

Read On



supporting blind and partially sighted people

RNIB National Library Service magazine for readers

Issue 15 Winter 2011/12

Passionate about books and reading



Choosing books

How we can help

**Booker prize
nominated author**

Stephen Kelman

Books of my life

Kevin Carey

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Read On is available in print, DAISY audio CD, braille and email

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Cover photo
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First words

From Deborah Ryan, Editor



Deborah Ryan,
Editor

Hello again. It seems a long time since our last issue as we're now only producing two issues of **Read On** per year. We've made a few changes this time – we're no longer having a book quiz (but don't worry we have included the answers to the last one), and we've added some new sections such as **Literary news**. If you want to hear about books and authors on a more regular basis we now produce a monthly e-newsletter. This is full of book suggestions and even more author interviews that you can listen to via links to our web pages. If you haven't been receiving it and would like to, call us on 0303 123 9999 and let us know your current email address.

Other developments include the new computer system for the library service which will offer you new features such as managing your own booklist. You should have received a letter recently telling you more about it and asking what kind of books you like to read. We'll keep you up to date with progress through **Read On**.

In this issue Kevin Carey, Chair of RNIB, shares the books of his life – titles that have influenced him profoundly over the years. Plus we have the usual reviews from readers and the library team and news about the Man Booker titles.

We'd love to hear any comments or suggestions you have. One reader recently asked if we could interview one of her favourite narrators: Garrick Hagon. You can read all about him in this issue. And don't forget you can hear these interviews at rnib.org.uk/readon or if you have a DAISY player why not switch to the DAISY audio version instead.

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Author Patrick Ness receiving a braille copy of his book at the Carnegie Awards (see p26)

News

Christmas hours

The Christmas hours for ordering from RNIB are:

24 to 28 December: closed

29 December: open 9am–4.30pm

30 December: open 9am–4pm

2 January: closed

Reader Services will be closed from 24 December to 2 January. And from 3 January 2012 normal opening hours resume for all library services.

You'll need to contact us by 14 December to ensure a supply of books for Christmas. Call RNIB on **0303 123 9999** or email **library@rnib.org.uk** The last order date to ensure delivery of products and publications before Christmas is also 14 December. Call RNIB on **0303 123 9999** or email **shop@rnib.org.uk**



Easy Pay

Now it's easier than ever to pay for a talking book subscription. If you are a talking book reader and you (or a relative/friend) pay for your subscription, you will be pleased to know that you can now pay by Direct Debit in ten monthly instalments.

New subscribers can also benefit from this option. If you are a braille or giant print reader and have been thinking about joining the Talking Book Service to get access to a wider range of books there's never been a better time.

The new Easy Pay option has been introduced to help spread the cost of an annual subscription over ten equal payments. Of course, you can continue to pay annually, six monthly or quarterly if you prefer.

RNIB members can also use Easy Pay to spread the cost of buying a product over £150 into ten equal payments. This offer will hopefully make it easier to buy more expensive technology products if you don't receive work or learning based funding.

For more information, contact RNIB's Helpline on **0303 123 9999** or email **helpline@rnib.org.uk**



Braille and giant print reader preferences

In October we wrote to all braille and giant print readers to ask for information about your reading preferences. This is important because we will be introducing a new computer system later next year and we need to know what kind of books you enjoy reading so we can prepare in advance.

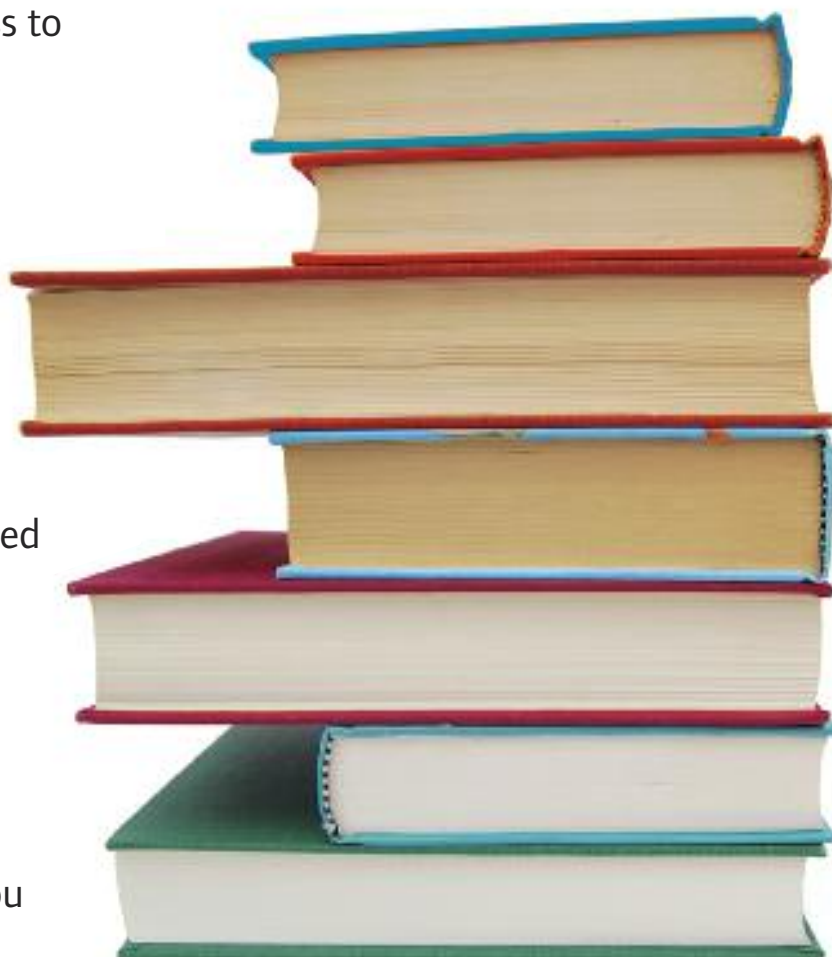
At present, we have two library management systems, one for talking books and one for braille and giant print books. These will be brought together into a single “reading business system” which will enable you to browse, borrow and buy books from RNIB more easily as well as giving you independent access to your own book lists.

When complete, the new system will automatically pick titles for all National Library Service readers if you run out of books on your list. Automatic selection already happens for talking book readers but will be new for braille and giant print readers. That’s why we need to add as much information to your customer records as we can about the books and authors you like.

If you currently select your own braille and giant print books, you will still be able to do so and the titles you choose will always take priority over

automatic selection. The system will only pick books for you when your list is empty or when titles are unavailable because they are out on loan. If we always choose books for you, then please make sure we have up-to-date information about what you like.

So, if you haven’t already responded to our letter, please get in touch with our Reader Services Team as soon as possible so we can make sure you don’t run out of suitable books when the new system goes live.



Quiz winner

Well done to Katherine Healey from Buckingham who named all the “rib ticklers” in our spring quiz correctly. We’re bidding farewell to the quiz but we couldn’t just leave you wondering about the answers. Here are the solutions to the quiz which appeared in the spring issue of **Read On**:

1. (Augustus) Gussie Fink-Nottle
2. Pride and prejudice
3. Tom Sharpe
4. San Francisco
5. Chiswick
6. So long and thanks for all the fish
7. Terry Pratchett
8. Jerome K Jerome



**565 new customers
join the National
Library Service
each month**

Braille donations

The Library often receives offers of braille books. Unfortunately, we no longer run an Overseas Gifts Programme, so we ask that anyone wishing to donate braille books contact us first to check whether the titles are needed. Due to space limitations we cannot add extra copies, except for the most popular titles.

The following materials are unsuitable for the library collection:

- magazines and journals
- books in poor condition or sets with missing volumes
- pamphlets and manuals
- audio cassettes or CDs

If you have a book you would like to be considered for the Library please contact Wendy Taylor on **0161 355 2093** or wendy.taylor@rnib.org.uk



DLA mobility increase

Changes to the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) higher rate mobility component (HRMC) mean that some blind people are entitled to an extra £30 per week from 11 April 2011. Don't miss out!

To be considered for HRMC, you must be under 65 and registered blind or certified as severely sight impaired, although not everyone will qualify. If you haven't claimed HRMC before or you've been refused a claim, we'd like to hear from you. We also want to hear from people who are registered blind or certified as severely sight impaired and receiving the middle rate care component of DLA, but who aren't receiving HRMC. You may be entitled to both benefit elements.

Call our Helpline on **0303 123 9999**
or visit **rnib.org.uk/dla**



Seeing it my way

Help us to make sure every blind and partially sighted person has access to the support they need by taking part in **"Seeing it my way"**.

"Seeing it my way" is a new initiative developed by the sight loss sector which lists outcomes that people have told us are important, such as the need for emotional support, mobility and independence. Your feedback is needed

to make sure we have the right outcomes to make changes to sight loss services.

To take part, complete the survey at **vision2020uk.org.uk/ukvisionstrategy**, or call Stephanie Village at the National Blind Children's Society on **01278 764 771**. To find out if you can attend a focus group at your local society, call Visionary on **01777 705299**.

Get organised!

Our 2012 stationery range has everything to help you remember important dates and appointments. Prices start from £3.75 (ex VAT).



Our Big Print stationery range, with its large, bold print, offers a choice of diaries – A4 (DS07), desk (DS02), pocket-sized (DS04) and year-on-year (DS06) – as well as a couple of calendars: the wall (DS03) and the foldaway calendar (DS05). There is also a Big Print address book (DS01).



Our braille stationery is very popular, so don't delay in ordering. The desk diary (BB08) is set out in an A4 ring binder with loose-leaf pages so you can rearrange or add pages. The more portable pocket organiser (BB11) comes in a smaller ring binder and has a page-per-month calendar, plus 50 blank sheets for your own notes. A handy pocket date calendar (BB10) is also available. Call us to order 0303 123 9999.

Choosing your magnifier



Choosing your magnifier

A guide to finding the most suitable magnifier for your needs



Magnifiers can make tasks such as reading your favourite book and using kitchen appliances that little bit easier.

If you are looking for a magnifier and don't know which one would be best for you, our free guide, **Choosing your magnifier** will help you narrow down the choice so you buy right first time.

The guide is available in large print (IP419), braille (IP419B) and audio CD (IP419CD), from RNIB on 0303 123 9999, and can also be downloaded from our online shop at rnib.org.uk/shop

'Tis the season to get reading

New DAISY books

We all have bookworms to buy for at Christmas, so here's a taster of what's new:



The Wilbur Smith Egyptian Novels Collection: Books 1-4, featuring River God, The Seventh Scroll, Warlock, and The Quest. Order No. 803065, £19.99.

The Brother Cadfael Mysteries Box Set: Books 1-4 by Ellis Peters takes you to the gripping world of Brother Cadfael as he investigates monastic murder and intrigue in medieval Wales. Set contains *A Morbid Taste for Bones*, *One Corpse Too Many*, *Monk's-Hood*, and *Saint Peter's Fair*. Order No. 803064, £19.99.

The Complete Inspector Morse Collection, by Colin Dexter, features a whopping 14 books – that's over 100 hours of top-notch detective fiction to get stuck into! Order No. 803067, £44.99.

And we couldn't count down to 25 December without mentioning Charles Dickens' **Christmas Stories**. Order No. 803096, £9.99.

Enjoy puzzles?

If you know someone who enjoys puzzles, our new **Giant Print puzzle book** (TC21348) would make a perfect gift. It's packed with 50 puzzles – all of

them in at least 24-point print, including the solutions. There are crosswords and word searches, as well as more unusual puzzles like speed maths. And at £2.99, it's a good price, too!



Seasonal specials

If you need a little help getting into the festive spirit order a copy of our **Shop Window Christmas Guide 2012**. It's full of tips and advice and priced just 41p.

Traditionalists amongst you will be pleased to hear that, again, we are producing our **Almanack 2012** (based on the famous Whittaker's version) and the **Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols**, our guide to help you join in the Christmas Eve carol service from King's College, Cambridge. Both are priced £4.50.

And don't miss your favourite programmes with our **TV and Radio Guide Christmas editions**. These are available to pre-order from 1 December. Call 0303 123 9999 to order.



Booker bonanza

Stephen Kelman talked to Insight Radio's Robert Kirkwood about his Booker Prize nominated first novel Pigeon English.

You said you felt like you were gate-crashing the Bookers, why was that?

I did feel that initially, coming from the background I did and not really knowing anybody who had those kinds of ambitions. There's a whole whirlwind journey from the point of publication, then on to being longlisted and then shortlisted. It was all totally unexpected and I was waiting for the letter telling me it was all a mistake. But I'm now getting used to the idea and consider myself very lucky.

Although it's been a short journey from publication to success, was it a long journey to publication itself?

It was, yes. I've wanted to be a writer since I was six years old. It's the only thing I can remember ever wanting to do. It then took me 30 years to get to the point where I had a novel I wanted to try and sell. To then reach a situation where 12 top publishers were interested and then be shortlisted for the Booker prize has been a very long but very enjoyable process.



Photo: Jonathan Ring

How long did it take to write?

It took me about six months to write the first draft. I was fortunate in a way that I'd just been made redundant so that gave me the time to push ahead and get it written. Once I'd found an agent we decided it was too long and I needed to trim it down so all in all it took about a year to write.

The story is told through an 11-year-old immigrant from Ghana. How hard was it for you to find his voice?

It was surprisingly easy. I've lived in a very diverse neighbourhood and been surrounded by people from many different countries for as long as I can

remember. Recently there's been an influx of Ghanaians who lived near me so I was able to absorb the way they spoke and interacted. I lived just five minutes from the local high school so I would listen to the kids' banter when I was out buying milk or whatever and I think it rubbed off on me quite naturally.

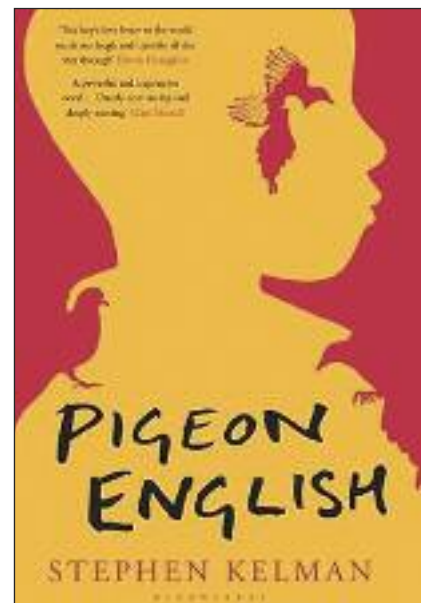
The character of Harrison is fictional but the incident he investigates is based on fact. Can you tell us about that?

Yes, Harrison, our protagonist, decides to investigate a murder: a boy he knew has been knifed to death on the high street. I took as the starting point for my story the death of Damilola Taylor which took place about ten years ago and really caught the public imagination. Not only was it a tragic and senseless waste of life but the media coverage told us what a bright and sensitive kid he was. He had come here with his family for a better life and his great ambition was to become a doctor so he could find a cure for his sister's illness. I think that sense of the loss of his potential struck me. My story explores some of the fallout from the Damilola case.

What's the significance of the title, Pigeon English?

That's just your run-of-the-mill play on words – I'm not particularly proud of that pun! There is a character in the novel, a pigeon, who appears from time to time and helps to compensate for the absence of Harrison's father who has stayed behind in Ghana. The title also reflects immigration, the fact that we live in such a diverse society with people from all over the world mixing together.

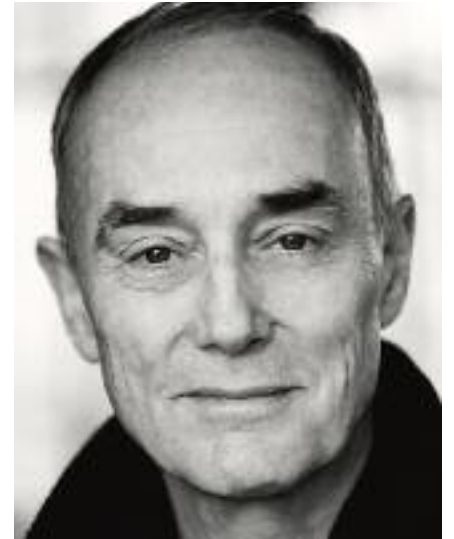
Pigeon English is available in braille 4v, giant print 3v, TB 19031.



A reminder that you can listen to RNIB's Insight Radio online at insightradio.co.uk, on Sky Channel 0188 and on 101 FM in the Glasgow area.

Narrator profile

Many of you will be familiar with the voice of Garrick Hagon who narrates fast-moving novels by authors such as Ed McBain, Lee Child and Stephen King amongst others. He's also known for his roles in Star Wars and Dr Who as well as playing the husband of Debbie Aldridge in the Archers on BBC Radio 4.



How long have you been reading for RNIB Talking Books?

Maybe 15 years or more. I added up all the books I've read, which include some that weren't for RNIB and I think I'm on my 171st book.

And what made you decide to stay?

I like it and I consider it both instructional for me, because I read so many books that actually teach me something, but also I feel I'm doing a job that I like for people who may like to listen to it. Actors don't work every day of the year and in between jobs it's awfully nice to be able to keep the machine oiled by reading.

And how do you go about preparing a book for narration?

First of all I read it. Secondly while I'm reading it, I mark it. I mark characters with letters. I know some actors who bring pictures they have cut out of magazines that give them a physical image of the character. You pick up clues as you're reading about the character, whether he speaks fast, slow, high or low or his accent and you try and make notes

so that you remember that character throughout the book.

You've been the voice for a lot of thrillers and detective novels. Did you choose those because you like the fast-moving pace or did they choose you somehow?

They always choose me. They're not books I would choose. For some reason I'm doing Alex Cross books – Alex Cross is a black detective in Washington and I wouldn't be an obvious choice but I enjoy them. I enjoy the books I read because they're generally well written, but sometimes they can be quite gruesome. Ed McBain's books are terrifically well written and not as graphically violent and with Stephen King I like the psychosis; the disturbed characters that he presents are fascinating. Then there are some like Tom Clancy which are just a real slog to get through. There's one I read called **The bear and the dragon** which must have involved every Chinese, Russian and American military man in the world, oh what a book!

What are the most memorable books you've narrated?

The one I've enjoyed most is **Huckleberry Finn** because it's so wonderfully evocative of that period and the dialect that Mark Twain gives you is so beautifully rendered in the text. The characters are so huge and colourful and it's funny, it's sad, it's got everything. It's just such a great work and I could read some passages again and again – they're just delightful.

I also narrated John Updike's essays in a book called **Odd jobs** and I remember going to meet him at a talk at the National Theatre. I lined up and as he signed the book I told him I'd read it for RNIB and he wrote, "To Garrick, the only person in the world besides myself who has read every single word of **Odd jobs**" because I'd read all the acknowledgements and the footnotes and everything!

If you were going to be stranded on a desert island and you could only take five books, what would you take?

I'd take Huck Finn, Shakespeare; I'd take a whole volume of Shakespeare. I'd probably take a James Thurber as I love

his humour. And for serious works I love Ian McEwan, I think he is a beautiful writer, a wonderful craftsman. And finally, I would take Robertson Davies, just for a touch of Canada.

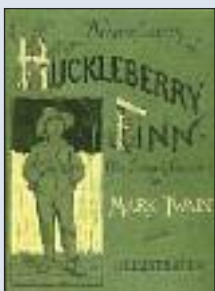
Claire McLaughlin, one of our talking book fans, would like to know what you read for pleasure.

I'm reading Ian McEwan's **Solar**. I don't read a lot out of the saddle as it were, I haven't got the time to. It's terrible because either I'm directing something like another book that I have to know very thoroughly to direct another actor reading it or I'm reading one myself for RNIB or somewhere else or I'm preparing for some other job, it's a terrible quandary!

Is there anything you'd like to say to our listeners?

These audio images are very strong and they're very powerful because they are also very personal. I'm very pleased that you've asked me to read and I'm pleased that you've told me that some people enjoy what I do because we don't often get feedback and I love it! I love to know that there are people enjoying what we do.

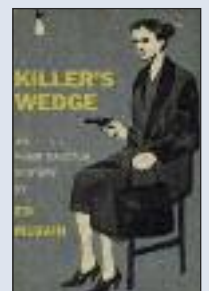
Some of the many titles narrated by Garrick:



The adventures of Huckleberry Finn
by Mark Twain TB 15501

The stand by Stephen King TB 11694

Killer's wedge by Ed McBain TB 10208



Choosing books

We know that many of our readers are new to, or are rediscovering reading for pleasure. Sometimes it can be a bit daunting finding a book to enjoy; many of us rely on recommendations by friends and family or picking up something through the radio or magazines. The National Library Service offers a range of helpful tools, such as the online catalogue or booklists but sometimes that “human touch” is needed.

If you haven't used the Reader Services Team why not give them a call for some advice? We always have tips for readers who are unsure where to start. Before you call us, think about the things you would like to read.

Think about the type of television programmes or films you have enjoyed over the years. If you were an avid Morse or Marple watcher then it's a good bet you'll enjoy crime. If you like soap operas, you might enjoy family stories. Perhaps you prefer a thriller, romantic comedy or serious drama? Perhaps you want a book to relax you or cheer you up. If you love documentaries, travel shows or the news channels, you may be interested in the various non-fiction categories. We have books on history, war, and sport, amongst others, or if your taste runs to David Attenborough there's our natural history collection. Ask for books on your special interests.



The important thing to remember is not to settle for books you don't want. We're here to ensure that you enjoy your reading experience. There's a whole new world of reading waiting for you so if you'd like some help, do give us a call.

Talking book readers should call Reader Services on 01733 375333. If you read braille or giant print, call us on 0161 406 2524.

**We send out
1.76 million
talking books
each year**

RNIB's month of reading

If you picked up a newspaper or listened to the radio during October, you will know RNIB had a focus on reading.

We published new research showing that just seven per cent of all books are fully accessible to blind and partially sighted people. This means that if you want the choice of reading in braille, large print or unabridged audio, just seven titles out of every hundred are available – including titles available as eBooks.

While the picture is rosier for fans of popular books – fifty four per cent of the top 1,000 titles are fully accessible – there is clearly a huge amount of work still to be done. We also need to make sure that more blind and partially sighted readers can access the world of reading that is opening up thanks to eBooks.

Funding this ambition is key – and our new signature event, Read for RNIB Day, gave supporters, old and new, lots of exciting ways to get involved. As **Read On** went to press, hundreds of people were signing up for reading relays, literary events, book sales and more. Go to rnib.org.uk/readforRNIBday for further information.

Throughout October, our advertising campaign featured the many challenges faced every day by blind and partially sighted people when it comes to the written word.



Drawing from your own experiences and testimonials, we made people realise that we all take so many things for granted. Whether it's reading a prescription, withdrawing cash from an ATM, getting directions to go somewhere or reading the content of a food packet, the lack of easily accessible information can leave people who have lost their sight feeling frustrated and helpless.

We wanted to make more people understand this and to highlight what RNIB does to solve these challenges.

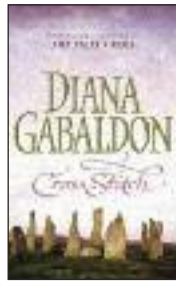
We hope that people will support us as a result, as we need their help to carry on our work and reach more blind and partially sighted people.

To find out more about RNIB and everyday reading, visit rnib.org.uk/lost or visit rnib.org.uk/readforRNIBday to read about our new fundraising event.

Reader reviews

Cross Stitch

Library user Helen Whitley has macular dystrophy and enjoys talking books. Here's her review of **Cross Stitch** by Diana Gabaldon.



"This book was brilliant because it encompassed my favourite two genres: romance and history. It's about a couple who are married and living in 1940s Scotland. Clare, the wife, goes back in time to the 1840s so it covers the history of that time in the Scottish Highlands, the Jacobites and so on. The book includes passionate romance, action and history but is also thought-provoking. There were times when I was holding my breath to find out what happened; it was a real adrenalin rush.

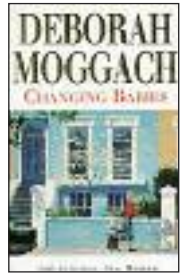
There's a character called Jamie that I think every woman would fall in love with. The dialogue is wonderful too. I learnt a lot about Scotland and it's made me want to go to the Highlands and find out more. It was narrated by Sally Armstrong who read it absolutely fabulously and really made the characters come to life.

I wasn't sure what to go for so I called Reader Services and told them I enjoyed history and romance and they recommended this one, which was great."

Cross Stitch is available in braille 18v and TB 15354.

Changing babies

Voracious reader Thelma Horrocks featured in the last issue of **Read On** where she told us about her love of talking books. Here's her review of the short story **Renting a granny** from a collection called **Changing babies** by Deborah Moggach.



"This story amused me a great deal. It's really about women's role in society and how it's changed. The main character Munro is a writer suffering from writer's block. He's been married three times and has a daughter by his first wife who's 32 and the same age as his current wife. He also has a daughter of 17 who lives with him and a son, Barnaby, who is 4. His wife is about to go on a course to "release the inner warrior" so Munro finds himself at home looking after Barnaby, which he does not find easy.

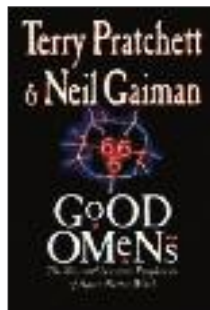
Munro thinks to himself, "why can't grannies be like they used to be". His wife's mother has Botox and HRT and does PR for a rock group. Then the old lady upstairs, who is actually the same age as Munro, comes down and Barnaby is transfixed at her knee while she knits, he even winds the wool for her. Munro thinks back to a golden age when grannies were grannies and they had a roast on Sundays. He goes up to his computer and his writer's block has disappeared and he writes a bestseller."

Changing babies is available as TB 12742.

On my bedside table

Jo Franks works in RNIB's products and publications department where she edits many of RNIB's leisure magazines. We are lucky enough to have her on the **Read On** editorial board. Jo also reviews books for the Peterborough Evening Telegraph, so we couldn't let all that expertise go to waste. Here she shares some of her recent reads.

I've been re-reading **Good omens** by Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman (braille 5v), a wonderfully tongue-in-cheek Apocalypse story. It contains witches, demons (including Crowley – an angel who did not so much Fall as Saunter Vaguely Downwards), angels, chattering nuns and some of the funniest lines my favourite fantasy writers have ever produced, not to mention some stinging observations on humans and belief.



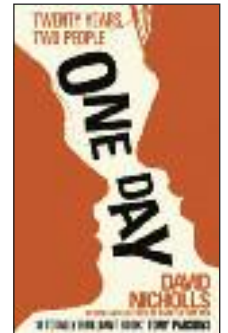
Newly besotted with Jason Isaacs, I've just finished **Case histories** by Kate Atkinson (braille 4v, giant print 4v, TB 14091, DAISY audio Order no. 800051, £6.99).



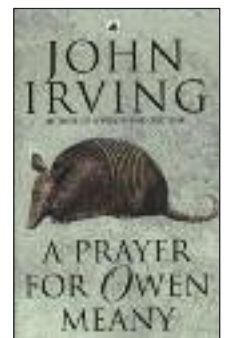
Former policeman Jackson Brodie is a private detective who finds himself investigating three cold cases – the disappearance of a small girl and two murders. Despite the dark nature of the

mysteries, there's a balancing vein of humour to lighten the proceedings, and you cannot fail to take Jackson to your heart.

I've just started **One day** by David Nicholls (braille 8v, giant print 4v, TB 16957) – a funny and (so far) bitter-sweet story about Emma and Dexter, who meet for the first time on their last night at university. In the morning they go their separate ways, but we catch up with them on each anniversary of that day and chart their lives and loves over twenty years. It's easy to see why it's achieved best-seller-made-into-a-film status.



After that I'm planning to re-read **A prayer for Owen Meany** by John Irving (braille 14v, TB 8247). It's a masterful piece of storytelling that keeps you hooked



through its many, many pages. In the summer of 1953, two 11-year-old boys – best friends – are playing in a Little League baseball game in Gravesend, New Hampshire. One of the boys hits a foul ball that kills the other boy's mother. The boy who hits the ball doesn't believe in accidents; Owen Meany believes he is God's instrument. What happens to Owen, after that foul ball, is both extraordinary and terrifying.

Books of my life

In this new feature we invite a special guest into the studio and ask them to choose five books which have had a profound influence on them on their way through life. RNIB's Chair Kevin Carey is interested in music, theatre, poetry, theology and politics. He's also an author himself. He told Kim Normanton about the books of his life.



What role have books played in your life?

An absolutely constant role. I went to a boarding school for blind children from the age of two and learnt to read braille from the age of three. I was unusual in that – and it meant that I was a “book person” from an early age. At boarding school books were a real escape for me and the only way I felt I could get a sense of privacy. We only got a television there in the late sixties so for the first 15 years of my life, books were my escape.

What book would you choose first?

Braille was fairly scarce when I was young so I read anything I could get my hands on including the entire contents of my school library. The first book that made an impression on me was during my teenage years, it was Virgil's **The Aeneid**. I read it in Latin and I still love it and read it today. I liked it because it was heroic and it was big. I love big, very long books.

And how about your second?

After a period of reading fiction non-stop throughout my sixth form

and at university, I came across George Steiner's **Language and silence**. George Steiner turned out to be the person who has most influenced the way I think; he spoke several languages fluently and knew about science and art and literature. That book introduced me to foreign literature and opened the door for me to Dante and Russian literature, Goethe and Thomas Mann, Balzac and Flaubert.

And how easy was it for you to get hold of these books in braille?

It was nigh impossible for a very long time. My braille books at secondary school were produced by people in prison braille units. And I continued this practice into adult life, so most of my George Steiner books were transcribed by people in prisons up and down the land. Even now there are four or five prisons who receive a steady diet of my theology book requests. It's a really valuable service.

What's your next book?

I went overseas and lived in Trinidad, Antigua, Accra and Nairobi from my

mid-twenties to early thirties and although I read a lot of talking books, this wasn't a great literary period for me. But when I returned to England in my late thirties the first book that really hit me hard was Marcel Proust's **A la recherche du temps perdu** [In search of lost time] which I now re-read every three years.

Is it still a challenge to get hold of these books in braille?

Specialist titles such as those by Dante are not so hard to get hold of. But it can be difficult to get the serious novel, those that are neither light fiction nor Booker prize nominated. Often by the time they come out my seeing peers have moved on to something else, which can make discussing the books with them a bit of a problem.

How about your fourth book?

My fourth book is more a class of book. Every Christmas I take a long holiday and I always read three books by Dickens: **Our mutual friend, Little Dorrit and Bleak House**, as well as a couple by Jane Austen. I love Dickens – he's my favourite British author as he wrote really long meaty books!

Which author would you say has had the most influence on your writing?

Proust, as he does long complex sentences, always has a large number of characters and it can be difficult to follow the thread as things are often picked up again a hundred pages later.

I also tend to be quite discursive in my writing.

Now to your last book, what would you choose?

My last book is AS Byatt's **Possession**. She's had a big influence on me as she and her sister Margaret Drabble are both very good at lists. And I am absolutely fascinated by long lists of apparently heterogeneous things.

And if you could keep only one of those books?

Let's put aside the Bible and Shakespeare as both of those are a constant presence in my life. But of all the rest, I'd take Proust as it's so long and endlessly fascinates me.

If you'd like to follow Kevin's weighty literary lead:

The Aeneid by Virgil
(braille 4v, TB 407646)

Several titles by George Steiner are available.

Bleak House by Charles Dickens (braille 12v, giant print 12v, TB 756) Many other titles by Charles Dickens also available.

Possession by AS Byatt
(braille 12v, giant print 6v, TB 8241).



Literary news

Booker Prize shortlist

RNIB has once again produced all six shortlisted titles for the Man Booker Prize for Fiction in alternative formats and made them available to borrow and buy at the same time as the winner Julian Barnes was announced on 18 October.

We are grateful for the ongoing support of the Booker Prize Foundation and the Man Group plc Charitable Trust, which has made this work possible.

These six shortlisted titles are:

The sense of an ending by Julian Barnes (TB 19027)

Jamrach's menagerie by Carol Birch (TB 19028)

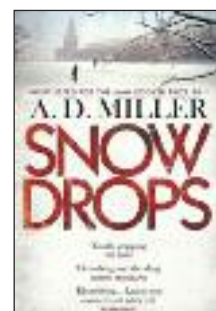
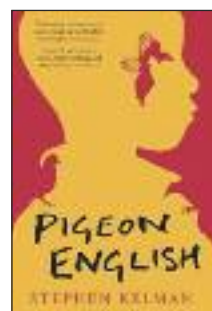
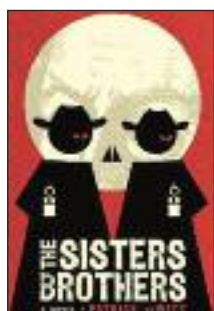
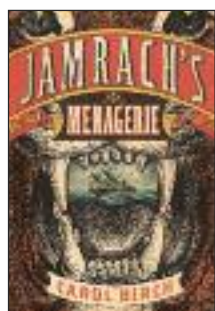
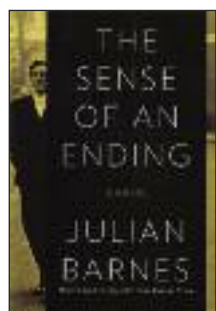
The Sisters brothers by Patrick deWitt (TB 19029)

Half blood blues by Esi Edugyan (TB 19030)

Pigeon English by Stephen Kelman (TB 19031)

Snowdrops by AD Miller (TB 19032)

All titles are also available in braille.



Neil Gaiman to adapt novel for TV

Neil Gaiman is adapting his bestselling novel *American Gods* into a TV series for the American cable channel HBO.

Gaiman, 50, is a British-born, US-based novelist, short-story writer and screenwriter whose work includes **The Sandman**, **Neverwhere**, **Coraline** and **The graveyard book**.

American Gods is based on the premise that the gods of ancient mythology exist in present-day America and are kept alive by people's belief in them (available from the library in braille 11v; soon in giant print).

Project Gutenberg founder dies

Michael Stern Hart, the man who founded Project Gutenberg in 1971, and who is also considered the founder of the eBook, died on September 6, aged 64.

Project Gutenberg was a network of volunteers dedicated to providing free online access to as many books as they could.

Hart began the project when he typed the text of the US Declaration of Independence into a computer network that he and about 100 others had access to. In an interview last year, he said the project and its partners had made more than 100,000 books freely available online.

Novelist Iain Blair dies

Iain Blair, better known to his many readers by his pseudonym Emma Blair, has died aged 68.



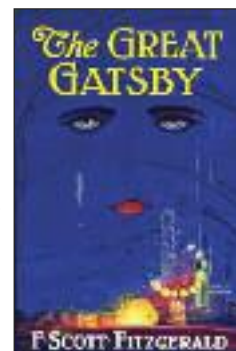
Pic: Mark Alsford

“Emma Blair” was a very popular writer and one of the most borrowed authors from libraries.

Iain, a 6ft 3in man, revealed he was Emma after 20 years when he was shortlisted for the Romantic Novelists’ Association romantic novel of the year award in 1998 with **Flower of Scotland**, and was asked to appear on the Terry Wogan show. He wrote 29 romantic fiction titles in all (the Library has a number of titles in various formats).

The Great Gatsby to hit big screen

F Scott Fitzgerald’s classic tale is getting the big screen treatment for the fourth time, with director Baz Luhrmann at the helm.



The Great Gatsby is currently being shot in Sydney with Leonardo DiCaprio as the enigmatic Jay Gatsby, Tobey Maguire as Nick Carraway and Carey Mulligan as Daisy Buchanan. The book is available from the library in braille 2v; giant print 1v; TB 1487.

Connie Willis wins 11th Hugo award

Connie Willis’s gripping portrait of London during the Blitz has won the American author her 11th Hugo award.

Willis’s two-volume time travel sequence, *Blackout* and *All Clear*, was voted winner of science fiction’s most prestigious prize by members of the World Science Fiction Society (available soon from the library in braille).

Free creative writing workshops for RNIB Members

RNIB's fifth Annual creative writing competition is open for entries. If you become an RNIB Member you'll receive exclusive access to this competition and free creative writing telephone workshops.

We're inviting all RNIB Members to submit their poems for consideration. Competition winners will receive a one to one session with a professional poetry critic who will edit their work and provide constructive suggestions for development. The winning poems will also be published in our members' magazine Vision and feature on Insight radio. Entries will be judged by past competition winners Len Scott and Peter Pascoe, award winning poets Don Patterson, George Szirtes and Todd Swift, along with a panel of RNIB Members. The deadline for entries is Friday 19 January 2012.

In conjunction with the competition we'll be offering free creative writing telephone workshops. So, if like many you find the prospect of writing poetry daunting, our free telephone workshops will help by giving you the opportunity to talk to other budding poets. The sessions will be informal and fun,

allowing you to share tips on writing, how to find inspiration and which is the best technology to use for writing. These free telephone workshops are available exclusively to RNIB Members and will run throughout November and December.

Not an RNIB Member?

Becoming an RNIB Member will give you exclusive access to this competition and free creative writing workshops, as well as a host of other benefits.

You can join today by:

- calling our team on **0303 1234 555**
- emailing **membership@rnib.org.uk**
- visiting our web pages:
rnib.org.uk/membership

RNIB Membership costs £15 a year if paying by direct debit, or £17 a year if paying by other methods.

We'll send you a membership card with our membership phone number, giving you access to a dedicated team who are ready to help.

Competition guidelines and full terms and conditions can be obtained by contacting Mel Jones on **talkandsupport@rnib.org.uk** or **020 7391 2243**.

Have you tried...

Scandinavian crime?

If you like your thrillers set in bleak locations with complex, angst-ridden detectives and great plots, you'll enjoy Scandinavian crime. An increasingly popular genre, we take a look at some of the best available from the National Library Service.

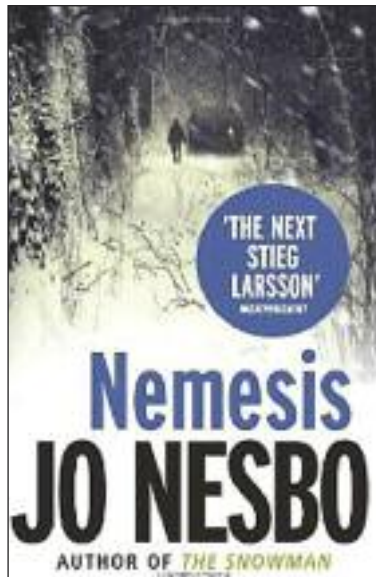
Nemesis

by Norwegian author Jo Nesbo.

Second in the Harry Hole detective series. Grainy CCTV footage shows a man walking into a bank and putting a gun to

a cashier's head. He tells her to count to twenty-five. When he doesn't get his money in time, she is executed.

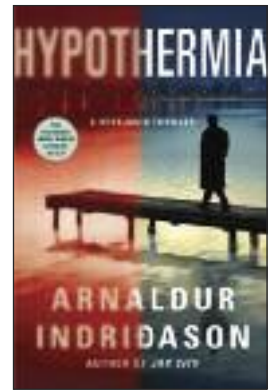
Detective Harry Hole is assigned to the case. While Harry's girlfriend is away, an old flame gets in touch. He goes to dinner at her house and wakes up at home with no memory of the past twelve hours. The same morning the girl is found shot dead in her bed. Is someone trying to frame him for this unexplained death? Contains strong language (braille 8v, TB 18343).



Hypothermia

by Icelandic author Arnaldur Indridason.

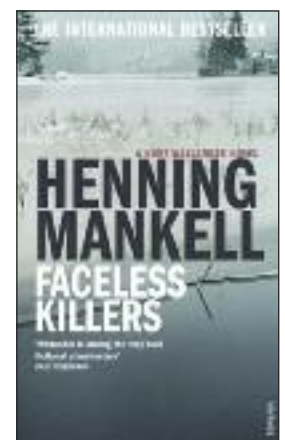
One cold autumn night, a woman is found hanging from a beam in her summer cottage. At first sight it appears to be a straightforward case of suicide; the woman, María, had never recovered from the loss of her mother and had a history of depression. But when Karen, the friend who found her body, approaches detective Erlendur Sveinsson and gives him the tape of a séance that María had attended, his curiosity is aroused (giant print 3v, braille 5v, TB 404465 synthetic voice).



Faceless killers

by Swedish author Henning Mankell.

One frozen January morning, Inspector Kurt Wallander responds to a seemingly routine call out. But when he reaches the isolated farmhouse he discovers a bloodbath. An old man has been tortured and beaten to death, his wife lies barely alive beside his shattered body. The woman supplies Wallander with his only clue: the perpetrators may have been foreign. When this is leaked to the press, it unleashes racial hatred (braille 5v, TB 14519).



Don't look back

by Norwegian author Karin Fossum. Beneath the imposing Kollen Mountain lies a small village where the children run in and out of one another's houses and play unafraid in the streets. But the sleepy village is like a pond through which not enough water runs – beneath the surface it is beginning to stagnate. When a naked body is found by the lake at the top of the mountain, its seeming tranquillity is disturbed forever. Enter Inspector Sejer, a tough, no-nonsense policeman whose own life is tinged by sadness (TB 17475).

The girl with the dragon tattoo

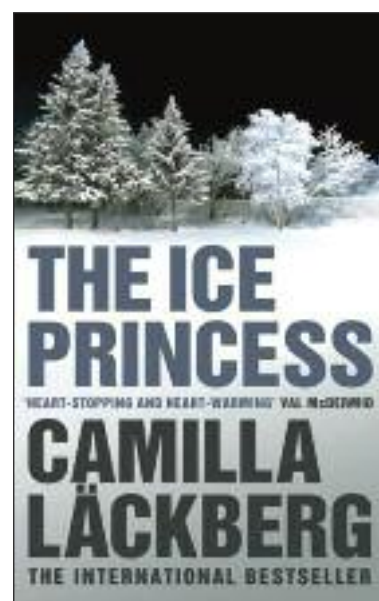
by Swedish author Stieg Larsson. Forty years ago, Harriet Vanger disappeared from a family gathering on the island owned and inhabited by the powerful Vanger clan. Her body was never found, yet her uncle is convinced it was murder – and that the killer is a member of his own tightly knit but dysfunctional family.



He employs disgraced financial journalist Mikael Blomkvist and the tattooed, truculent computer hacker Lisbeth Salander to investigate. The pair begin to unravel a dark and appalling family history (braille 8v, giant print 5v, TB 16729).

The ice princess

by Swedish author Camilla Lackberg. Returning to her hometown after the funeral of her parents, writer Erica Falck finds a community on the brink of tragedy. Erica conceives a memoir about the apparent suicide of her childhood friend, Alex. While her interest grows to an obsession, local detective Patrik Hedstrom is following his own suspicions about the case. When they start working together, the truth begins to emerge about this small town with a deeply disturbing past (braille 7v, giant print 4v, TB 17019).



Did you know...

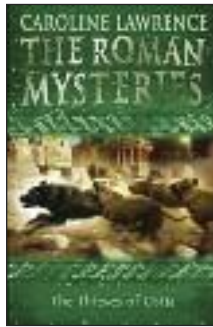
Book bags are specially made for braille and giant print and cost £5 each

Books for younger readers

Mysteries and thrillers

If you enjoy exciting books that keep you guessing all the way through you might like to choose from some of these great mysteries and thrillers available from the library.

In **The thieves of Ostia** (braille, giant print, TB 17011) by Caroline Lawrence we go right back in time to the year 79 AD. Someone is going around the ancient



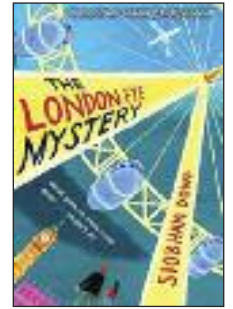
Roman port of Ostia with one thing in mind – to rid the town of its dog population! It seems that no dog is safe and Flavia and her friends decide that they need to investigate in order to track down the person responsible before any more harm is done. **The thieves of Ostia** is the first book in the Roman mystery series and is not only a thrilling page turner with a cliff hanger at the end of each chapter but the attention to detail brings to life what it was really like to live in ancient Rome.

With the past still in mind we move on to **Z. Rex** (braille, giant print, TB 17792) by Steve Cole. Z. Rex is a living, breathing, man-eating dinosaur who has been brought to life by Adam's dad. Z. Rex can talk, think and kill and has absolutely no idea why he's here! It's



only Adam's dad who knows the reason but now he's nowhere to be found. Boy and dinosaur set out on a mission to find him but there are people who will stop at nothing to stop this from happening.

Next we move to modern day London for Siobhan Dowd's **The London Eye mystery** (braille, giant print, TB 18183). Ted and Kat watch their cousin Salim get on board the London Eye but after half an hour all the passengers who boarded with him have trooped off but Salim is nowhere to be seen. How on earth could he have disappeared into thin air? It's left to Ted and Kat to play detective since the police are having no luck.



Finally we end with Sophie McKenzie's best-selling thriller **Girl missing** (braille, giant print). Lauren has always known she was adopted but she discovers that there is a real possibility she was snatched from an American family as a baby. Suddenly her life seems like a sham. How can she find her real parents? And are her adoptive parents really responsible for kidnapping her?



Please contact the Children's Librarian on **0161 355 2061** or at **childrenslibrarian@rnib.org.uk** for more recommendations.

Author interview: **Patrick Ness**

Patrick Ness was the 2011 winner of the CILIP Carnegie Medal for his book **Monsters of Men**, the third and final instalment in his **Chaos Walking** trilogy. Pupils Sonia and Jess from New College Worcester went on stage at the Carnegie Awards at Bafta to hand Patrick a braille copy of the book. Patrick is American and has lived in Britain for over ten years. He spoke to Clare Carson.



The previous two titles in your trilogy were shortlisted, how does it feel to finally win?

It feels great. Shortlisting is a great thing because of the shadowing. To have shadowers who have read all three books over three years is a fabulous thing. It means the books get read and talked about by so many people. People say why did this book win and not the others? You can't ask an author what their favourite book of the trilogy is so I can't possibly say!

I think possibly the judges have caught up with the teenagers who have given a massive vote to you doing something new.

People always say you have to give them vampires or this and that they are as hungry for a story as everybody else. I don't think that at all. As long as it's new and fresh and exciting and you take them along. Also I aimed to tell the truth about tough things, teenagers know all

kinds of tough stuff and they often get dismissed when they worry about it. I remember as a teenager being dismissed and hating it so I wanted to write a book I would have wanted to read as a teenager.

You were given your braille copy by Sonia and Jess from New College Worcester, was that special?

It was fantastic. In fact I had a teenage boy reader email me to say he'd read *Monsters of men* in braille and he made the point of saying, "all 11 volumes – 11 hundred pages of it", so I'm sorry about that! I loved getting that copy though.

Your book is about war and how war makes monsters of men but on a different planet. Where did the idea come from?

It evolved from the idea of information overload, the world is already noisy with mobile phones, texting, the internet and tweeting, what if you couldn't get away

from that and had no privacy. In the book people's thoughts are played out in front of you and you can't get away from them. You need privacy as a teenager to discover who you are.

I also wanted to talk about war and how it dehumanises other people. It started when I saw *All quiet on the Western front*, a story about soldiers suffering in the trenches during World War I and about halfway through I realised that it wasn't about American or English soldiers, it was a story about German soldiers. These are the "enemy" we see suffering and that was a revelation. We dehumanise them so we can fight them but they stay human and that is vital to remember.

You always say you know the ending before you write the book, was that the case with the trilogy?

I know the last line. I may not know how I'm going to get there but that is the exciting thing to find out. I know how I want to leave the reader because ending a book is so important.

You run a lot, is that when you develop your complex plots?

Running is great because you are using different parts of your body and brain and that's when I get my best ideas and work out my toughest plotting problems. If you are struggling when writing, just do something else, doesn't have to be running, just different from writing.

Did you always want to be a writer?

Yes I wrote from the age of seven or

eight, usually copying people I liked. I didn't think it was possible to have a career in writing so I went to college to be a film editor, but it is possible. There are lots of ways to make a living by writing.

What advice would you give to aspiring writers?

If you are going to write a book you have to write one that you would want to read yourself – you'd be amazed how many people don't! They write for what they think publishers or the market want but nobody was looking for the first *Twilight* book or *Harry Potter*, they were written by writers who had an idea they couldn't wait to read themselves. A reader can tell if you are having a great time.

The Chaos walking trilogy is available from the Library:

The knife of never letting go –
(braille 9v; giant print 3v, TB 16562)

The ask and the answer –
(braille 9v, giant print 3v, TB 16884)

Monsters of men (braille 11v, giant print 3v, TB 404314 synthetic voice, real voice in production)



World Book Night 2012

Pride and prejudice and **The Alchemist** are among the 25 titles that will be given away on World Book Night on 23 April 2012 marking both Unesco's International Day Of The Book and Shakespeare's birthday. The aim is to celebrate reading. For the first time RNIB will take part, giving away audio copies of the listed titles.

We need your help: we are looking for "givers" to pass on titles to blind and partially sighted people. If you are 16 and over, resident in the UK and interested in finding out more, get in touch with Deborah Ryan on **0161 355 2082** or email **dryan@rnib.org.uk**

This year's selection was partly chosen by members of the public, who helped to draw up a list of 100 books over the summer. The final shortlist was decided by a panel of experts chaired by novelist Tracy Chevalier, whose historical novels include **Girl with a pearl earring**. She summed up the list, "Key to all of them is that they tell cracking stories which make you stay up late reading to find out what happens."



Here's the full list for 2012:

Pride and prejudice	Jane Austen
Sleepyhead	Mark Billingham
The player of games	Iain M Banks
Notes from a small island	Bill Bryson
The Alchemist	Paulo Coelho
The take	Martina Cole
Harlequin	Bernard Cornwell
Someone like you	Roald Dahl
Tale of two cities	Charles Dickens
Room	Emma Donoghue
Rebecca	Daphne Du Maurier
The remains of the day	Kazuo Ishiguro
Misery	Stephen King
The Secret dreamworld of a shopaholic	Sophie Kinsella
Small island	Andrea Levy
Let the right one in	John Ajivde Lindqvist
The road	Cormac McCarthy
The time traveler's wife	Audrey Niffenegger
The vanishing act of Esme Lennox	Maggie O'Farrell
Damned Utd	David Peace
Good omens	Terry Pratchett & Neil Gaiman
How I live now	Meg Rosoff
Touching the void	Joe Simpson
I capture the castle	Dodie Smith
The book thief	Markus Zusak

Our Technology Support Service

Did you know we provide a Technology Support Service that can help you with problems you might have accessing books and reading generally? We have a network of volunteers across the UK who can help you by:

- demonstrating how to use talking book players and troubleshooting any problems
- showing you how to use our talking book catalogue
- showing you how to choose and order books through RNIB's National Library Service.

This used to be part of our Home Visiting Service but we recently changed the name to better reflect the type of support we provide. As well as dealing with reading related issues, our volunteers can also fix problems with your computer and other technology you use around the home. This includes setting up new computers, installing and troubleshooting hardware and software and setting up internet connections.

We hope to expand the service to include:

- eBooks, which have the potential to revolutionise access to books and dramatically improve the number of books produced in accessible formats. We want our volunteers to be able to help you to use them

- help in using Twitter to tweet about books and reading as well as using our web forum to discuss books and share ideas
- help you use social networking sites so that you can stay connected with family, friends and others who share your interests.

“After a home visit from the Technology Support Squad I’ve once again realised my independence through technology. The volunteer spent as much time with me as I needed. Nothing was too much trouble.”

To find out more about the range of support we can provide, visit our website at rnib.org.uk/techsupport or call us on **0303 123 9999**.



Behind the scenes

John Kerby is CEO of National Talking Newspapers and Magazines, based in Heathfield, East Sussex.



Tell us about your service.

The NTNMM developed out of the local talking newspaper movement which has been going now for about 40 years. About 26 years ago the idea was raised as to why this couldn't be done for national newspapers. So a remarkable man, Ted Davis, started to produce a weekly digest of the national press from his caravan in Heathfield, East Sussex and then gradually a growing number of magazines. It's now reached the stage where we produce audio recordings and electronic text of over 200 titles, including the weekly and Sunday nationals and a very wide range of magazines, in CDs, cassettes and DAISY CD. The electronic services comprise email or web download of the full text of the national papers and some magazines. We add navigation so, for instance, someone can skip straight to the sports section if they want to.

What do your customers think of the service?

Again and again we get told that it is like

old friends coming by each week, or month, bringing them up to date on what's going on in music or gardening. We have a magazine covering almost any interest people may have.

How do you decide which titles to record?

We cover the national press. We try to provide at least the leading magazine titles in any subject. Recently a number of retired doctors requested the **Lancet** for example, so now we produce that.

What is your most popular title?

By far the **Readers' Digest**. And in terms of more unusual titles we have **Classic Bus** and for those interested in spirituality **Two Worlds**.

Are you limited to how much you can record?

The audio service is constrained to around 80 minutes, the length of a CD, which is why we do digests of the papers, but you can get most magazines into 80 minutes.

Volunteers play a crucial part in the service, where do you find them?

They are mostly retired people living within a 30 mile radius of Heathfield and want to help provide the service for blind and partially sighted people. We audition our readers because we match the magazine with an appropriate voice but there are also lots of other things volunteers can do to help.

Your studios must be working non-stop?

We have about 200 titles, a lot them are weekly, which means that we have eight or nine studios recording pretty nearly non-stop making 20 recordings a day.

In 2009 you joined forces with RNIB. Has that made a real difference?

The foremost benefit it brought was financial salvation because like a lot of small charities we were struggling and RNIB's support has enabled us to keep going. The much wider advantages are that we could not reach out across the

country promoting and fundraising for what we do. RNIB with its national reach is far better placed to do that. The second main area is that we will gradually see a move towards more digital delivery so we naturally fit in to all the work RNIB is doing in future technologies reaching blind and partially sighted people.

Some of the titles available from NTNMM:

Country living

Dogs monthly

Times Literary Supplement

Money week

PC Advisor

Which?

Good food

Garden answers

Homes and gardens

OK magazine

Cosmopolitan

Woman's own

Top gear magazine



NTNM can be contacted on 01435 866102,
email info@tnauk.org.uk or visit tnauk.org.uk
ask for a copy of our 2011 catalogue





Share the gift of reading

Do you love listening to talking books? Do you know a friend or family member who would also enjoy them? Why not recommend the Talking Book Service so they can share the pleasure of a good book too.

We now offer a gift subscription to the Talking Book Service. If you know someone who struggles to read print, give them a Christmas present they will enjoy all year round. For less than the annual cost of a daily newspaper, they can discover a new way of reading. And you will be able to discuss your favourite books and pass on your recommendations for a good read.

With a talking books subscription, they can:

- choose from more than 19,000 titles
- borrow up to six books at any one time
- enjoy a speedy on-demand service with no waiting for popular titles.

Your friends and family can sample the high quality of talking book recordings online at rnib.org.uk/sampletalkingbooks or we can send them a taster CD.

To order a gift subscription to the Talking Book Service today, please call RNIB on 0303 123 9999.

RNIB

supporting blind and
partially sighted people