

Interview Summary Sheet Project: Memories of Fiction: An Oral History of Reader's Lives
Reference No.
Interviewee name and title: Alison Williams
Interviewee DOB and place of birth: 27 th December 1962, Kingston upon Thames (home) Interviewee occupation: Librarian Book group(s) attended: Putney
Date(s) of recording: 28 th July 2015 Location of recording: Battersea Library Interviewer: Amy Tooth Murphy Duration(s): 01.47.37 Summariser: Alison Chand
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Key themes: Education, career, family, reading, childhood, libraries, reading groups, reading genres, reading for feeling, illness, emotion, link between reading and place.
All books and authors mentioned (those discussed for >20 seconds in bold): Dan Brown, <i>The Da Vinci Code</i> Dawn French Agatha Christie <i>Andrew Lang's Fairy Book</i> Beatrix Potter Rosie Thomas, <i>The Kashmir Shawl</i> Rosamunde Pilcher <i>Who Else Writes Like...?</i> Markus Zusak, <i>The Book Thief</i> Stephen Kelman, <i>Pigeon English</i> Anne Donovan, <i>Buddha Da</i> EL James, <i>Fifty Shades of Grey</i> Virginia Woolf Yann Martel, <i>Life of Pi</i> Edmund de Waal, <i>The Hare with Amber Eyes</i> Damon Gulgut, <i>Arctic Summer</i> Henry James, <i>Washington Square</i> Fyodor Dostoyevsky, <i>Crime and Punishment</i> Leo Tolstoy, <i>War and Peace</i> , <i>Anna Karenina</i> Lewis Carroll, <i>Alice in Wonderland</i>, <i>Alice Through the Looking Glass</i> Arthur Ransome, <i>Swallows and Amazons</i> Enid Blyton

Andre Norton, *Octagon Magic*
 Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden*
Noel Streatfeild, *Thursday's Child, White Boots*
Dame Lynley Dodd, *Hairy Maclary*
Catherine Anholt, *A Kiss Like This*
J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter*
Roald Dahl, *The Witches*
 Richard Scarry
 Cormac McCarthy
Mervyn Peake, *Gormenghast*
Dave Boling, *Guernica*
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun*
Irene Nemirovsky, *Suite Francaise*
Andrea Levy, *Small Island, The Long Song, Every Light in the House Burnin'*
Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace*
Sarah Waters, *Fingersmith*
Helen Macdonald, *H is for Hawk*
T. H. White, *The Sword in the Stone*
Roger Deakin
Richard Mabey, *Flora Britannica*
 Frederic Gros, *A Philosophy of Walking*
Marion Zimmer Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon, Black Trillium*
George R. R. Martin, *Fever Dream, A Game of Thrones*
Philip Larkin
 John Keats
 Thomas Hardy
V. C. Andrews, *Flowers in the Attic*
Danielle Steel

Interviewer/Summariser comments:
 Part two of two

00:00:00	Introduction to interview, interviewer lays out plan for interview, clarification of date of birth.
00.02.00	Reflection on personal style of reading, self description as 'snobby' reader, liking reading to be literary. Comments on reading <i>The Da Vinci Code</i> (Dan Brown), finding book painful because of bad writing style. Remarks on studying English literature at university, reading group preferring literary style of fiction.
00.03.00	Comments on enjoyment of reading 'tripe' when busy as Mum, not being averse to lighter material, enjoying Dawn French fiction, description of self as quite serious reader.
00.04.00	Remarks on literary fiction, classically well known material, material aiming for literary prizes. Comments on avoidance of crime fiction, dabbling in Swedish crime fiction, general avoidance of science fiction/fantasy/erotica/'chick lit'. Remarks on 'chick lit' section being renamed in library due to complaints.
00.06.00	Further comments on crime fiction, grandmother reading Agatha Christie prolifically, reading Agatha Christie when staying with

	grandmother, spending lots of time with grandmother, reading <i>Andrew Lang's Fairy Book</i> , Beatrix Potter. Memories of grandmother's attic, description of room as 'magical playroom', trunk of dressing up clothes, shelves built into slope of roof, toys, book shelves. Comments on having own bedroom at grandparents' house, description of room. Further comments on Agatha Christie, reading books aged between nine and ten (1971-1972), enjoying working out puzzles, enjoying character of Hercule Poirot. Remarks on losing interest in Agatha Christie as adult.
00.09.40	Comments on years of reading 'rubbish', Rosie Thomas, Rosamunde Pilcher. Remarks on being drawn to books set in interesting times/places such as Oxford University, Kashmir, Egypt, interest in plot locations/links to past, idea of reincarnation, not remembering romantic aspects of books. Remarks on mother recommending Rosie Thomas/Rosamunde Pilcher, library book called <i>Who Else Writes Like...?</i> , using book to find similar authors.
00.11.40	Further comments on <i>Who Else Writes Like...?</i> , use of book as library resource, logistics of producing book, book not being online.
00.12.30	Comments on not always remembering plot, preferring lighter material when pregnant/breastfeeding/very tired, being unable to engage with books as much.
00.13.40	Remarks on most recent Rosie Thomas book read, <i>The Kashmir Shawl</i> , setting in India, entertaining nature of book.
00.14.30	Comments on reading more challenging material on holiday, not doing a lot of holiday reading, taking books on walking holidays alone, reading books in pubs at end of days spent walking.
00.15.10	Comments on reading <i>The Book Thief</i> (Markus Zusak) on walking trip.
00.16.00	Remarks on feelings of obligation to read more serious material, comparison of light reading to watching soap operas.
00.17.20	Comments on preferring not read more than one book at once, further remarks on preferring to only read more challenging books.
00.18.00	Further comments on <i>The Da Vinci Code</i> , poor writing style.
00.19.30	Comments on being put off by speech difficult to believe in books. Remarks on reading <i>Pigeon English</i> (Stephen Kelman), language used, readable nature of book. Comments on reading <i>Buddha Da</i> (Anne Donovan), Scottish dialect used, comparison in different styles of speech in fiction. Further comments on <i>The Da Vinci Code</i> .
00.21.10	Remarks on badly written books encouraging people to read, comments on <i>Fifty Shades of Grey</i> (EL James), further comments on <i>The Da Vinci Code</i> . Remarks on views of reading of others as librarian.
00.23.20	Remarks on not viewing material as too challenging, being grabbed by unsurprising material at university/reading group, fears of not understanding material.
00.24.40	Comments on stream of consciousness style of writing in Virginia Woolf.
00.25.40	Remarks on experimental forms of writing, enjoying experimental material. Comments on <i>Life of Pi</i> (Yann Martel),

00.26.45	<p>unique and experimental nature of book, reading group members not liking book, description of book as favourite.</p> <p>Remarks on <i>The Hare with Amber Eyes</i> (Edmund de Waal), not expecting to enjoy book. Comments on general dislike of fictionalised fact, view of kind of writing as laziness. Remarks on <i>Arctic Summer</i> (Damon Galgut), annoyance with plot of book. Further comments on <i>The Hare with Amber Eyes</i>.</p>
00.28.00	Comments on not expecting to enjoy Henry James, not enjoying Henry James, comments on <i>Washington Square</i> , remarks on plot.
00.28.50	Remarks on approaching reading material with open mind, not expecting to enjoy Fyodor Dostoyevsky, reading <i>Crime and Punishment</i> . Interviewer comments on reading groups reading Russian novelists, mention of <i>War and Peace</i> , <i>Anna Karenina</i> (Leo Tolstoy). Comments on not reading other Russian novelists. Further comments on depressing and dark nature of <i>Crime and Punishment</i> , enjoyment of book, believable characters.
00.31.10	Comments on reading <i>Alice in Wonderland</i> (Lewis Carroll) with father, reading on sofa at home, description of sofa. Remarks on reading on parents' bed, memories of 'snuggling up' with father. Comments on memories of pictures in book, excitement, childhood imagination of book's reality. Remarks on reading with mother, clearer memories of reading <i>Alice</i> with father, favourite parts of <i>Alice</i> stories, not finding story dark.
00.33.40	Comments on <i>Swallows and Amazons</i> (Arthur Ransome), being allowed freedom growing up, enjoying spending time outdoors, importance of lake and island to <i>Swallows and Amazons</i> story. Comments on continued interest in outdoors, walking with parents.
00.35.30	Comments on Enid Blyton, preference for <i>Alice in Wonderland</i> and <i>Alice Through the Looking Glass</i> , inheriting father's copy of <i>Alice</i> books on father's death, continued love for books.
00.36.50	Remarks on <i>Octagon Magic</i> (Andre Norton), comments on plot, visual nature of story, hazy memories of plot, similarities to <i>The Secret Garden</i> (Frances Hodgson Burnett), reading book aged seven to eight (1969-1970). Further comments on freedom to read material of choice.
00.38.30	Comments on Noel Streatfeild, identifying with characters in Streatfeild books, remarks on <i>Thursday's Child</i> , <i>White Boots</i> , remarks on plots, brief comments on skating.
00.39.40	Remarks on memories in physical books, further comments on Noel Streatfeild.
00.39.55	Comments on not passing books to son, problems with persuading son to read. Remarks on reading with son, <i>Hairy Maclary</i> (Dame Lynley Dodd), repetitive reading of book. Comments on reading <i>A Kiss Like This</i> (Catherine Anholt), remarks on plot, son still owning book. Remarks on reading <i>Harry Potter</i> (J. K. Rowling) with son, partner mostly reading <i>Harry Potter</i> to son. Comments on process of choosing material to read with son, not reading same material as with own parents. Remarks on reading Roald Dahl with son, <i>The Witches</i> (son aged six to seven). Interviewer comments on scary nature of book.
00.42.50	Remarks on lack of memories of libraries as child, studying education and English at university, enjoying English more than education part of degree. Comments on getting job as library

	assistant at university, doing postgraduate degree, deciding to pursue career in libraries. Remarks on parents owning lots of books, not needing to borrow books from libraries, not having expectations of libraries.
00.45.10	Comments on starting to work in libraries, working in Chelsea library, memories of building, working full time in Chelsea library before beginning library postgraduate degree. Remarks on rota system round Kensington and Chelsea libraries, moving between libraries every six months. Comments on varied nature of Kensington and Chelsea borough. Further comments on Chelsea library.
00.47.10	Comments on seven years managing Willingdon library, enjoyment of working in Willingdon library, loving building and clientele. Description of building, involvement in refurbishment of library, getting to know building and stock.
00.48.30	Remarks on brother's reading tastes, childhood interest in Richard Scarry, adult interest in Cormac McCarthy, <i>Gormenghast</i> (Mervyn Peake). Remarks on different reading tastes to brother, finding brother's choices too philosophical, interviewer comments on Mervyn Peake books.
00.50.40	Comments on link between reading and place of reading, remarks on lack of memory of content of reading, remembering more about own life at time of reading books. Comments on lack of memory of reading given amount of time invested in reading, interviewer comments on memories of other interviewees, nature of memory.
00.55.20	Remarks on reading <i>Guernica</i> (Dave Boling), disturbing/harrowing nature of book, feeling emotion when reading.
00.56.00	Comments on <i>Half of a Yellow Sun</i> (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie), learning about subjects not otherwise known about, remarks on descriptions, learning about historical events through fiction.
00.56.50	Remarks on reading <i>Suite Francaise</i> (Irene Nemirovsky), remarks on plot, emotions of reading, remembering feelings more than characters.
00.59.00	Comments on Andrea Levy, <i>Small Island</i> , memories of courage/fortitude, caring about what happened to central character. Remarks on other Andrea Levy books, brief mention of <i>Every Light in the House Burnin'</i> , remarks on <i>The Long Song</i> , plot.
01.01.00	Comments on not avoiding any particular subject areas, not seeking particular answers from literature, reading to relax/escape. Remarks on reading as conscious act to avoid other activities/thinking.
01.03.50	Further remarks on reading <i>The Book Thief</i> on walking holiday, reading at table overlooking sea, enjoying beer/sunshine, not wanting to be anywhere else. Comments on finishing <i>The Book Thief</i> on train on way home, fellow passenger asking after wellbeing when crying reading book, having private experience in public place.
01.06.00	Memories of reading light fiction in specially designed breastfeeding chair in son's bedroom, remarks on lamp in bedroom.
01.07.30	Comments on laughing out loud at books, humour in Dawn French books.

01.08.20	Remarks on missing stop on train because of reading, missing stop because of reading <i>Alias Grace</i> (Margaret Atwood), <i>Fingersmith</i> (Sarah Waters). Further comments on <i>Alias Grace</i> , getting inside central character's head.
01.10.20	Comments on reading fictionalised accounts of real life events. Further comments on not expecting to enjoy <i>The Hare with Amber Eyes</i> .
01.11.20	Remarks on <i>H is for Hawk</i> (Helen Macdonald), introspective nature of book, annoyance about assumptions made about T. H. White, unlikeable nature of central character, uncaring treatment of hawk. Remarks on use of location in book, wasted potential for good nature writing.
01.15.30	Comments on interest in nature writing, remarks on Roger Deakin, <i>Flora Britannica</i> (Richard Mabey). Remarks on Roger Deakin's writing about outdoor swimming experiences. Comments on not always enjoying fictionalised nature writing, enjoying reading about personal relationships with environment. Interviewer comments on Amazon reviews of <i>Flora Britannica</i> .
01.18.40	Remarks on interest in both fiction and non-fiction books, interest in books about standing stones, outdoors, reading travel guides, practical guides to activities such as painting, not reading about history often.
01.20.20	Remarks on not having read <i>A Philosophy of Walking</i> (Frederic Gros). Interviewer comments on book.
01.21.20	Comments on T. H. White, <i>The Sword in the Stone</i> , fascination from childhood with Arthurian legend. Remarks on reading <i>The Mists of Avalon</i> (Marion Zimmer Bradley). Further comments on defensiveness of T. H. White story, misinterpretation of experience in <i>H is for Hawk</i> . Further remarks on unlikeable nature of central character.
01.24.50	Remarks on George R. R. Martin, mention of <i>A Game of Thrones</i> , comments on <i>Fever Dream</i> , lack of memory of content, reading book because of recommendation.
01.25.40	Comments on <i>Black Trillium</i> (Marion Zimmer Bradley), not usually reading fantasy fiction.
01.26.00	Further comments on <i>The Mists of Avalon</i> , taking reading recommendations from friends, feeling obligated to read books recommended by friends.
01.27.00	Remarks on librarian job being about other activities than reading, not feeling as much pressure to read as previously, reading from curiosity, reading less of own personal choice material since involvement with reading group.
01.28.00	Further comments on facilitating reading group, trying to steer group in direction of own personal choices, alternating between two different reading groups, reading one book per month, disappointment at not managing to finish all books.
01.29.50	Comments on always having enjoyed reading, comments on son's and partner's methods of relaxation, rewarding nature of reading.
01.30.45	Remarks on being asked for reading recommendations by others, reading shaping views of others about interviewee. Comments on having read more books than seen films.
01.31.50	Comments on reading on way to work, sometimes on way home from work, also doing crosswords on train. Comments on reading

	early in morning, reading in bath, not reading in bed at end of day.
01.33.20	Remarks on diagnosis with ME, impact on reading/other hobbies of diagnosis/tiredness. Comments on unpredictable nature of illness, reading less than previously, restriction to reading group material, effects on speed of reading/ability to process story, frustration with condition, impact on walking holiday in Scotland.
01.38.00	Comments on poetry, Philip Larkin, John Keats, Thomas Hardy, reading more poetry when studying, enjoyment of poetry, beauty of words, not knowing many others who enjoy poetry. Comments on memories of feeling rather than specific words, remarks on in-depth study of Philip Larkin at university, doing later study on Larkin at time of Larkin's death, listening to sound recordings of Larkin, Larkin's delivery. Comments on not carrying around poetry on day-to-day basis, reading poetry when recommended by others.
01.41.50	Remarks on re-reading poetry, re-reading Philip Larkin, description of poems as 'old friends'. Comments on not usually re-reading fiction.
01.43.00	Comments on popular reading material, <i>Flowers in the Attic</i> (V. C. Andrews), Danielle Steel, prolific nature of Steel's writing.
01.44.10	Remarks on process of recycling library books not read much, books being kept off site.
01.44.45	Comments on having been gifted leather bound reading diary, not writing in diary, keeping walking notebook, records of swimming, preferring to record own experiences than reading materials.
01.46.20	Remarks on enjoyment of interviewing experience, remembering less than expected, reflections on own reading.
01.47.37	END