

Book reviews for 2019



<u>Month</u>		<u>Author</u>	<u>Review</u>
January	The Beekeepers Daughter	Santa Montefiore	An interesting book to start the New Year with. Two love stories over two generations (mother and daughter) and the secrets and lies involved in their history. The heroines, Grace, and her daughter, Trixie, are both likeable. Some of the group enjoyed the details of keeping bees with Grace the mother taking over the job of beekeeper on a large country estate when her father died. Others found it far too predictable a story overall with a sudden abrupt ending guessed beforehand. It was felt that the writer's style was not easy flowing and the dialogue not good with the characters and plot rather predictable and lacking in finesse. Overall however the pros outweighed the cons and the marks were mainly 6, 7 and 8 out of 10 with one 3!
February	Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine	Gail Honeyman	Original tale about loneliness and being a misfit in today's society. Shows how a child's upbringing with unsuitable and abusive parenting can affect their whole existence and how they deal with life's issues. The group found it different, very sad in places but an uplifting ending by a survivor who managed to find light at the end of the tunnel. The study in friendship was written well and the story gradually came to an end and wasn't abrupt as in some books with no one guessing the surprise twist. It would be a good book to have a sequel made it was felt. The group found it very believable writing with high marks given of mainly 8 and 9 with one 9.5!

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March	Before We Were Yours	Lisa Wingate	Heartbreaking true story-line based around children from poor families being wrenched from their families and lives and placed in a children's home to be eventually adopted by wealthy families. Another very well received choice of book with very high marks – even one 10! The group found it was well written but a bit confusing with the children's change of names. Very subtle writing and very upsetting in places knowing it was based on fact. It was felt it would have been nice to hear more about how their biological parents tried to find them but well written with interest shown on reading more by the same author.
April	A Man Called Ove	Fredrik Backman	Ove is almost certainly the grumpiest man you will ever meet. He thinks himself surrounded by idiots with neighbour's annoying him because they are incompetent fools and he has little patience. It is hilarious in parts but very moving as you find out during the story why he is the way he is through traumas that have happened in his life. However, there is something about him that is quite irresistible. On a personal note I absolutely loved it as it reminded me of many men I know! Generally, the marks were high but three of the group in particular couldn't connect with the character and found it too depressing and had no empathy with the character. However, everyone agreed it was an easy read and it all depended how the individual reader looked at the storyline as it covered all different relationships and was a funny, moving, and uplifting tale of love and community.

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<u>Month</u>		<u>Author</u>	<u>Review</u>
May	See You in September	Charity Norman	This book got very good reviews by the Club with one 10! Set in New Zealand it recounts a young girl's experiences of being in a religious cult and the idyllic lifestyle offered and feeling of belonging but also gave the downside detailing how vulnerable people are indoctrinated bit by bit. From another viewpoint it also outlined her family's feelings of helplessness and how the situation affected all their lives. Some of the book club had tales to tell of acquaintances' experiences with similar circumstances. A recommended read.
June	A Discovery of Witches	Deborah Harkness	Well this book was one that you either loved or hated! Very long book, the first of a trilogy. Some of the group hadn't managed to read it all by the meeting. A bit like Twilight tales for adults dealing with trying to find a certain magical book and detailing a love story gradually occurring between a witch and a vampire. Several of the group found the characters hard to believe and the storyline too repetitive while the fans found it enthralling and very descriptive, in one instance imaginatively detailing what to feed a vampire when inviting the same to dinner!! Marks varied from a 3 to 9, rest mainly 5's and 6's with one 7.

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July	Lullaby	Leila Slimani	Disturbing tale starting with the lawyer mother of two young children finding one dead and the other near death on her arrival home and their nanny in a comatose state. The book gradually unravels the nanny's life and how she became unhinged and none of the characters were easy to like. It showed the parents becoming involved in their work lives and depending increasingly on their 'exceptional' nanny and in doing so neglecting their children. Not a very good clear ending and as we were told at the very beginning of the story who did it there were no twists and not enough suspense for some of the group. It highlighted how dependent people are on comparative strangers to be responsible for their children with a lot of food for thought. Varied marks from 1 x 3, rest mostly 6 and 7 with one 9.
August	A Place Called Winter	Patrick Gale	Set at the turn of the 20 th Century this tells the moving story of Harry Cane who is forced to abandon his wealthy easy life in England for the harsh world faced by pioneers settling on land allocated to them in the Canadian prairies. Loosely based on papers found by the author relating to his great grandfather's life. Slow start building up to his departure due to an illicit affair. Most of the group found it was very sad as his family basically cut him out of their lives. Overall marks mostly 8 with one 9 due to the story being very descriptive and well written. One 6 (not finished) and one 7.

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<u>Month</u>		<u>Author</u>	<u>Review</u>
September	Miss Garnet's Angel	Sally Vickers	Unfortunately, I missed the meeting for this review as I was delayed in London. I personally didn't finish the book and found it quite hard going. This was Sally Vickers debut novel about a retired teacher using a legacy left to her by going to live in an apartment in Venice for the winter. She lived her whole life cautiously and orderly but changed her whole outlook on life during her stay. Particularly she is touched by the all-prevalent spirit of the Angel, Raphael. The ancient tale of Tobias, who travels to Media unaware he is accompanied by the Archangel Raphael, unfolds alongside her journey. A few of the group loved it with marks of 7 and 8 but the rest in the majority felt the same as me. Not enough action and difficult to follow with the parallel story and marks varied on the lower spectrum of 3,4 and 5. The comments were generally that they did not enjoy this book or the characters and found reading it a bit of a chore with too many plot lines to follow and wouldn't hurry to read another novel by the author!

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<u>Month</u>		<u>Author</u>	<u>Review</u>
October	The Light Behind the Window	Lucinda Riley	This book had two connecting storylines throughout which meant jumping back and forth which annoyed some. The part of the story set in the present day was about Emilie de la Martinières who has always fought against her aristocratic background, but after the death of her glamorous, distant mother, she finds herself the sole inheritor of her grand childhood home in the south of France. An old notebook of poems leads her in search of the mysterious and beautiful Sophia, whose tragic love affair changed the course of her family history. The contrasting storyline running alongside is set in the past in London 1943 and tells the story of a young office clerk, Constance Carruthers, who is drafted into the SOE, arriving in occupied Paris during the climax of the conflict. Separated from her contact in her very first hours in France, she stumbles into the heart of a wealthy family who are caught up in a deadly game of secrets and lies. Forced to surrender her identity and all ties to her homeland and her beloved husband, Constance finds herself drawn into a complex web of deception, the repercussions of which will affect generations to come. This Resistance part of the book during the War was interesting and showed how difficult it must have been to live during that period. Most of the group loved the book and gave marks of 8 or 9. However 3 of the group gave 5-7 as didn't like the jumping back and forth and found the Emilie character a bit namby pamby in character particularly with her quick marriage considering she was an intelligent woman but overall this book was easy to read and we would recommend the book.
November	Girl on the Line	Alice Vinten	True stories of life on the beat by a WPC with various scenarios. Overall not very good marks as found to be a bit boring and not enough action and the WPC was generally found to be very difficult to empathise with and the storylines more about her than the characters she came up against. It was easy to read and gave an insight into police work but marks generally were on the lower spectrum of 4 and 5 with one 8!

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<u>Month</u>		<u>Author</u>	<u>Review</u>
December	The Lido	Libby Page	<p>Was spotted by one of the members when at the Guildford Book Festival and was a nice easy read to end the year loosely based on a true story of a lido in Brixton earmarked for demolition and redevelopment for residents only of a posh complex by a property company.</p> <p>Shows the power of community spirit in their fight to save their swimming in all weathers and moral is that if you fight hard enough you can overcome! Found to be a good holiday read although some thought the middle could have been shortened and the ending lengthened as like other books this year the loose ends were tied up very quickly in the last few pages without much elaboration and it was and felt like a debut novel! Overall the marks were mainly 7.</p>