

## YLG Conference “Reading the Future” (Manchester - 21<sup>st</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2018)

I was very fortunate to receive a bursary from CILIPS to be able to attend the YLG Conference in Manchester. The theme for the Conference this year was “Reading the Future” and was sponsored by Enid Blyton Entertainment. The whole conference linked with old and new Children’s books looking at books from our Childhoods and reinventing them for audiences in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Blyton Entertainment were particularly promoting that Scottish author Pamela Butchart, has re-written two of the Secret Seven series, which was a particular favourite of mine when growing up.

Along with the nostalgic element of the Conference there was an underlying theme of making sure children’s fiction, literacy and libraries were continued to be shouted about and promoted. The conference looked at many key issues in contemporary children’s fiction – such as the rights and representation of women, the need for diverse and inclusive books and the promotion of empathy. Throughout the conference, authors, panellists, poets and publishers stressed the importance of reading for pleasure. Reading may not be an instant joy to all children, but with enough support it can become one and us as Librarians can instigate that by showing Children just what they can read.

I had arrived in Manchester the night before the start of the Conference and when I arrived at the Mercure hotel the next morning, I was then part of a group having a tour of the Central Library. This was a fantastic building in the heart of the City. The tour was a great experience and gave us access to the many hidden secrets of the library, including the restoration room and archives. The conference was then about to begin back at the Mercure Hotel.



For the opening session of the Conference we watched a courtroom scene with three librarians dressed in wigs and gowns (including a colleague from Aberdeenshire), interrogating a series of witnesses, including Anthony McGowan, Non Pratt and Theresa Breslin, about what makes a reader. As the conference began, I started to realise that I was experiencing a unique event, as fellow delegates whom had been to a YLG conference before continued to say to me. It was a jam-packed Conference when you looked at the programme, one session after another. Never thought I would be sitting in a session drawing Kevin the roly poly flying pony with the authors, Philip Reeve and Sarah McIntyre.



As the weekend went on, there were many more one-off experiences such as Ginger beer cocktails, a midnight feast, a cake-pop shaped like Frankenstein's monster head.



Near the end of the first day we were bombarded (literally 2 minutes per publisher) with information from various publishers that were attending the conference too, giving us all an insight into what books were their next big things and being published on the run up to Christmas. I would say one thing I wasn't told about was bringing another suitcase to house all the freebies that the Publishers were giving delegates, such as posters, bookmarks, proof editions of books and even copies of printed books, they were all very generous.

The conference would encourage people to have fun, to be a little silly and encourage audience participation such as the drawing session mentioned before, something that a Librarian may not be that comfortable with, but this Conference brought out the best in everyone. During the dinner on the first evening, I had the pleasure in meeting Tony Ross which was even more surreal, but this conference brought surprise after surprise. Librarians in the presence of over 50 authors - Malorie Blackman, Anne Fine, Anthony Browne, Robert Muchamore, Melvin Burgess, Frank Cottrell Boyce, Geraldine McCaughrean, to name a few, during the three days which again was a unique experience.



The Conference had so much to take part in over the 3 days I was worried about not having time to just take everything in. However, the programme did work extremely well, with mixing formats - a panel of authors, which was then followed by a poetry performance and so on and so on. I also enjoyed the tea break sessions; thirty minutes or less of listening to brilliant authors while eating themed-snacks which was very informative and worked very well. These were also offered on the second day too.

On the morning of the second day, I went along to a Breakfast session of my choice to hear from the author, Paul Jennings Live from Australia, as he had written Round the Twist a programme favourite from me childhood, again more nostalgia. I then chose 'Literacy by Stealth' - a discussion

of how the Book Bench project and Read Manchester initiatives had engaged disadvantaged communities in Manchester, increasing tourism and library visits. I found this session again very informative. Although you would need to have buy in by many organisations to get the funding and enthusiasm to duplicate something like this in other areas around the UK.

After each session I attended you would come back to the Exhibition Room, where publishers showcased their new and upcoming releases. I was touched by how much the publishers were enthusiastic about the books they were promoting and how humbled they were to be able speak to Librarians as we are the ones promoting their books in Libraries across the UK, that was very interesting to hear and something I had not come across before. Something else that I hadn't thought about before was how these books would eventually play a big part in Children and young people's lives and us Librarians promoting the books to them.

Another great moment of the Conference was hearing from Frank Cottrell Boyce who did the keynote speech. It is was so full of sincerity, humour and his love for books. It was also full of some great quotes including one which I think I remember as "All those things that are no longer with us, but books are still here!" Reading the Future does not mean forgetting the past too and again Nostalgia was spoken about.

There were many authors at the Conference that spoke about Libraries and Reading as something from their past that influenced their future, which was another poignant moment of the Conference when I realised how much us Librarians can influence people into their future, as well as reading in the future. It also increased my knowledge of new authors and new books coming out. I was surprised at the number of Poets that are writing for Children and will do my best going forward to promote these and make sure we have enough stock available for Children to access here in Aberdeenshire.

It was a very worthwhile experience and was enlightening to hear how reading and libraries have influenced Authors like this. Attending was a good opportunity to take time out from my job and just look at Reading and Books, and how going forward accessing books will continue to be very important and Libraries is the place to be.

I would like to Thank CILIPS for funding my experience at the Conference and felt I learnt so much from it.