* for unpublished novels and the *Carol Award* for published novels. Prizes were being awarded for the following genres: contemporary, historical, historical romance, mystery/suspense/thriller, novellas, romance, romantic suspense, short novel, speculative and fantasy, and young adult. Now the point that immediately leaps to the eye is that there are effectively three romance categories, which says something about both readers and writers. *HarperCollins Christian Fiction*, which was formed last year from the merger of Thomas Nelson and HarperCollins, publishes sixty Christian novels a year. One third of those are in the romance category. This output is dwarfed by the ‘*Love Inspired*’ range of Christian romances from *Harlequin*, which incidentally is represented in the UK by *Mills and Boon*. The *Love Inspired* range has over seven hundred and sixty books on its list and they publish over two hundred and forty new Christian romance novels a year. It seems almost impossible to publish in any other genre!

So far our experience of publishing romance under *Lion Fiction*, in the eighteen months we have been operating the imprint, has been rather

limited. We publish Claire Dunn's marvellous romantic suspense series ***Mortal Fire*** and its sequels. I do commend these to you- they are brilliantly written and they have already won some awards. Another one is ***Making Marion*** by Beth Moran (our first piece of chick-lit!) We are quite proud of this. When it came out, it received a starred review in ***Publisher's Weekly***. "*This is a debut novelist to watch*", it said. We are starting to get out past the '*watchful dragons*'. Here is Beth Moran getting noticed by the main trade organ for the book world in North America.

However, if you look at the top selections in ***Love Reading*** in the UK you will see that crime and mysteries and thrillers all feature very strongly. This is where we have been focussing our efforts thus far and amongst these we have published someone called Mel Starr. His first book called ***The Unquiet Bones*** is a novel that he wrote after retiring as a history teacher in Michigan. Coming to the UK for an end-of-career trip, he went to the village of Bampton, near Oxford, and there he found in his host's library the novels of Ellis Peters – the ***Cadfael*** series. He thought to himself '*I can do this*'. For most of us this gets no further than the next television programme, but Mel Starr was of a different mettle. He went back to the States and put himself through a fiction course at college. Then at the age of sixty he wrote that first novel, but he came up against the reality that no-one wanted to try anybody new. He sent it to every significant publisher and significant agent in North America and after two years had received a series of rejection letters. At which point he talked to his old tutor back at the writing course, and his tutor advised him to send it to me as a sort of last resort. It took me two years to persuade my colleagues to take a risk with this untried, unpublished American novelist whom no-one had heard of, who had no public profile, and no social media presence. We have now sold over 50,000 copies of that book. He has recently published his seventh novel, which is called ***The Abbot's Agreement*** and which sold five thousand copies in a month, and he is just about to deliver the eighth novel in the series.

These are grand 14th century whodunits. When I sent him the contract for the first novel, he sent me an email back saying '*Tony, if this works, I'd like to buy a Corvette Stingray*'. Last summer he sent me the photograph! It's a photograph of him driving this car through the high street in his town of Kalamazoo in Michigan, with an admiring crowd staring at this beautiful sportscar, with a senior but distinguished author at the wheel. And this came about because of the ***Chronicles of Hugh de Singleton*** series. So it can work. It is so rewarding from a publishing perspective to be able

to be one part of the machinery which has made that happen. If you look him up on Amazon, there are lots of starred reviews.

However, the problem that you face when you are trying to generate fiction from within a sceptical environment is that you don't want to follow the American model of fiction with its characters automatically turning to their favourite verse or who mutter a grace before tucking into their supper. From a British perspective this sounds like preaching. It's important to be careful here because you cannot use fiction to preach without undermining its potency.

Let me try and make a stab at defining Christian fiction, not least to distinguish it from Christian propaganda.

To illustrate the dangers of propaganda, let us look at a piece of secular propaganda. Consider Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*. The first two volumes *The Northern Lights* and *The Subtle Knife* were brilliant novels, justifiably applauded as masterpieces; but *The Amber Spyglass* rapidly degrades into anti-Christian polemic. Frankly, it's embarrassing. It's barely readable; it's crude knockabout stuff. The hatred has overcome the judgement. So propaganda is our danger here, and it is the primary reason that I turn down material that is submitted to me as a publisher. Propaganda makes its characters into mouthpieces, and they become dull cardboard-cutouts. In the plays of George Bernard Shaw, you come across characters where they are just there to expound an argument. It becomes tedious. Essentially, in the Christian context, if you can see the point of the conversion arriving over the hill along with the cavalry and a big sign in the sky pointing down, the subtlety and the tension and the flavour of the novel are dispensed with.

So what makes a novel Christian, or if you prefer, a Christian novel.

Firstly, the fact that it is written by a Christian: if they are a thoughtful, praying servant of the Most High, what is written will carry something of the fragrance of heaven. You can't bottle it but it is there to be discerned. Secondly, I believe it will have something of the redemptive thread running through it, because the Christian truth is that we are not condemned but

in Christ we have the hope of glory. This changes the way that we see people and see events. This is not to give everything a sugar-coating. Juliet remains dead and Desdemona does not rise from her bed and embrace her murdering husband. But there is always the possibility of repentance, there is always the promise of grace because no-one is wholly evil. If you read ***The Hawk and the Dove*** series, by Penelope Wilcock, you will see that there is a character called Prior William, who is quite horrible in the first three novels. But there is a fourth novel and things change.

Thirdly our Christian novels will be both sceptical of the lies that we tell about ourselves and the garbage that we believe about ourselves. This means, for example, that our heroes and heroines are likely to fall off the holiness wagon, but equally that our utterly useless comic creation who is vain and self-deluding, who is the butt of everyone's joke, will not be completely without dignity, because there is the capacity to be more nuanced here. Every fool was created by the Almighty.

So what does Christian fiction affirm?

First of all I would like to suggest that it paints with the entire palette. I have tried to read the book ***Gone Girl*** twice now, but I find that its despairing view of the human condition makes it, to my mind, quite repugnant. At ***Lion Fiction*** we have produced a title by a new author, Henry Vyner Brooks, entitled ***The Heretic***. It is set in the time of the dissolution of the monasteries, around 1536. I think this is a very fine book. A colleague of mine has compared it to C.J. Samson's ***Shardlake*** series, but says that , in one respect at least, it is better than Samson's "*because Samson brings a 21st century consciousness to the world of faith, whereas Vyner-Brooks, who is writing as a Christian , takes a different, less-sceptical and more serious attitude to faith.*" In other words it is in this respect a more convincing portrayal of the period. If you are painting with the entire palette you won't be working within the same restrictive view.

Secondly ,a Christian novel should be feeding people's imagination with new possibilities. Once you are in the hands of a good novelist, you are open to new ideas. Christians obviously have no monopoly here but I am looking for originality in the books I review.

Thirdly, a Christian novelist ought to be able to make goodness palatable and attractive. I think we can build plots and characters around profound Christian insights, such as the power of truth; or the nature of service or the nature of servant leadership; the place of sacrifice and the possibility of forgiveness, and the possibility of redemption; the place of reconciliation and healing in human affairs; even – but with a heavy dose of caution – the possibility of the miraculous. In our faith there are such big themes to turn into novels: honour and betrayal, love and lust, cruelty and kindness, faithfulness, spiritual growth, and so on. These are found not only in the Bible, but in our history, and they give us great material to turn into fiction. So we have a fantastic opportunity.

In creating the fiction list with *Lion Fiction*, we have tried to find books which are grounded in the faith but which do not have a Christian agenda. More particularly they do not assume any faith on the part of the reader. As Christians we are not offering faith, we are offering truth, which is an important distinction.

We don't include overt sex, gratuitous violence, or bad language in our books. That does not mean that our books are not scary or full of erotic attraction, or full of danger, because these are novels for adults and contain adult themes.

So what have we done so far and what are the results? Is it working? We are, after all, a commercial publishing company.

We set ourselves the target of producing twenty-five new novels per year, from all over the world, drawn from different cultures. We haven't quite got there yet but we have published about fifty novels on the list so far. There are some real challenges because it takes a long time to assess fiction: it is far easier to assess non-fiction than fiction. We initially assumed we would get a lot of good material coming in from the States but most American fiction assumes too much faith, and we want to avoid anything with too overt an agenda.

On the other hand we are finding that we are getting some truly good

authors coming through our doors. One of them is Pam Rhodes, a name familiar to you. We have been delighted with her ***Dunbridge Chronicles***, the first being ***Fisher of Men***

E-books have become a big part of our world, and most of the books aimed at adults are published in an e-book version as well as in print form. E-books really are opening up a new area for us.

This is where we are at now. I wonder what your experience is in placing fiction with a Christian core before an unbelieving public?

Penelope Wilcock

One of the questions we were asked to look at today is whether it's permissible to use fiction to preach a message. I don't think you can really stop it, or help it. I have a vivid abiding memory from my teenage years when my sister's boyfriend, who later became my brother-in-law, had been to see ***A Clockwork Orange*** at Bishops Stortford cinema; when he came home he borrowed my sister's false eyelashes because he wanted to put one above his eye and one below his eye, to be able to walk through the village looking like the man in ***A Clockwork Orange***. But I would have said that he, aged about seventeen, didn't believe that he'd been influenced by anything. With something like ***A Clockwork Orange*** people will ask "*Does something like that affect you?*" or "*Does it change you?*" or "*Are you influenced by what you have seen?*" . People will say no to those questions or perhaps assert that there is no message; but even if you are intending something to have no message at all, or no content, you do still end up with a message, but your message is nihilism.

Another iconic moment for me was a time when my daughter was just coming to the end of her art and design degree, and she had chosen for her final exhibition to do the work of the symbolism of the four gospels. So she had her exhibition stand, which had the various graphic representations that she had drawn upon, showing the language and the

power of the gospels, and taken that imagery in graphic form. Close by, on the other side of the corridor was a young woman who had chosen for her theme and final piece 'Sex with no meaning'. What she had were a lot of very careful, anatomical drawings of genitalia. I think she thought she was saying nothing, but her work was not devoid of a message. It did tell us something about the direction of her generation, and something about her disillusionment. It actually spoke volumes. So any artistic work will speak and bring a message, intended or not.

One of the very oldest stories from the Christian tradition is the *Binding of Isaac* from the Old Testament. This story has been drawn from its ancient Hebrew roots into the Christian tradition because of the similarity the church sees between Isaac carrying wood and bound on the altar by his father with the redemptive death of Jesus. But if you go back and look at this in its original context, the story is being told in a time when they are thinking about moving from their Canaanite roots, which included sacrifice of the first-born child to avert disaster, towards a substitutional animal sacrifice instead. Try to imagine that context, the people sitting round the camp fire listening to the story: the ancestor of Israel, Isaac, is in danger and everything hangs on his survival. Isaac is the child born in Abraham and Sarah's old age. He is the single thread who is going to carry forward the hope and the promise of God for Israel. Here he is, taken by his father, to be bound at the altar.

The story is so full of suspense. First of all you get what the old Hebrew commentators describe as being like the one-sided part of a two-sided conversation, where God says to Abraham: "*Take your son, your only son, and sacrifice him on the mount of Moriah.*" The commentators invite us to expand that because you can see a whole conversation in that instruction. This now looks like:

God: Take your son
Abraham: Which son? I have two sons
God: Your only son - your son Isaac - and take him to Mount Moriah, and there you will sacrifice him.

There is then a tussle and a struggle between God and Abraham, and we feel Abraham's reluctance as he goes slowly and as the story unfolds they talk about looking at the mountain in the distance, and gradually over days

coming nearer and nearer. As they get to the foot of the mountain, Abraham says to his servants: “*You wait here, the boy and I will go on alone together.*” There is this sense of impending doom and dread about what he is going to do to this child. They get the firewood, the father’s got the knife, but where is the animal, the sacrifice? But *you* know, as the person hearing the story, that the sacrifice is the child. The father takes the knife in his hand, and at the last moment, the angel stays his hand and draws his attention to the ram caught in the thicket.

This story will move people off from child sacrifice and on to animal sacrifice much better than any kind of leaflet or sermon. There is something wonderful written by Mary Evelyn Tucker, writing about the environment and climate change and the future of the earth. She said this: “*Environmentalists have been working to address ecological issues for many years by means of science, policy, law and economics. These approaches have had their effect in terms of legislation, but not necessarily in terms of behavioural change. We need to incorporate religion and spirituality, philosophy and history, literature and the arts. These disciplines show us how humans are moved, by beauty, love, story and symbols. Story-telling and symbolic consciousness bring us into emotional intuitive and embodied ways of relating to the earth.*” There is a picture, which shows in graphic form, everything I am talking about. It shows how I imagine the people of Israel with the story of the *Binding of Isaac* gathered round their camp fire with the mystery and the imagination of all that’s being brought to them in terms of story, that will be life-changing.

Another way of helping people to change track usefully, by the power of story, is a means that was taken to educate people in Africa about AIDS, and how to halt its spread. It had proved difficult to get the message across by means of clinics, nurses and informational leaflets, and broadcasts of that kind. What they did was hire somebody to script a story that was like ***The Archers***, a story to be told in episodes, and broadcast on the radio. People began to follow it, and by that means the educational material about the spread of AIDS, and how to prevent it, was effectively communicated: if you can go through the gateway of the imagination, instead of the cerebral gateway of the intellect then you can get across the most complex and sophisticated concept to even a small child. It goes in intact. An analogy is the way vitamins are better for you if you have them in the whole fruit, rather than in the form of a pill. The vitamin does its work by being together with other things. It’s the same with information:

even if it is life-changing, it won't work for you unless it comes in a way which is holistic. What fiction does is to deliver truth in a holistic form.

I've asked myself the question: what kind of truth belongs to fiction? I've identified three kinds of truth that rightly belong to fiction. Firstly, you need authenticity in the detail of settings, history and incident. If you are going to write a novel you have to get your research in place. I can remember one time when I was a child, I came across a novel called ***The Good Master*** by Kate Seredy. I absolutely loved it. When I became a grandmother, I went back to it and thought I would give it to my grandson to read when he is a bit older. However, in the intervening years I had kept goats, and whilst reading along with ***The Good Master*** I came across the part where the girl, the main protagonist, was encouraged by her rural host to drink up her bowl of rich yellow goats' milk. I now know that goats' milk is only ever a snow white colour. I put the book down and didn't finish it. The whole story was shattered for me. It didn't matter what Kate Seredy said after that: she had got it wrong. Authenticity is absolutely crucial in the kind of truth you have to see in fiction.

Secondly, there is authenticity of character and encounter, where consistency and accurate representation of types matters. For example, people with Asperger's Syndrome or people who are suicidal or chronically sick or children require authentic handling. In books written by grown-up men for grown-up readers, very rarely are children well-portrayed. In the book that I helped to work on this time last year, there was a two year-old who was taken from pillar to post in the setting of extreme danger, not being allowed to go to the toilet or make a noise. Never was the red pen so abundantly used in the margin of a man's book! The setting says that the child cannot be kept quiet – it won't work. The child must be fed, it will be crying etc. You have to have the realistic representation of your character type. It's that sort of truth which you need in a novel.

Thirdly, there is spiritual insight in a world-view or message. For example, we see in ***The Brothers Karamatzov*** the author exploring faith and love versus intellect and logic as a conduit of hope and truth, proposing the romantic rather than the pragmatic world-view. We see it too in ***Oliver Twist***, challenging social evils, or in Ursula Le Guin's ***Earthsea*** novels where life has pattern and meaning, and illustrating the importance of tolerance and understanding. Jane Austen's ***Pride and Prejudice*** has it

in the title-: these are the things which are the stumbling blocks to love.

These are the kinds of truth then that belong to fiction. They are about authenticity and what life is really like. Christian fiction has a very strong base to build upon in terms of communicating a message, in as much as we believe in a God who revealed himself as I AM. We believe in a Lord, who said of himself, "*I am the way, the truth and the life*". That proposes an understanding of truth as something which can be known as a person, which is nuanced, which is known like you know somebody, rather than as a doctrine or as a creed, to which you acquiesce. With that kind of truth, you are right in there with the type of communication in the novel. The novel can give you truth as truth is in a person, because that is the purpose of a novel. Truth is complex: there is usually more than one point of view in a situation and fiction is made for exploring the complexity of truth, when polemic and propaganda are inherently one-sided and over-simplified. Fiction has the advantage of being able to present debate and not necessarily with an implied conclusion. So the Christian gospel can appear as a point of view in a novel without the novel descending into a tract. The Christian point of view is therefore given a fair hearing, as an aspect of the world's stage.

What kind of truth does not belong to fiction? Firstly, dogmatism, propaganda and plot conformity to ideals. I'm thinking of the archetypal conversion narrative when for example on page seventy-six the erring boyfriend wanders unawares into a church where there happens to be a good sermon being preached, and he falls to his knees at the altar rail, after which he comes back a changed man to his girlfriend, who in spite of his previous unfaithfulness and alcoholic behaviour takes him back and life is wonderful thereafter. That kind of truth does not belong to fiction. Secondly, there is the kind of fiction which presents truth in rambling dialogues or monologues. All we hear on page after page is the author's point of view, where the narrative voice and the character's voice fuse as one into presenting a one-sided ideal.

Thirdly, and something we see quite often in new writers, there is the kind of writing where the author imports someone from their own life, sometimes as a walk-on role. I have been asked: "*Will you put me in your next novel?*" I have to say it's not really like that. You pluck bits and pieces that you have overheard on the tube train, or in the cafe, or you've seen wherever you go, and you weave it into the whole but the novel has

its own truth and integrity, and so your characters won't be walk-on parts of your best friend or the evisceration of the church warden you disliked particularly.

Fourthly, lovingly-wrought pages of tedious detail do not, in my view belong in novels. I think many readers must have died in Tolkien's battle scenes!

Finally, and if there is one form of truth which writing fiction is not about, that has to be *'being right'*. This is where Christian fiction writers sometimes come unstuck, because as Christianity has developed, being right has become its paramount obsession, when our focus was meant to be on love. Inquisitions and creeds 'r us! This has made its adherents punitive and anxious, and when that works its way into a novel, as the ambience of the novel rather than the fixation of a particular character, it makes very bad fiction. Certainties and didactic agendas do not suit fiction because fiction is about reality - and that kind of truth is riddled with doubt, uncertainty, paradox, change and mistakes. And fiction can also present truth in the sense of reality that may not be admirable. The reality may involve a person who is not to be emulated, but the depiction may still evoke compassion, and that in itself enlarges understanding. It makes the reader go to their own relationships with a deeper insight and a gentler judgement.

One last point about the way fiction is written. As a novelist, or a published writer of any kind, one is required, responsible and expected to create one's own platform and do one's marketing in partnership with the publisher to see that the book gets sold. The upshot of this is that you sometimes get targeted writing. An author might say "*I'm going to write a book for thirty-five year-old women who like romantic fiction*" and they will research plot scenarios to construct a book in a painting-by-numbers technique. Some think this is a *'good wheeze'* for writing fiction. It happens with non-fiction too, and in fact I walked away from one publisher of a non-fiction title (I was writing about the death of my second husband). There had been a mistake in the original contract about word-length, and as a result the publisher wanted to split the story up *'into gobbets'* and use it through the book as illustrative material for the rest of what I had written. The suggestion didn't go down well and she and I parted company. Authenticity is the heart of a novel and so it is of crucial importance that the novelist finds their authentic voice in the same way that a musician

needs to find his or her voice. They need to find the song that is in them that wants to be sung, or in the case of a novelist, the story that is in them. This way the whole thing will have a ring of truth about it.

Fiction will most certainly carry a message – all works of art do. Yet the ground or ‘compost’ in which the message takes root, and from which it can grow organically and flower and bear fruit, is on every level, authenticity.

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