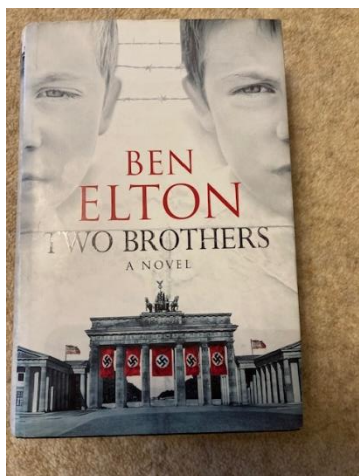


BOOK CLUB February 2024:

The Two Brothers by Ben Elton



This book provoked a very mixed response within the group. Some really enjoyed it, some found the plot contrived and pursued by the author way beyond its' initial appeal, making the book very cumbersome and unrealistic.

The novel, set in Berlin, takes the reader from the birth of two brothers in 1920, through the Weimar period, the rise of Nazism, the war years, the division of the city and ends with the death of one character in 2003. If you enjoy historical fiction, we felt that the historical detail was good; the book provides authentic description and analysis of the horror of this period and how it impacted upon the lives of ordinary people.

We felt that the characterisation of the four young people who are the main protagonists was weak and improbable, which detracted from some excellent descriptions of some of the minor characters and how they lived during these traumatic times.

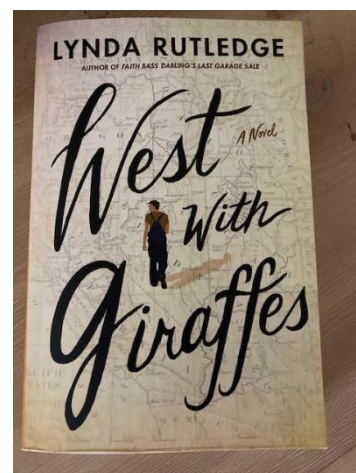
BOOK CLUB March 2024:

West with Giraffes by Lynda Rutledge

All members found this book to be captivating, enjoyable and very moving. The book is an imagined retelling of fascinating and unusual real- life events, set against the back-drop of American social history in the 1930's.

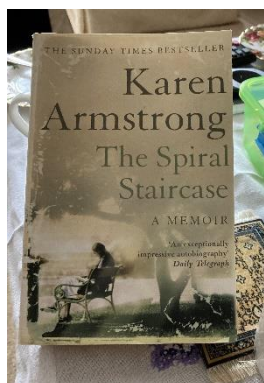
The author has created a wonderful group of characters whose stories were at times very affecting but also uplifting. The plot contained real tension both in the perilous events that beset this epic journey and in the relationships between the characters and the choices they were presented with.

Finally, I must mention the two giraffes around whom the story was woven, they added so much to the book, particularly in the demonstration of trust, family and love.



BOOK GROUP – April 2024

The Spiral Staircase by Karen Armstrong



This was an unusual book choice, a memoir rather than a novel, that told the challenging and often traumatic story of a young woman who at the age of seventeen entered a convent. After seven years she made the difficult decision to leave her order.

Many of us were intrigued by the subject matter and it was a very compelling read. The book charts the practical difficulties she encountered while adjusting to her new life but also the spiritual challenges she faced while she looked for purpose and meaning.

The book prompted a very interesting discussion and many are eager to read her first book: Through the Narrow Gate.

BOOK CLUB – May 2024

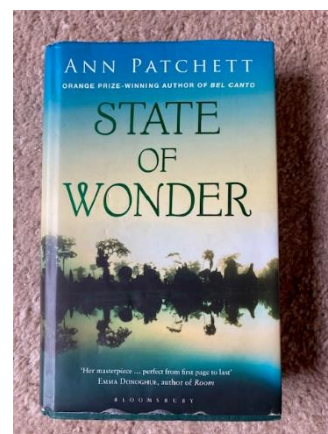
State of Wonder by Ann Patchett

This book was difficult to categorise, but gave rise to lots of themes and ethical issues which in turn led to a lively and interesting discussion.

The book had a slow start and some of the members thought that many of the events were far-fetched. However, these events were cleverly woven and this led to a far more compelling second half and the concluding scenes were dramatic and heart rending.

The book was skilfully and beautifully written with some very evocative multi-sensory descriptions of the Brazilian rain forest; both the great beauty and perils that could be found there.

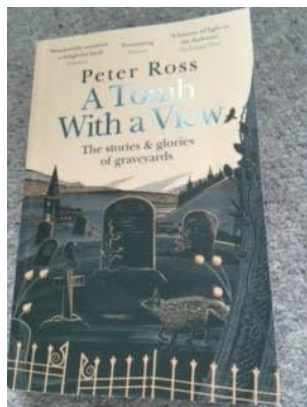
Chris Lautaikis



BOOK GROUP – June 2024

“A Tomb with a View” by Peter Ross

Being non-fiction, this book was an unusual choice for the group and an unexpected theme: the stories and glories of graveyards. We felt the author was a good story-teller, showing compassion, respect and gentle humour. He did not shy away from difficult or contentious issues and there was social history and comment.



The stories were interesting, varied and well researched. Sometimes the focus was on individuals, their lives and deaths - including a dog named Bobby, sometimes on specific cemeteries, graveyards or groups of people.

The book gave insight into different cultural and religious practices both contemporary and historical. Sections are also devoted to people who work as funeral directors or in cemeteries and graveyards. The book also has a local reference to an ossuary: the final resting place for human skeletal remains, found in the crypt of

The Holy Trinity Church in Rothwell.

Chris Laukaitis

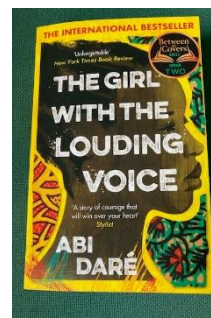
BOOK CLUB – July 2024

The Girl with the Louding Voice, by Abi Daré

This debut novel tells the life of a young Nigerian girl: Adunni. It gives a harrowing but inspirational story of her quest to receive an education. Her life contains many disturbing and violent episodes. Despite these seemingly insurmountable barriers, she showed great character, resilience and wisdom that went way beyond her years.

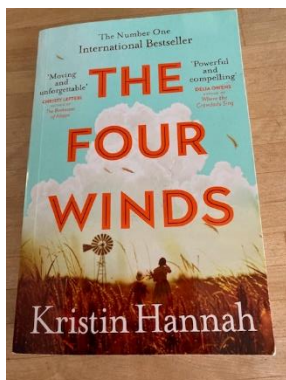
We felt that her experiences give a fair representation of the life experienced by many young girls in societies where they do not have a voice.

Chris Laukaitis



BOOK GROUP – August 2024

THE FOUR WINDS, by Kristin Hannah



The Four Winds, set in America during the 1930's, charts the life of families living through the dust bowl and subsequent migration. All members of the group found it an interesting and enjoyable read. The book has strong female characters, who showed great strength and resilience when contending with the horrors of these times and the near impossible decisions they had to make.

As the book progressed it gave details of how one group of people can be demonised and exploited and the rise of political movements that were trying to address their lack of rights.

To conclude it was a moving family saga, that gave lots of historical detail.

Chris Laukaitis

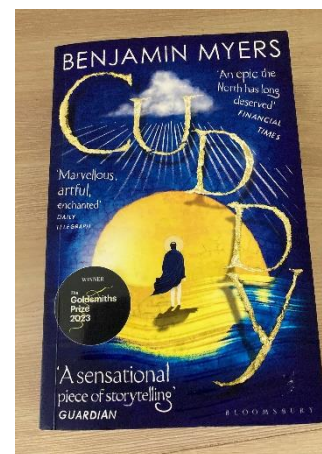
BOOK CLUB – September 2024

CUDDY, by Benjamin Myers

In an interview, Benjamin Myers said "Writing is fun." He certainly had a lot of fun with this novel; taking the reader through a variety of genres within one book. The focus of the book is the legacy of Saint Cuthbert, affectionately known as Cuddy. Starting with his death in March 687 and ending with a contemporary tale set in Durham 2019.

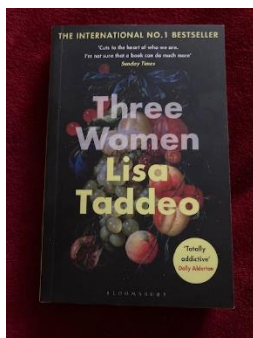
Most of the group did not enjoy the switch between different genres and struggled to make links between the different historical time zones. We all agreed that Myers writes very well it was just his whacky creativity that did not give a cohesive or satisfying read.

Chris Laukaitis



BOOK GROUP – October 2024:

“Three Women” by Lisa Taddeo



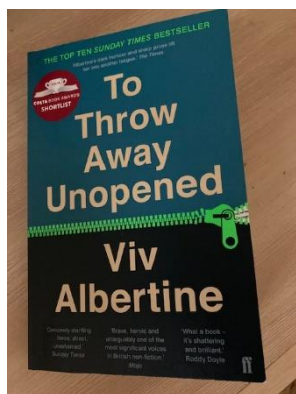
Lisa Taddeo is an American journalist and author. This non-fiction book was nominated for several awards and was Foyles book of the year for 2019. However, the comments of the group were not favourable.

The author interviewed lots of American women to talk about their relationships and sex-life and then chose three women's experiences to write about. One summation was that the book was boring, certainly the sex was far from erotic and mostly sad. The women seemed stuck in a cycle of introspection and pain, which frustrated many of us, they seemed completely unwilling to try to find fulfilment in their lives away from the men that they were so unhappy with.

Chris Laukaitis

BOOK CLUB – November 2024:

“To Throw Away Unopened” by Viv Albertine



This was a well written autobiography by Viv Albertine, best known as the guitarist for the all-female punk band The Slits. She was also a singer, song-writer, writer and film producer. The main focus of this book is the relationship with her mother Kathleen and her early family life.

The book was shockingly honest, with a horrifying thread of dysfunctionality and abuse running through her life. Her mother raised her to be a strong person, yet at times she showed great vulnerability.

An interesting and complex read.

Chris Laukaitis

BOOK GROUP – December 2024

“The Great Alone” by Kristin Hannah

This book was well received by the group. Difficult issues including PTSD and domestic abuse were dealt with in an authentic, disturbing and often brutal way. The writing is very affecting; you really feel both the impact and tension of the plot developments, the emotions as experienced by the characters and the beauty and harshness of life in Alaska.