

# THE KITTIWAKE TRUST MULTILINGUAL LIBRARY

Hello Multilingual Library friends, and welcome back to the library newsletter, featuring links to the events and groups at the library this month, as well as contributions from our amazing team of volunteers! But first, here's...

## *A Word from Amina*

It's hard to believe how long it has taken to bring you the 4th Multilingual Library newsletter, but as most of you probably know, in the spring of 2021 we lost our home in Eldon Garden shopping centre in Newcastle and spent 2 years searching for a new space. During that time we considered dozens of buildings and bits of buildings and viewed the 9 most likely. One of these was a former library and seemed perfect, but the second time we went to view it with more of the trustees, it was raining and there was a torrent similar to Niagara Falls sloshing through the roof.... Later we signed a lease for another building this time on Gateshead High Street, but that too was in a miserable state of repair and turned out to be unsafe. Eventually we were offered the former Gloucester pub, opposite the register office at Gateshead Civic Centre.

There was plenty of work to be done, and Darius excelled himself painting the walls and creating a wonderful frieze in the children's area as well as two beautiful kittiwakes using old book pages to create the wing feathers.

Graham worked tirelessly to rip out most of the seating to leave space for the shelving. Eventually we brought our stock out of storage and began the onerous task of unpacking. We had a wonderful group of students helping with this huge job. After being in storage for so long, the books had become somewhat dusty, to say the least. Definitely a job to be done wearing gloves!



It took another year before we were able to open, but at last, on 2 August 2023, in time for the school holidays, we opened the doors and began welcoming people in.

Many are curious to know what has been done with the pub that was a family favourite and come in to tell us how things used to be. We're pleased to see that most people are happy that the building has been given a new lease of life and that they can continue to drop in and get – not a pint, but a brew, particularly as we are registered as a Warm Space through the winter months.

### *Many thanks*

Since we opened, Joe Anderson has been taking care of the daily work and supervising the volunteers. His work has been hugely appreciated and we are sad to see him go, but wanderlust cannot be fought off so he will finally be able to go off on the trip he had planned before covid put paid to everyone's plans.



*Joe*

Apart from Darius and Graham, we must also thank all the many people who helped to get the building ready, from the students and others who helped with the unpacking, Glen and Bonnie who moved our books and shelving in, Lee's team of sparkies who managed to untangle a very complicated and antiquated electrical system, the plumbers who plumbed, long-suffering Karl from the council who goaded the workers into action, the Comfrey Project who came to help rid the terrace outside from weeds and various teams of people from the refugee community who helped out when there were jobs to be done – like repainting a whole lot of iron fencing that was rusted and peeling, and generally making the building look more appealing.

We are still planning to add a mural by the one and only Frank Styles once we get the permissions and the funding.

### *Space*

Rather than having separate units as we had in the past, we have a single building with the main part of the library, a separate area for the children's books, a community space where we have chess sets, jigsaw puzzles, and other board games and a music area where people can drop in and play for a while. Upstairs we have two rooms that can be hired for classes and meetings, and a quiet room where our volunteers can go to relax, or where people can go to pray during the day.

For more details of our current activities read on – our new editor is volunteer Ana McKenna who plans to bring new life to the newsletter and will no doubt be asking you for your contributions.

*Amina, February 2024*



*Two of the new crew*



### **Coming Attractions**

We are delighted to be able to take part in this year's North East Festival of Languages.. As part of the Festival , we will be hosting the following events:

#### **20 March, 4:00-5:30pm:**

##### *Heritage Storytelling - Our Shared Roots*

Families and members of the region's diverse communities are invited to share their heritage stories and memories of their countries of origin at this community event hosted by Antonella, who also runs our regular Italian conversation sessions.

#### **21 March 2pm**

##### *Breaking Bread*

All around the world different types of bread are a staple food. In this afternoon session we will exchange stories and songs about bread from our various cultures as well as tasting breads and sharing the names of breads in many languages. Bring your tastebuds and your stories and help create an artwork for our Library of Sanctuary. In conjunction with The Comfrey Project and the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art.

#### **23 March 2-6pm**

Our official re-opening celebration, with guest appearance via Zoom of our patron Professor David Crystal, and in-person visit and talk by John Vincent from the Network. We'll also have music and poetry from our amazing library volunteers and users.

This event will also give us the opportunity to tell everyone (again!) that we were the first Library of Sanctuary in the North East - six months before the Newcastle City Library. Our award came when we were still locked down and b the time things opened up again, we had to move from Eldon Garden



### **The Late Shows**

On May 18 we will be open in the evening from 6-10pm for the LATE SHOWS. This happens once a year when museums, galleries and libraries open up in the evening to provide visitors with a different sort of experience. Look out for updates on what we'll be doing in an upcoming edition of the newsletter.



## Volunteered Thoughts: Ana

Shining a light on the people who keep the Library running. This week: Ana.

I write poetry. I prefer saying that to saying ‘I’m a poet’, because the idea of ‘being a poet’ is freighted with romanticised ideas I am uncomfortable with, but the fact is that I have been writing since I was much, much younger than I am now, and while I have worked as a journalist and written fiction and essays, what I have written, more than anything else, is poems.

I mention this because in a way, it was poetry that brought me to the Multilingual Library. Not just because it was through poetry that I met Amina, but because the nearest thing to a religion I observe is these words on poetry from John Berger:

*‘Poems, even when narrative, do not resemble stories. All stories are about battles, of one kind or another, which end in victory and defeat. Everything moves towards the end, when the outcome will be known.*

*Poems, regardless of any outcome, cross the battlefields, tending the wounded, listening to the wild monologues of the triumphant or the fearful. They bring a kind of peace. Not by anaesthesia or easy reassurance, but by recognition and the promise that what has been experienced cannot disappear as if it had never been. Yet the promise is not of a monument. . . The promise is that language has acknowledged, has given shelter, to the experience which demanded, which cried out.*

*Poems are nearer to prayers than stories, but in poetry there is no one behind the language being prayed to. It is the language itself which has to hear and acknowledge. For the religious poet, the Word is the first attribute of God. In all poetry, words are a*

*presence before they are a means of communication.’ (John Berger, And our faces, my heart, brief as photos, pp.21-22)*

Around the time I started volunteering at the library, I was severely burned out as a poet. For the past few years I, like many of us, had been grappling with the noxious politics of post-Brexit Britain in my work, and I was tired. I had written my share of wild monologues and prayers, I had tried to tend the wounded and to bring down the triumphant, and it felt as if all that had achieved nothing. I needed to find some other way of praying to language, to paraphrase Berger. And, most of all, I needed to get away from the Matter of Britain for a while, because that matter, it seemed to me, was becoming an extremely toxic substance, and I had developed an acute case of toxicity.

It occurred to me that the answer lay in looking beyond this archipelago we wrongly call an island, in learning the languages of others. This process began, as many things do, in small, private activities (I learned from a friend that Duolingo had added Haitian Creole to their available courses; having been fascinated by that country and its history for years, I downloaded the app and started practising) but shortly afterwards I saw the Facebook post advertising for volunteers for the library’s re-opening, and recognised at once that here was a chance to do something that really would cross the battlefields, a chance to acknowledge and give shelter to so many more languages, and the people who speak them. A chance to engage with those languages as living things, to engage with other cultures by seeing what they read, and a chance, in a country which increasingly seems to be intent on dividing and expelling those we deem ‘outsiders’ to welcome people from across the world and bring them together.

This library does vital, meaningful work. And if the events of the past few months have taught me one thing, it’s that what we do here is more vital than ever.



Last October, as the bombs began falling on Gaza, I started learning Arabic. It seemed like a way of expressing solidarity. To try and learn a language so different from your own is a very humbling experience, because you have to learn not just the words, but the individual letters. You have to learn to recognise them by their shapes, and how they sound and, in the case of Arabic, the way they change in connection to other letters, their differing initial, medial and final forms. For all my fluency in English, I felt like a particularly slow and stupid child as I struggled to learn the difference between baa’, taa’ and thaa’, to distinguish dat from daat and daT and daaT, to train my throat to make new sounds in ways that didn’t make it seem like I was choking.

And it was through learning Arabic, and reflecting on my learning, that I found my way back into writing poetry in my mother tongue. The poem below, which I wrote most of in Costa Coffee while waiting for the library to open one morning, is an attempt to live up to Berger’s idea of what poetry should do: not to cheer a battle or erect a monument, but simply to acknowledge, to give shelter, and to relate my experiences to those with whom, in however halting a way, I now share a language.

## English sounds like injury in Arabic

In the language I am learning like a child who must be taught the shapes and sounds of letters, children scream. Already, they are more well-versed than I in sounding out these shapes I find so strange, and screaming too.

I who, from my earliest days at school, was punished for deficiency in cursive; I, whose English letters fall somewhere between a spider-in-an-inkpot smear and a-for-apple print, am learning a supremely calligraphic language as hands far more practised than mine find their own writing sliding into scrawl and must accept it, so those hands may yet incise and suture with precision after sixty-six days, most without electric light or anaesthetic.

In the language I am learning the word I find most pleasing is the name of a nation we bombed into freedom where people are now sold as slaves. In this language, the words for my country are half-rhymes for wounding and guilt.

In the language I have grown up speaking people quibble about what it means to say things like 'genocide' or 'self-defence', or 'rules-based International order'. In the language I am learning, I cannot say these things. I do not, yet, know it well enough to lie.



## The Library on Instagram

Our Instagram account will be getting a lot more active as the library gets back into action, so don't forget to check it out at <https://www.instagram.com/themultilinguallibrary/>. In the coming weeks you'll see a lot more from us on the 'gram, including book recommendations and reviews, photos from our events, and lots more.

You can also follow us on Facebook to see what is happening at the library and also see articles of interest about libraries and language.

On Twitter (ok, X) we share the account with @borderlinebooks as we didn't want to lose the many contacts we had built up. News about the library will also appear there, so keep up to date with all our activities through the anti-social media options - or come and visit the library, have a brew and a chat. You could even read a book if you felt like it.

if you would like to volunteer with us, please fill in [this form](#).



## About the Kittiwake Trust

The Kittiwake Trust became a registered charity in 2016. We run two main projects. Apart from the Multilingual Library, we have a project called Borderline Books, which collects books no longer needed by publishers, libraries and the public and redistributes them free of charge to those without the means to buy books.

This includes schools, refuges, organisations supporting people without homes, mental health projects, refugee organisations food banks, schools, holiday projects and more. We also send a large number of books to people in prison and their families.

In 2023 we gave away over 30,000 books of which half went to prisons and half to local projects.

We welcome donations of books (and money) for both the library and Borderline Books. Please contact us to arrange a time for you to drop off books or to work out the best way to get them to us.

We also hope that at some point people on other parts of the country will set up local branches of Borderline Books.

For more about the Trust and links to Borderline Books please go to: <https://www.kittiwaketrust.org.uk/>

WE would like to thank the many publishers, agents and authors who have sent us copies of their translated books. This has meant that we now have a collection of much more recent titles than we had in the past.

We are bound to miss out some people - partly because new people donate books to us all the time - but would like to give a special mention to Professor David Crystal, John Marrs, Tracy Chevallier, Mark Haddon, Ken Follett, Anne Fine, Anne Cleeves, Geraldine McCaughrean, Celia Rees, Helen Pollard. Nicola May, Sophia Bennett, Rosie Walsh.

Better World Books. Search Press. Hachette Children's Books, Cambridge University Press. Macmillan Children's Books. Nosy Crow Publishers. David & Charles. The Society of Authors. Iron Press.

Agents: Rogers Coleridge & White Ltd. Independent Talent Group. Curtis Brown Ltd. DHH Literary Agency

And the wonderful Forum Books, Corbridge and New Writing North.

When we receive multiple copies of a book, the first copy goes in the library and additional copies go to Borderline Books to be sent to prisons, schools, hospitals and local organisations supporting people whose first language is not English.

We also invite other multilingual libraries to visit and take some books for their own collections so that for speakers of languages other than English it will no longer be a struggle to find something to read and materials to help their children remain fluent in their mother tongue as well as in English.





## Opening hours

**11:00 - 18:00 Monday to Saturday**

Please keep an eye on our facebook page or instagram for any unexpected changes.



*We add to this map as we get new volunteers. If you worked with us and don't see your home marked, please let us know so we can add you.*

*Thanks to Marran for her impeccable stitching of the title!*

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