

Calibre Echo Number Two Spring 2011

This is a text version covering most of the items in our audio newsletter, Calibre Echo, issued in Spring 2011.

Introduction and Contents (Track 1 of audio version)

For those of you who have not heard the audio version it is well worth a listen particularly for the interview with Calibre member, Liz Lovick, whose interesting life makes for fascinating listening, so much so that we gave over the whole of side one (on the cassette version) to this piece! It therefore proved far too long to transcribe with the easy flow of the conversation partially lost in translation. The interview with Liz is Track 2 in our audio version.

Denise James from the editorial team was hoping that the interview could take place on location at Liz's home on the island of Orkney but the wonders of modern technology and the skill of Monica Peterson, our Digital Studio Manager, meant that she was bitterly disappointed with just a short trip to the adjacent studio. Better luck next time, Denise.

We have one goodbye and two hellos. Liz Mitchell, who many of you will have met out and about at exhibitions, is retiring after more than six years in the Publicity Department. Our two newcomers are Nicole Russell, who takes up the post of Publicity and Communications Officer, and Kate Barker our new Fundraiser.

Christine Ronaldson explained how we categorise books into the different genres. Then we had Nicole, with news of forthcoming exhibitions, followed by Liz Clarke, who brought us up to date with what's been happening on the fundraising front. Finally,

Nicole read us some quotes from two well known Calibre supporters.

Farewell from Liz Mitchell (Track 3 of audio version)

Liz Mitchell told us about her time at Calibre and her plans for the future.

The timing of this newsletter gives me the ideal opportunity to talk to you all as I wind down towards my retirement at the end of June.

It's only natural, of course, to look back at what I've been involved in and the highlights of my time at Calibre. Happily, there have been quite a few:

The rebranding of Calibre - that was such an interesting and rewarding process (and fun); coming up with the strap line and design of our logo. The exercise included the creation and design of our range of publicity materials and exhibition equipment and it's been good to experience how all these elements have come together and contributed to the very positive way Calibre is now regarded by members and other organisations in the same field of work.

The rebranding exercise went hand in hand with the **introduction of our digital service** which has been an exciting development. And it's been my job to tell people about the benefits of this way of listening to books. Once people realise how easy it is to use the MP3 CDs and (more recently) the memory sticks they're very enthusiastic about using these formats and, of course, the sound quality is better too.

Being able to widen our service to include people with **dyslexia** has added another dimension to my job and the increase in dyslexic members in the Young Calibre Library has been really encouraging.

These have been huge steps forward for Calibre.

But most rewarding for me has been the increase in the awareness of Calibre and its service across the whole of the UK. So many more people now know about us than was the case 4 or 5 years ago and that's largely due to keeping in touch with the contacts we've made as we've travelled round the country attending exhibitions and giving talks to visually impaired groups and professionals. To be partly responsible for that change is hugely satisfying for me.

Of course, what I've enjoyed most has always been meeting our existing members (and potential new members). Obviously I couldn't do this job if I didn't like talking, so that part has been easy – but on my travels to all parts of the country it's been heart-warming to meet so many people who are grateful for the service we provide.

I know I'm going to miss that part of the job most of all.

But it's now the right time for me to concentrate on other things. My second grandson is due in March and my daughter is getting married 4 weeks later. So the next couple of months will be a hectic and exciting time for us as a family. I'm telling myself I'll have more time when I retire in June, so the plan is to do more Scottish Country Dancing which I love - it keeps me fit and mentally alert and the more I can dance the better I should

become. That's the theory anyway! I'd like to be free to get back home to Scotland more often and see my friends; and I want to put my skills to good use by doing some volunteering locally. Last but not least, the man in my life is going to have a bit more of my time than he's had recently. So I'm not convinced I'll have more time – I expect I'll still be juggling commitments as I do now.

It's been a privilege to work for such a caring organisation as Calibre which certainly deserves its excellent reputation and I hope you all continue to enjoy the books you get from us.

My final word is to thank all of you, especially those I've met personally, for your kind words, courtesy and sense of humour. You've made my job so enjoyable and I wish you all the very best for the future.

Hello from Nicole Russell (Track 4 of audio version)

Next we heard from the first of our new members of staff, Nicole Russell.

Hello.....I'm Nicole Russell and I joined Calibre audio library as Publicity and Communications Officer in January.

I'm a BBC trained broadcast journalist who worked in BBC local radio for a number of years both as a presenter and a producer. I still present programmes for army radio.

I've broadcast a number of live reports from locations as diverse as inside a pigeon loft, the top of a travelling double decker bus trying to avoid low lying branches and also sitting inside a

Warrior tank during manoeuvres; I'm a woman who likes a challenge.

I've worked in the press office of two large organizations, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (The RSPB) and the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) for the past few years.

During this time I've managed to study for two Open University degrees and I cannot tell you my relief when I was awarded my Master's degree after spilling blood, sweat and tears writing my final dissertation.

I love reading, from **Ian Rankin's Rebus** novels to autobiographies. I particularly enjoy works by **Anita Desai** such as **FASTING, FEASTING** and **Nadine Gordimer's THE HOUSE GUN**. One woman I admire, both as a war reporter and writer, is **Martha Gellhorn**. **Carl Rollyson's** book **BEAUTIFUL EXILE** recounts her amazing life.

When I'm not working my favourite place is in my garden. It's filled to the brim with a mixture of shrubs, flowers and climbers. I also grow some of my own vegetables in pots and have a couple of fruit trees which come in handy when making plum and apple crumble in the autumn. Many of my plants I've bought because of their names. For instance, my Nana was called Adelaide so I have a beautiful rose called 'Adelaide d'Orleans' climbing up a pergola. My granddad was called Herbert, so I have a 'Herbert' blueberry plant in a pot and one of my favourite roses is called 'Grace', which is also the name of my best friend Sally's daughter. There's nothing I like more in the summer than to sit in the garden with a small tincture and smell the exquisite perfume of my Oriental lilies and buddleja.

I've very keen on wildlife conservation so I'm always interested to see which butterflies land on my buddleja in the late Spring and Summer months. I'm a supporter of a number of conservation organizations and I volunteer for the RSPB. This means I'm a dab hand at putting up marquees, building nest boxes and making fat ball feeders.

Another of my interests is aviation, particularly women's aviation history. Although I don't fly myself at the moment, I'm a volunteer for the RAF Benevolent Fund (an organization which supports Calibre). This entails travelling up and down the country to various air shows and seeing some amazing aircraft and displays including The Red Arrows, the Tigers Parachute Team, the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight with the Spitfire and Lancaster, and the world's only flying Vulcan, which is my favourite plane.

I'd highly recommend one of Calibre's books: **Giles Whittell's SPITFIRE WOMEN OF WORLD WAR 2** about the determined and tenacious female pilots of the Air Transport Auxiliary which is a really good read.

My secret ambition is to wing walk and I'm hoping to do a test flight in the summer. So if you hear the whirr of a Tiger Moth engine overhead that will probably be me standing aloft with a Calibre banner trailing behind!

The catalogue numbers for the books recommended by Nicole are:

FASTING, FEASTING by Anita Desai 5757

THE HOUSE GUN by Nadine Gordimer 5037

BEAUTIFUL EXILE by Carl Rollyson 6042

SPITFIRE WOMEN OF WORLD WAR 2 by Giles Whittell 8076

Did you know? Some interesting facts about Calibre (Track 5)

- Did you know that last year we added 723 new books into the digital library?
- Did you know that Calibre receives no government funding?
- Did you know that legacies are vital to continue Calibre's free service and typically make up one third of our income? Could you support us with a gift in your will?
- Did you know that as well as supporting over 19000 individual members, Calibre supports over 80 book groups?

Hello from Kate Barker (Track 6 of audio version)

Kate Barker from fundraising told us about herself and her first impressions of working at Calibre.

Hi. I'm Kate Barker and I joined Calibre's fundraising team in January. The staff here are all really friendly and it's great to be part of a team with all the volunteers, seeing the audio books going out to people all over the country.

One of the first things that made an impression on me was all the wonderful letters that Calibre members send in to say what the library service means to them. It's been really moving reading them and they're a great inspiration for me when I'm writing grant applications. I came into fundraising from journalism because I wanted to use my writing and communication skills to help other people. As a reporter on local newspapers, I liked covering the campaigning stories about people trying to save their local school or hospital because I wanted to make a positive difference to people's lives. After eight years fundraising for two other charities, I'm now looking forward to helping all the people who depend on Calibre by raising some of the money needed to keep the service going.

Working at Calibre has reminded me how much reading for pleasure means to me. As a child, I loved losing myself in stories about magic and adventure and I enjoyed literature so much at school that I went on to do an English degree. I can't imagine how frustrating it would be if I couldn't just pick up any book I wanted and read it, but I may find out when I'm older. My mum has aged-related macular degeneration and has lost most of her sight in one eye. I discovered recently that it's hereditary and that I have a 50% chance of developing it too, so it's good to know that the Calibre library will be there for me if I ever find that I can't read print anymore.

In the meantime, I'm grateful that I can and I've got into the habit of reading in my lunch break, when a lot of the other staff sit and read or chat in the dining room. In the last couple of weeks I've got through **BLACK ORCHIDS** and **THE KITE RUNNER** - which are both really powerful stories about family relationships - and I've just started **LIGHT ON SNOW** by **Anita Shreve**, who's one of my favourite authors.

When I'm not reading, I also enjoy hiking and dancing. I go to salsa classes and events with my partner and I took up belly dancing about 18 months ago, which is much harder than it looks, but a great way of keeping fit and good for a giggle in a women-only class. I made the mistake of mentioning it at work and I have a horrible feeling that someone's going to decide belly dancing would make an unusual fundraising event for Calibre. I'll let you know if I get dragged into it!

You can borrow all three of the books mentioned by Kate from the Calibre Library.

The catalogue numbers for the books are:

BLACK ORCHIDS by Gillian Slovo 8627

THE KITE RUNNER by Khaled Hosseini 7202

LIGHT ON SNOW by Anita Shreve 6828
(available in cassette only)

Book Categorisation (Track 7 of audio version)

Christine Ronaldson has clarified information on how we allocate book categories.

We have recently had feedback from some members who don't choose their own titles, but borrow their books by category. They say that we are sending them books from categories they haven't chosen. I thought it might be useful if I explained why and how we allocate books to certain categories.

Every year we add several hundred books to the library and we want to make sure that each book reaches all the members who might enjoy it. To do this, and to assist anyone searching for books in the catalogue, we assign one, two or three categories to each book.

Some books are very easy and only need one category. For example **Agatha Christie's** books featuring **Miss Marple** or **Hercule Poirot** are detective stories so at Calibre we put them in the category Detective & Mystery Stories.

C.J. Sansom writes some wonderful books set in Tudor times featuring **Matthew Shardlake**, a lawyer, who inevitably ends up trying to catch a murderer. Whilst these are Detective & Mystery stories, they are also extremely well written Historical novels. To ensure that devotees of both Detective fiction, and Historical novels can receive the book we assign TWO categories, and our issuing computer will look at all the assigned categories when looking for a book to send out.

Sometimes the subject matter of a book is even harder to define. We are currently working on a book called **BLACK COUNTRY TO RED CHINA**, the true story of the author, **Esther Cheo Ying**, who was born in China in the 1930s to an English mother and wealthy Chinese father. She spent the years of the Second World War with her mother's family in the Midlands, but in 1949, at the age of 17, decided to return to China, where she was caught up in the Chinese Civil War and the Communist Revolution. Assigning categories to this book was a difficult task. It is firstly autobiographical, so needs to be found in Biography, as it also deals with war time situations in Europe and later in China, it would also need to be found in War. Finally, because she lived in

China, as a member of the Red Army, during such a turbulent period in China's history the book also needs to be shown as History. So we have classified this book as Biography – General; War – General and History – World, and hope that everyone who wishes to listen to it will be able to find it.

Another little quirk has been pointed out before, but it is probably worth repeating as we still get some queries. The publishing industry has promoted an increasing number of titles to both the adult and teenage markets, terming them Cross-over books. Again it is difficult to know how to treat these titles, so we have decided to place the book in the section for which it was originally written, but to give it both Young Calibre and adult categories so it can be found by all those interested. For example all **Jane Austen** titles will have adult catalogue numbers, but will also be available to Young Calibre members and appear in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 catalogues, as well as the Fiction Classics category of the main library.

On the other hand **THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME** by **Mark Haddon** was written for teenagers, but the world of a boy with Aspergers Syndrome soon became popular with adults and is almost required reading with Book Groups. So if you want to read this it will have a Young Calibre number, but it will be found in both Key Stage categories and the General Fiction category of the main Calibre library.

I hope you find this a helpful guide to how the library works, and that you continue to get the books you really want to read.

Might I also add that if you are a member who prefers to read books you have selected yourself, it is really important that you keep your reading list well stocked, so that the computer can always find something for you. A list of 50 books or above is

most effective. If the selection drops too far you may find that we are unable to issue you with a book you really want. You can change the list yourself, through the Calibre website, though you will need to contact us for a password, or you can send us your choices by e-mail; or write to us or phone us on 01296 432 339.

Talks and Exhibitions (Track 8 of audio version)

Some of our forthcoming events; detailed by Nicole.

In 2010 the Publicity team was very busy attending 125 exhibitions, talks and work shops. This gave us an opportunity to tell people about the free, easy-to-use service we provide but also for potential members to ask questions and try out the different players for our digital MP3 CD and USB memory stick books.

This year the team will again be out and about all over the country.

Highlights will include the Dover Local Eyes exhibition on the 6th April and the Low Vision Day in Peterborough on 14th April. We head to Kendal for the Sight Advice exhibition on 20th April and on May 18th we'll be attending the Galloway's Society for the Blind Exhibition in Preston.

We always enjoy going to the very popular and busy Sight Village exhibitions. You'll find us at Sight Village in Edinburgh and Glasgow on the 5th and 6th April; Sight Village in Birmingham between the 12 – 14th July; Sight North East in Newcastle on 7th September; Sight Village in Manchester on the

27th September and, finally, Sight Village London on 1st -2nd November

We'll also be giving talks and workshops for various groups such as the Macular Disease Society and local blind associations across the UK.

If you would like us to come and give a talk or attend an exhibition then contact Liz, Nicole or Lily in the Publicity Department on 01296 432339. The earlier you give us notice of your event the more likely we'll be able to come.

Did you know? More interesting facts about Calibre (Track 9)

- Did you know that Calibre has over 200 volunteers? 103 help in our library and offices. 99 people read, check or review books for us.
- Did you know that last Christmas Calibre sold over 5000 packs of cards?
- Did you know that over 60% of our members now use our digital service and receive books on CD or memory stick?
- Did you know that our most popular category of books is Detectives & Mysteries which has 898 titles listed with 497 available in digital?
- Did you know that Calibre was founded in 1974 and started life in a kitchen?

Fundraising News (Track 10 of audio version)

All the latest news from the Fundraising Department from Liz Clarke.

Calibre's income target for 2010 was close to £1.2 million and the expectation was that we would end the year with a budgeted deficit of around £200,000 largely because of expenditure on projects essential to keep Calibre up to date with technology. Our biggest project of course is moving further towards our digital service which offers books on disks and memory sticks. In the future we hope to add internet delivery as a further choice.

The good news about 2010 is that we ended the year with a surplus of around £45,000. The reason for this marked change in fortune was the unexpected increase in legacy and in memoriam donations. I really wish I could say a special thank you to the 48 people who remembered Calibre in their wills – many of them remembered Calibre because of the difference our service made to their lives. It seems fitting that their gifts are now benefitting current and future Calibre members who will derive similar pleasure from reading.

We need to raise about £1.3million in 2011 in order to maintain our service and the scary thought is that over 97% of this income needs to come from a range of fundraising activities. I think my team and I will be rather busy! The thought that there is lots of support for Calibre out there is hugely reassuring because we certainly couldn't raise such a large sum without lots of help.

Many different people have contributed to fundraising in a variety of different ways. I would like to thank all the Calibre members and their friends and families who have supported us

in a host of innovative, inspiring and generous ways. These have included skydiving, requesting donations to Calibre instead of wedding gifts, completing a Coast to Coast challenge involving running, biking and kayaking 105 miles across Scotland and making lovely coasters which we were able to sell to raise funds.

Some Calibre members like Dan Roche and his brothers chose to sponsor a Calibre book. "I have three sighted brothers who read lots of books and it's great that Calibre can offer some of the books that they read" said Dan who lives in Cardiff and is totally blind due to suffering with Alstrom Syndrome.

Of course many more Calibre members made donations in response to our annual appeal, along with Christmas card purchases or indeed at other times. We thank you for all you have done and hope you will stick with us and continue to help in whatever ways you feel able and appropriate. Calibre's service to members is ongoing but along with that goes the continued need for funding.

As well as regularly giving us their time some volunteers have helped raise funds. Many of you will know the voice of Pat Steadman as she has read lots of books for Calibre. Pat nominated us to receive the proceeds from the collection at the Christmas Concert of Hertford Choral Society. This amounted to a wonderful £600. If you are a member of any groups who raise funds for charity please do mention Calibre!

Staff, trustees and companies have also played a part in Calibre's fundraising. I end with a mention of Francis Bianca, husband of our Audio Production Manager Carol. Francis is running the Virgin London Marathon on 17 April to raise funds for Calibre. He has been training hard for this prestigious event and with the

aim of finishing the course in under five hours. Francis was so determined to continue his training in the period of heavy snow that he bought a treadmill to keep up his schedule. If you would like to sponsor Francis whose 60th birthday is soon after the marathon, he has a justgiving page online at: www.justgiving.com/Francis-Bianca. Any cheques received at Calibre will be added to his sponsorship total.

Authors' Quotations (Track 11 of audio version)

Finally some quotes from two authors who support the work of Calibre.

We are delighted that award-winning Scottish author **Candia McWilliam** has agreed to be a new patron. Candia's career as a writer began in 1988 with **A CASE OF KNIVES**. Her most recent work is **WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN WINTER: A MEMOIR IN BLINDNESS**. This details an amazing journey through her experiences of visual impairment to restored sight.

Of Calibre's work Candia says:

"Your excellent work demands support. I'm honoured to be asked and very glad to give it. I have been visually challenged for a long time and completely sightless for protracted periods yet I am a voracious reader: professionally, emotionally and spiritually dependent on books. Audio books reach into the dark and loneliness as little else does. I cannot stress too strongly my gratitude to Calibre."

The doyenne of crime fiction, **PD James** is also a supporter of Calibre's work as she says:

“Being read to is one of life’s keenest pleasures, especially when the reader has an attractive voice and a real understanding of, and sympathy with, the story. I am delighted that many thousands of book lovers, including enthusiasts for detective stories, enjoy this unique experience brought to them by Calibre audio books. The human voice has an intimacy which makes listening a very personal pleasure and which brings the story alive in a unique way”.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN WINTER: A MEMOIR IN BLINDNESS will be added to the library later this year.

If you have any comments on the items featured in this issue of Calibre Echo please send them to the newsletter editor, Christine Ronaldson, at Calibre. Or you can email her at christine.ronaldson@calibre.org.uk.