



Over the Christmas period, many of you found the time to share your views on our first book club recommendations. We have been really pleased with the response – and thanks to everyone who has taken part.

You can still have your say on these books by emailing sherry.smith2@nhs.net or debbie.arnold4@nhs.net and we will add your thoughts to our summary.

Watch this space for information about our next round of books for your consideration.

The Yorkshire Shepherdess

This is the autobiography of Amanda Owen, who left her home town of Huddersfield to pursue her dream of being a shepherdess. One day she is sent out to pick something up from a local farmer – an event that changed her life. The farmer was Clive, 20 years older than her who became her husband and the farm was Ravenseat – one of the most remote farms in the country high up in the Yorkshire Dales fells. Nine remarkably independent and spirited children, a television series and many thousands of lambs later, Amanda has put pen to paper to tell her story. But were you captivated?

Well, you were divided. Some of you had seen the television programme and felt it gave you more context whilst others felt there wasn't enough content. Alison said she enjoyed the story up to the point where Amanda moves to the farm. "Then she started using local dialect for her dialogue which was incredibly off putting. She describes the rather brutal, raw way of life of a sheep farmer in the middle of nowhere, which was interesting as was her parenting of her numerous children. I couldn't quite equate the Amanda prior to the farm with the Amanda as a sheep farmer with loads of children - it felt like two different people. Perhaps that was the point - but it didn't work very well. This was a very easy, quick read but instantly forgettable."

Sheila said she respected Amanda for following her dreams and achieving her ambitions. "Having watched the TV series The Yorkshire Farm I had already formed my opinion on the writer. This led me to read the book - Amanda as a writer invites the reader on a journey to grow with her experiences as a shepherdess, wife an mother, also as an historian of the hill farm Ravenseat."

However, Margaret found it very easy to put down. "It didn't capture my interest which is why it took me so long to finish it, but I did persevere to the end, I am afraid that I didn't really care what happened next."

The Threads of Life by Clare Hunter

The Threads of Life is an extraordinary debut book, which tells history and politics through the stories woven in textiles and embroidery – and the people behind the sewing. The premise was one that appealed to many of you and the importance of an activity such as sewing on mental health was not lost on you during these difficult times.

Clare's passion for her subject came through on the pages. As Amanda said: "The author is obviously passionate about embroidery and textiles and has undertaken a lot of research, including visiting various countries to see such works and talk to the people involved. She includes a number of stories in the book about projects she has been involved with. The descriptions of embroideries and textiles were detailed and thorough."

Barbara was so enthralled with this book she wrote to the author – and was thrilled to receive a reply! "This was my lockdown book of the year, I loved this book. It could have so easily been a catalogue of textiles representing historical events or a tale of how textiles are used in recounting events but it wasn't. It was the most uplifting and surprising book I have read for a very long time. I loved the way the author wove her own story into the narrative without it becoming about her. It just became more personal when woven with her own experience of finds in her aunt's attic and her own experiences of curating textile shows and working with community groups. The whole book constantly surprised me, the way people use innovative ways to communicate when they have no writing materials or how textiles are used as protest or even a way of not being wiped out of history, such as Mary Queen of Scots and the Argentinian mothers and grandmothers. I think what surprised me was that this is a story of human resilience and that in the times we are in is very uplifting and inspiring."

Amanda liked the way the book was structured. "The book is not a chronological history of world textiles but has 16 chapters with headings such as 'Power', 'Identity', 'Captivity' & 'Community'. I quite liked this way of setting the book out as it meant the author could emphasise that textiles have not been simply an art form throughout history. Many of the stories had a political slant and some were much more interesting than others."

Penny thought the book was fascinating: "I love to do any kind of needlework as I find it relaxing. My only criticism is that I would have liked some examples of the works she talks about. I found the stories concerning the war injured finding solace in some degree in embroidery amazing. When it is done freehand it is only another medium of art."

Sheila agreed. "I was drawn to read this book as I am a stitcher myself. I knew nothing about the author but have been delighted with her style, knowledge

and attention to detail. Some chapters were beautifully poignant in particular 'Captivity and Protect'. I haven't quite finished the book as I am quite a slow reader and keep busy with my crafty hobbies. However, Clare has inspired me to think about doing some sewing that can be passed on to my family containing some memories or family history."

You were disappointed at the lack of pictures in the book. As Amanda said: The lack of photos gives the book an academic feel (indeed, the writing can also do this) and I did skim over some sections where I felt information overload. The author includes a bibliography and list of websites at the end, including her own, where you can see images of textiles discussed in the book."

Generally, you were glad you read the book and would recommend it to anyone with an interest in the subject matter.

The Thursday Murder Club

This is the debut novel by television favourite Richard Osman and features four unlikely friends in a peaceful retirement village who meet up once a week to investigate unsolved killings. But soon they find themselves in the middle of their first live case.....

This was another book which drew a mixed response from you.

Penny said: "I thought I would enjoy this book more than I did - especially after all the amazing reviews. I hope that his portrayal of the retirees were caricatures. I liked Elizabeth and Stephen. I am not sure why she felt she had to hide his dementia. There were so many different people I got lost, especially when dealing with the Cyprus part of the story.

Penny

Chris added: "It was a pleasant read but not terribly gripping. Some of the characters and their foibles did raise a wry smile as I recognised some of my meanderings. Perhaps Richard Osman has invented a new genre...geriatric lit as opposed to chic lit. I did think three murders by three different people was pushing the boundaries of my credulity too much."

Graham said: "I felt that the book had some good observations about life in a retirement complex and some amusing one liners. But for me all the characters were too lightweight and fluffy and I could not believe in or care about any of them. Had the book been an out and out comedy, it might have been better. I didn't feel that trying to introduce a more serious note in the last few chapters worked at all."

Barbara enjoyed it. "I didn't really expect to but it surprised me. I enjoyed the first part more than the second because I liked it better when it was funny and a bit tongue in cheek. The descriptions of the 'village' were great. As it got a little more serious and the crimes were becoming unravelled it got rather sad and poignant, especially the John and Penny storyline. My favourite character was Joyce, she just chimed with me, I liked the relationship with her daughter,

it rang quite true. I also liked Donna as she was very competent and down to earth, I quite liked how her relationship with Chris worked out, a bit neat but nice.”

Barbara commented on the number of characters. “There were an awful lot of characters in it, both on and off stage and you had to pay a bit more attention than I did sometimes. I did get a bit confused with some of the past crimes and the nun story with the doctor/priest. I did enjoy the Peter character and how the ex-criminals turned over a new leaf and became models of rectitude! In some ways they were the funniest characters.

Alison enjoyed the way “Osman developed the characters, peeling back layers of their personalities as we read on. My favourite to begin with was Elizabeth - what was it she had done as a career; all very mysterious, but as time went on I loved the other club members equally and also Donna and Chris.”

She also said she cried at Bernard’s story. “There was an underlying thread of loss and regret as most of the characters moved into the twilight of their years. All the main characters had some major loss in their lives – Elizabeth’s friendship with Penny, Joyce’s widowhood, Donna’s failed relationship.”

So – a mixed review of the three books presented to you for our first book club – if there is a winner, it is probably *The Threads of Life*, but you may need the internet to look up pictures of the works being discussed.