



# What happened next

## Our year 2016-2017

# The Kett's Books story this year

One morning I popped into the back to make a drink for a customer, only to hear him exclaim from the other side of the shop: '*My life is complete!*'

Now that's terrific feedback, and I'm delighted that we were there to make it happen. But as it turned out he had not found enlightenment, just the Neil Young biography. I carried on. It's not our place to judge: perhaps it did indeed fulfil his deepest needs.

Some things do need judging, however. When we look at how successful the bookshop is, we can look at an awful lot of factors—and *My life is complete!* is an immeasurable, subjective, and frankly ridiculous ambition for a business.

But the question of whether we're meeting a need is actually a useful one.

When our volunteer admits that he hasn't slept or eaten since the day before, but has come straight in from a night shift because he felt the atmosphere in the bookshop helps him to recover from the stress of work, I think we're meeting a need.

When a customer stops us in the street to say that the cup of tea we made for him a week before was the only thing that got him through that day, we're meeting a need.

Or when a customer dismisses the baby on her shopping list, thinking he'll have a plastic toy instead of a book like his brother and sister—and then she leaves us very happily with a copy of *Tap the Magic Tree* for him—we know that the small person she's buying for will benefit from rhythm and rhyme, from a lovely story of the life cycle, and precious time sharing the story with his grown-ups.

However you measure it, this year was a success: Yes, we're delighted to have made a profit. We grew up a lot: we addressed our marketing, got our child protection policy in place, and issued a volunteer handbook. And we also had a fair bit of industry-level acknowledgement of the good job we're doing.

The pages that follow tell some of the stories of our year through photos, words, graphs and numbers. We hope you'll agree that however you assess us, Kett's Books is a success—especially that the people who join us and the conversations that emerge create new and important stories. We hope you stick with us for what happens next.

- Tracy



## Top ten bestsellers this year

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. <i>Golden Hill</i><br>Frances Spufford                           | 6. <i>Book of Dust</i><br>Philip Pullman             |
| 2. <i>Kick</i><br>Mitch Johnson                                     | 7. <i>The Bedlam Stacks</i><br>Natasha Pulley        |
| 3. <i>Watchmaker of Filigree Street</i><br>Natasha Pulley           | 8. <i>Prisoners of Geography</i><br>Tim Marshall     |
| 4. <i>Little Book of Jokes for Kids of All Ages</i><br>Martin Ellis | 9. <i>The Words in My Hand</i><br>Guinevere Glasfurd |
| 5. <i>The Essex Serpent</i><br>Sarah Perry                          | 10. <i>Tap the Magic Tree</i><br>Christie Matheson   |



## Ten things we learned in 2017

1. People come to Wymondham for the community bookshop and get to know the town
2. We should ask people buying a book token if they have time to browse
3. Customers like to be offered a hot drink—and the more they look, the more they might buy!
4. Every bookshop's character is shaped by the place where it does business
5. Many people who've heard about the shop can take years to come discover us for themselves
6. Same as letters can be arranged to tell a story, numbers can, too
7. There are 136 steps at the Russell Square underground station
8. There is a hidden code in the front of books to reveal their edition
9. Katharine Rundell's name rhymes with 'bundle'
10. We found a shortcut so we can avoid typing so many ISBNs

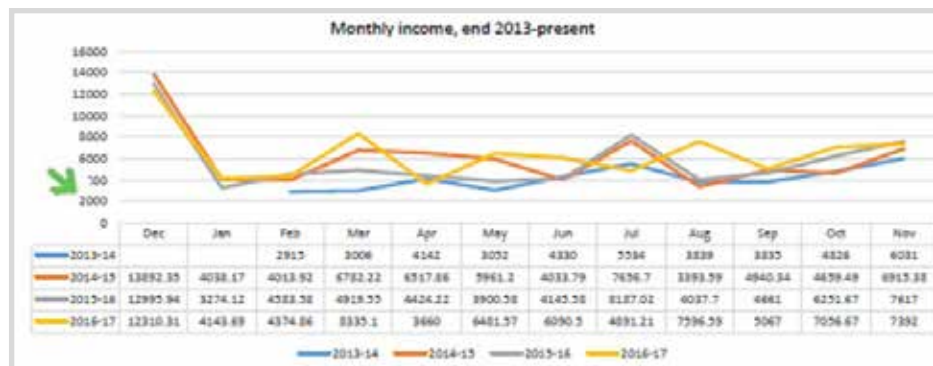
# Finance

The graphs to the right represent unaudited data presented to the Finance Support Group in January 2018, illustrating our understanding of the financial picture for the year ending 30 Nov 2017. At the time of going to print our financial accounts had been returned to us and were being reviewed for signatures by the directors.

The bottom line: the audited accounts report a profit of £2832. This means we have had two consecutive years of profit.

This figure allows for a £5800 offsetting of expenses, with consideration of loans repaid in April 2017.

We are now setting aside money monthly into a repayment fund to ensure funds are available to continue repaying instalments April of each year. After the accounts are approved at the April 2018 AGM, our Finance Director Trevor Ellingworth will issue the next instalment payments to the lenders. We are on track to completely repay loans by April 2020, fulfilling the original amount lent of £24,000.



The turnover for the year 2016/2017 represents an increase over the previous year of approximately £4800.

Our expenses were higher this year, with two obvious explanations:

- The increased turnover of books required an increase in book purchases
- We invested heavily in our Christmas marketing. In October we committed £1656.01 to printing and distributing a 94-page overprinted Christmas catalogue for 8100 homes in the NR18-0 and NR18-9 postal areas. This investment saw a large increase in the number of customers new to the shop, and especially those who said they'd been aware of us but hadn't come along. The cost of the distribution was subsidised with a grant from the Booksellers Association. The effect of this investment will have been realised in the following financial year (which began 1 Dec), but the increase in brand awareness will continue to benefit us into the future.

Finally, in May we celebrated the news that we'd received a £2000 development grant from the publisher HarperCollins, which allowed us to commission artwork to refresh our branding and to professionally rebuild our website.





# Our volunteers

People sometimes nod knowingly to us, saying that it's tricky to work with volunteers, but we reckon our volunteers are our biggest strength—we've got a far better community of people than we could ever pay to work with us, and every single one of them is there because they believe in what we're doing.

Every time you visit Kett's Books, you will be greeted by someone who is excited about the part they play in keeping that door open, and they are happy to see you come through it.

Together, the 20+ who work a regular shift, and the 20+ who don't, form a tight community with a combination of skills, experiences, and insights you won't find anywhere else.

And because we're a community, it works both ways. We know that volunteers are giving their time and energy, but we also know that they are getting something in return.

All our volunteers enjoy the satisfaction of knowing they help to keep the bookshop open in Wymondham.

Some simply love working amongst books—for many it's living a dream that faded in the reality of a career and responsibilities.



And for others, they get something much deeper than that: having a place that is relying on them to turn up is how they keep their brain, body and mind healthy in retirement.

At Kett's Books our volunteers make their first friends in Wymondham, grow the confidence to seek work, or gain experience to apply to university.

Same as we'll never read all the books in the shop, we'll never know all the stories behind our volunteers coming in, either regularly or on-call. But we do know that we're all better for being part of growing the shop, together.



Adele, Chloe, Ems and Ian

Christine

Jess

Trevor



Mary and Geoff

Wendy

Em K

Ray R



Elena and Emily

Jan and Olivia

David

Em H

Tracy



Karen

Jacob, Liz, Jess, and Steve

Chris B

Nikki



Bella

Chris S

Lynne and Sally

Jesse

# Book groups

Early on, even before we'd opened, Ray Rumsby said he wanted the bookshop to help people form a critical response to the world around them. We've just been getting on with the book groups, because they seemed the right thing to do. But now at the end of our fourth year we can see how important they are—and that they are evidence of Ray's vision becoming reality.

The book groups select their own books to read, but they give everyone in the shop an increased awareness of a particular title, and conversations around these books grow even outside of the group.

All participants say that they now read books that they'd not have chosen themselves, and that they've broadened their thinking

Some of the participants say that they had never really considered themselves a reader, but that their book group has given them confidence that their opinion counts

Even children who don't read the books come along to the children's book groups, as we aim to build excitement and familiarity around the idea of reading

In addition, the variety of book groups allow us to offer a solution to people who come through the shop at a loose end. A book group gives a built-in set of friends, a conversation you can prepare for, and a regular appointment to get people out of the house.



Early members of the kids' book group wore volunteers' lanyards while they helped in the shop

## Kett's Books book groups days and times:

*Please always check website for current information*

Evening adults' group: second Tuesday, 6:00 p.m.

Daytime adults' group: third Thursday, 12:00 p.m.

Kids' book group (8-10s): fourth Fridays, 4:00

Storybook Tea party (picture book interest level): third Fridays, 4:00

Teen book group: date changes; see website



Every third Friday the picture book crowd gather to hear stories at the Storytime Tea Party, organised by volunteer Em Harris. Here children listen to a story while they finish their snack.

## Pop-up book group

Because we have a good relationship with Great Hockham Primary, Headteacher Alex Bowles knew he could ring us to ask if he could use the credit voucher the school had earned through their book fair, to order a quantity of 'Jack' books by Kes Gray.

It seems a reluctant reader had suddenly switched onto this series, and the school wanted to feed his appetite. We happily arranged a stack of them, then remembered that one of these had been previously been amongst the World Book Day £1 selections. With a bit of digging we were able to give them several copies of the same book, so the youngster could share the love of these books by forming his own pop-up book group.

The whole process cost the school nothing, and we were happy to know that we'd helped the school keep this one young man engaged.





## Our work with schools

When we get to know a school it's not just about selling books. We like to go into the conversation as if we're making new friends—we encourage them to keep in touch, to let us get to know them, and to come to us to talk about what's on their minds. Barford ask us if we have any posters for their classrooms, and we do. Hingham ask if we have ideas on engaging parents, and we spend an hour on the sofa, getting excited about possibilities. Wicklewood ask for a talk to the Year 6s, and we thoroughly enjoy an hour in Kingfisher class.

We know that the friendship will probably be reciprocal—that when the school needs books, they will probably come to us at least for a quote. But just as importantly, we want to work together because we want the same thing: to encourage a love of reading amongst the children and their parents.

As we are neither home nor school, we have a unique opportunity to help make this happen.

One of the more formal activities we do is the school book fair. It's far more than just selling books: because we are local, we are able to offer continuity. Children get to know us and approach our volunteers in town to talk about books, and parents come back, with or without the children, to continue the conversations we start about their children's reading.

*In World Book Week 2017 our volunteers held 13 events at 11 schools in 10 days.*



We met George at Tacolneston Primary where we recruited him as a helper setting up books—then got to know him better when we bumped into him at Wymondham College. We knew what he wanted for Christmas!



Emily and her mum always stop and talk to us about books, pets, and art when we visit her school, and they frequently come to see us in the shop as well.

Around 20 times a year we pack up 300 new, newly published books to take to schools. At our book fairs every child gets a balloon, whether they buy a book or not.

Because we are a good friend, we do offer a credit voucher back to the school, so they can buy books with a portion of the income we make. We encourage the school to bring children to the bookshop to make these selections, so they feel more engaged with the school's library.

We love to say yes to your ideas: we have hosted 150 Reception children from Attleborough (a few at a time!), we have helped with writing competitions, we have supplied authors, and we have helped countless youngsters find their love of reading. If you think we could make a good friend for your school, do get in touch with the shop—we'd love to swap ideas with you and see if we can help.



Mitch Johnson signed books for a queue of kids that stretched across the playground at Robert Kett Primary.



A selection of books before the fun started at Attleborough Junior School.

# Author visits

Our customers have got used to great authors visiting Kett's Books, and 2017 kept all of us happy. And no one worries anymore that the shop is too small for an author visit. We've had so many that now we all know the cosiness gives the event the feel of a conversation.

Authors regularly tell us that they enjoy the visits to our shop, not only because they agree with the community principles behind it, but also because it feels so personal to be near to their readers, who feel happy to ask what's really on their minds.

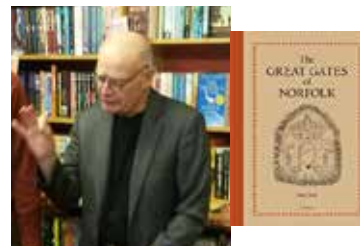
Even telling customers about the events feels like an individual invitation—one customer told Sally that she wasn't a practised enough reader to attend an author event, but on her encouragement the customer came along, thoroughly enjoyed Guinevere Glasfurd's talk, and re-discovered her love of reading.



*The Wymondham Carnival were grateful to Kett's Books for supplying their special guest in July—the Gruffalo from Julia Donaldson's much-loved book, which Tracy then read to hundreds of children in the library. Jacob was a superstar posing for thousands of photos in the costume!*



In October Guinevere Glasfurd gripped our book groups with her discussion of writing a historical novel, and re-creating the life of Descartes



Peter Kent explains the historical and creative challenges in creating *The Great Gates of Norfolk*

We promote our author visits through word of mouth—because we invite the authors we love, we are able to sell the events through our own enthusiasm. Most of the visitors to our author events come because we looked them in the eye, put the book in their hands and said they should read *this*.



Natasha Pulley's name is on our bestseller list this year for both her new novel, *The Bedlam Stacks*, as well as her first book, *The Watchmaker of Filigree Street*. Natasha has a firm fan base in Kett's Books, where we love to see her imagination spill over even while she's talking.



Mitch Johnson came back to the bookshop to meet volunteers after our event at Robert Kett Primary, where 150 children were literally shrieking and leaping out of their seats. His first book, *Kick*, is about exploitation, football, and most of all, people, and it has changed the game in children's literature.



No one expected a first novel, set in 18th century New York, to be our top selling book of 2017, but Frances Spufford's *Golden Hill* surprised everyone—not least with all the twists of plot and surprise that he manages to fit in. His visit was almost as entertaining and energetic as the book itself.



Ann Thwaite is well-known to the shop. We were delighted to finally sit down with her and hear her stories of a lifetime of publishing, and her experiences of having her award-winning biography turned into a film.



In March Norwich-based Eleanor Wasserberg's harrowing first novel *Foxlowe* prompted a great deal of discussion about crafting psychologically complex characters.



## Sharing the story

The story of Kett's Books has travelled far this year – we've taken the story to London, meeting with other booksellers, authors, and a few celebrities along the way! At events at HarperCollins and Bloomsbury, Chloe, Nikki and Tracy have shared last year's annual report and spread the story. Tracy even found herself seated next to a buyer from Amazon, where she boldly introduced herself, handed her last year's copy of this report, and explained why an independent community bookshop in Norfolk matters.

Still we know where home is - despite the excitement we increased our marketing locally, to make sure our customers remember why they fell in love with us in the first place.

This year we had a good hard look at our brand and recognised the strength of what we'd created, way back before we even had the keys to the shop. The name, logo and vision have all served us well, and we believe the heritage and values they capture are still compelling.

As happy as we are with what we've got, we were still able to development funding from HarperCollins to commission companion branding. Alby-based artist Claire Knight took the brief to 'capture ideas you'll find in a good book' and created paper-cut artwork that adds playfulness and imagination to the brand.

To support our school book fairs, we created A5 leaflets for children's book bags to announce our visit, explaining who we are and why we're different. We also used Royal Mail to distribute our Christmas catalogue to 8100 homes.

We were also delighted to welcome Sharon from the Booksellers Association, who came to meet us and explore how we were progressing after the two rounds of James Patterson funding we received early in our existence.

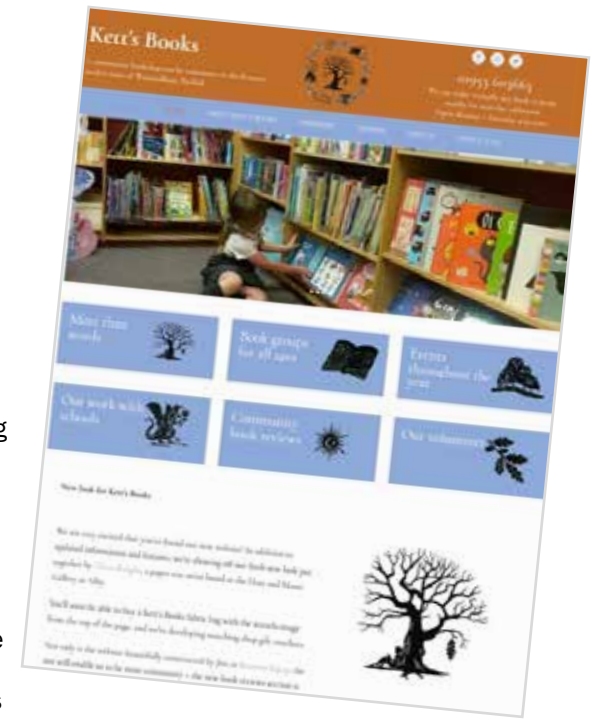
Finally Em K, a long-time Friend of the shop, has offered her expertise in social networking. We look forward to where the combination of all these activities will take us in the new year.



## Our new website

The website we started with was just about good enough for a bunch of volunteers who were jumping into this adventure, but by our fourth year we knew it needed to come up to date—we had grown into a professional independent bookshop, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with all the other booksellers, and we needed a website that captured both our community spirit and showed our professionalism.

After a formal tender process we decided to work with Business Equip in Norwich, who helped us present the imagination elements Claire had designed, alongside our community message. The new website has enabled us to create a space for community book reviews, which means that everyone, of any age or opinion, can make a contribution to our community discussion about the books we love. We also have volunteers in place to keep the book reviews up to date. We couldn't be happier with it, and we hope you like it, too.



## Booktime magazine

In September we had another surprise—*Booktime* magazine, which goes to independent bookshops and libraries around the country, chose Kett's Books for a full-page feature of our story. We then received emails and cards of congratulations and thanks for what we're doing from readers around the country!



## Good to know: membership and structure

We like the symbol of the tree at Kett's Books. And like you can't see the roots of a tree, did you know that we have at least as many volunteers behind the scenes, as behind the till?



Kett's Books is made of:

- The community we serve in
- Customers
- Friends of the shop (see next page)
- Friends who volunteer casually (thank you!)
- Volunteers who are on-hand, for when we need them
- Volunteers who have committed to a regular scheduled role
- Volunteers who have signed up to be a member

The term 'Members' doesn't mean a Friend of the shop—Friends pay £20 a year to demonstrate their support and help us to meet unexpected costs of running a business.

Members are a separate group of people who share our vision for Wymondham Community Bookshop and have committed to help steer it into its best future. Members are elected by the existing membership, they meet quarterly, and each member gets one vote on important company decisions.

If you are interested in becoming a member, please speak to one of the Directors, or email the shop, and we can share more information with you. We look forward to hearing from you.

## Friends

If you've shopped in Kett's Books, you've probably been asked if you're a Friend. We're very happy to be friendly with everyone, but some of our customers believe in what we're doing enough that they want to become paid-up, card-carrying supporters.

We started the scheme before we opened, because we knew there would be people who believe in us, but couldn't necessarily make a commitment to volunteer regularly. However well we know them, Friends are proud to be part of us, and still dig out their card to wave it, and show us: 'I'm in. I'm a Friend.'

For a minimum donation of £20 a year, Friends of Kett's Books get free entry to author events, invitations to Friends-only events, and a 10% discount on books. The money off comes in handy for book-buyers, but we like to think it's not about the discount, but about showing support.

In 2018 we will also begin offering privileged information to Friends about what's about to be published and extending further pre-order discounts on these titles. The pilot of the system has proven very popular.

To become a Friend, you can send us a cheque, set up a standing order, or come along to the shop, and we'll do all the paperwork.

You can also email [friends@kettbooks.co.uk](mailto:friends@kettbooks.co.uk), and our volunteer David will help to guide you through the process and answer any questions.



## Feedback, and a bit more

In October Trevor welcomed a pair of customers, both ex-booksellers from Borders in Norwich. They were excited to see that we use floor space for books, and also they commented  
*"You are trying to make everything exciting. And you're doing it!"*



Chloe with one of our favourite authors, Katherine Rundell, at Bloomsbury Publishing



Nikki and Tracy having tea with Judith Kerr's Tiger at HarperCollins' Big Book Bonanza

*'The selection is good, the layout is good, you can see what you've got to choose from and you know what you're doing. It's better in here than it's ever been.'*

- Customer



A young reader gets into his book with author Dara O'Briain

## In case you forgot what it's about



If you've not heard the story of Kett's Books, we don't mind telling it again: late in 2013 one of our group, Ray Rumsby, realised that Wymondham's independent bookshop was going to close due to retirement. Ray hastily called a meeting, and sixteen like-minded book-lovers met in the Cross Keys pub, to explore whether the shop could be run by volunteers.

At that point the group literally did not even know each others' names, but given what they built in the next twelve weeks, they turned out to truly be a group of perfect strangers: without a scrap of bookselling experience between them, they found enough enthusiasm, goodwill and optimism to put the vision into place. By 1 January we had raised £24,000 in unsecured, interest-free loans, had formed as a company, created a brand, worked with a designer to produce visual materials to communicate our product, and opened the shop.

Four years on the name still holds, and the vision is delivered daily. We have increased our opening hours and have in that time only lost two full days due to staffing issues. We have improved systems, built a school supply service, won grants, and become a respected part of the community we serve.

One of our earliest and most popular features is the sharing shelf, a converted sack barrow which stands outside the shop. A blackboard mounted to it announces 'Books are for sharing.' Indoors the books are for sale, but outdoors we let customers share books with an unknown child who would go home without a book. Through this shelf we proudly demonstrate our attitude and ethos: Giving comes first, and we don't need to know who's benefiting. It's enough to make it happen.

Books, and bookshops, are for sharing. We hope you think we're doing it well.





## Wymondham Community Bookshop

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