

2019-2021

What happened next?



2 INTRODUCTION

Recently one of our neighbours joined us for an author event. He popped in one afternoon and said ‘I want to support my community bookshop. I’d like a ticket to this event. Which book should I buy?’

A few days later he stopped in again and said ‘Isn’t it wonderful that something I had no interest in and knew nothing about could turn out to be absolutely fascinating. Bring on the next one!’

For us this is what it’s all about. Our friend hadn’t ever imagined reading this author’s books, but we had enjoyed lots of conversations, and he wanted to be neighbourly and supportive by buying a ticket. Because of our mutual friendship, he found a new seam of knowledge, a new genre to start exploring – and an excited awareness that every book and every author bring so much more to discover.

At Kett’s Books we’re all book lovers, but through lockdown we’ve really begun to understand the expression ‘sharing the love of reading’. Sharing and love are the first steps. The reading will follow.

Until April 2019 we had prepared an annual edition of this report, but when it came to April 2020, we knew that no one was in the mood for our good news stories. We spent that year learning to respond to frequent change, evaluating what we had learned in the years since we’d opened, and adjusting to be able to continue to deliver our mission of forming and growing the community through books.

We no longer assume that the future will look like today, but we are becoming a business that can adapt even more effectively – keeping firmly in mind the purpose of creating a meaningful experience for everyone. We have learned that technology and knowledge are tools that can help us extend and protect the personal touch, never replace it.

We hope you enjoy reading this report, the story of what’s happened before at Kett’s Books. And we hope it leaves you on the edge of your seat, asking ‘What happens next?!’ You are very welcome to join us for the journey.



To continue to bring books to life for our readers, we developed Books At Lunchtime, a series of YouTube author interviews

To read previous annual reports go to www.kettsbooks.co.uk/reports

FRIENDS SCHEME

For those who want to step up their support for Kett's Books beyond being great customers, we offer the Friends scheme. Over 200 loyal customers pay £20 a year to be a card-carrying supporter, which means we have an additional income we can depend on. Friends enjoy a 10% discount on most products, and receive additional offers for pre-orders. We are really grateful to our Friends for their commitment and advocacy.

If you'd like to join the Friends scheme, email our volunteer David on friends@kettsbooks.co.uk

“Bringing books to the public is a great joy, and by running the shop as volunteers instead of as a sole owner, we are able to share that joy with a wider community.”





If you visited Kett's Books the first weeks of March 2020, you'd have found we'd all gone to the pub: a roof leak meant that we had to close at Whartons Court. Fortunately our neighbours in The White Hart kindly took us in. We soon got used to sharing out World Book Day books to children over beer mats!

We didn't know that this early-March challenge was our chance to polish

up the strength and resilience we would soon draw from. Working across the road taught us an important lesson: Kett's Books is not about its place, it's about people, and what we do.

And in any case, setting up in a pub was a kind of return to where we started.

Because the community of Kett's Books started in a pub. In September 2013 our founder Ray Rumsby called like-minded people to discuss whether Wymondham

still needed an independent bookshop. With the threat of digital technology and the internet looming, was there a future for the bookshop?

And more worryingly, could a bunch of strangers make it work?

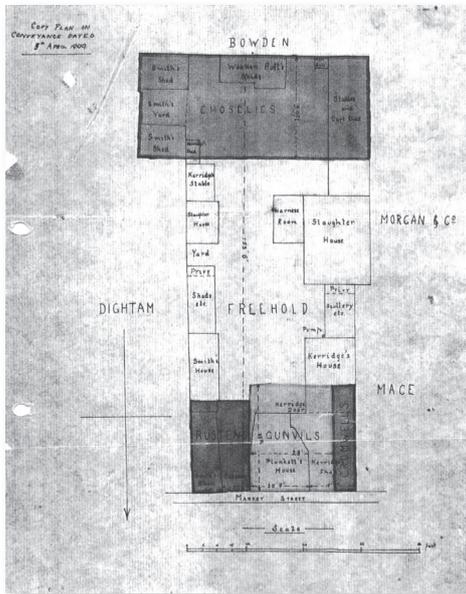
The answer was a resounding yes. A piece of paper went round, and everyone signed up, offering what they had: some gave time, some gave knowledge, some lent finance.

We were rich in skills and experience, enthusiasm and goodwill, but no one had ever been a bookseller. So when someone asked, 'How difficult can it be?' we all laughed.

Nearly eight years on, we've had time to explore that question – and to make good on the investment of the generosity of our community.

And we've also had time to reflect on how wise it was of that group to name the new bookshop Kett's Books. Just as the Robert Kett story belongs to everyone, Kett's Books is an important community resource. And every time a customer

buys a book from us, they know they are buying into something more important than 300 pages of paper and ink – they know they are investing in community, in learning, and helping to change the world into the way we all want it to be.



Plan of Whartons Court in 1909

Kett's Books: history

- **Pre-1990s** Bookshop on Damgate Street
- **1994** Adamson Books moved to Whartons Court
- **2006** The bookshop became The Book Fountain
- **2013** Wymondham Community Bookshop formed as a CIC
- **2014** Kett's Books opened
- **2014** First author event, with the ever-popular Elly Griffiths
- **2015** Grant from the author James Patterson to refit shop
- **2018** Regional shortlist Independent Bookshop of the Year
- **2018** Produced and distributed first Christmas catalogue
- **2019** *One Community, One Book* begins
- **2019** Shortlisted for Best Independent Shop in the UK



- **2019** Kett's Books presented about Community Bookshops at London Book Fair
- **2021** Kett's Books presented about Community Bookshops at Brussels Book Fair (online)
- **2021** Introduction of a committed service to schools
- **2021** Shortlisted for the Independent Bookshop of the Year award

KETTS BOOKS and THE PANDEMIC



In the spring lockdown we were able to operate a click-and-collect service

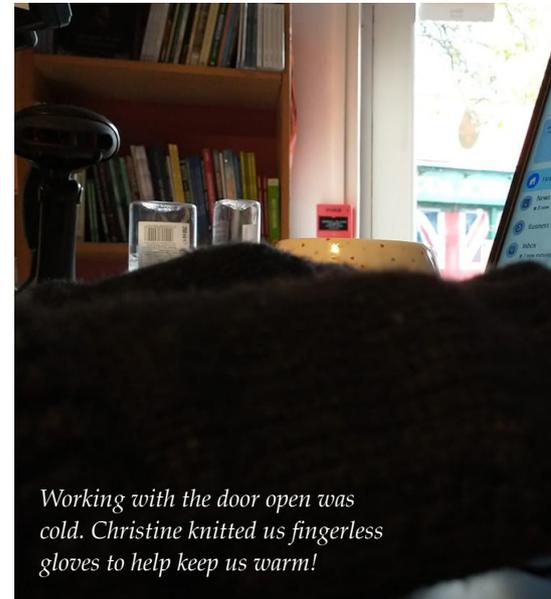
When the order came through for everyone to stay home, it was a shock: everyone had to rethink how they were going to complete the basic tasks of living. The routines and habits that allowed us to care for ourselves and those we love were suddenly prohibited, and everyone wondered what was left of the lives we were trying to protect.

At Kett's Books we were still unpacking after the building work, when we decided for everyone's safety to close. It was difficult to get our heads round, because from the beginning, we had built our entire identity around 'save the shop from closing.' To us, to be Kett's Books was to be 'open.'

Apart from worry about the business, we were additionally concerned for the wellbeing of our friends and neighbours. If the people of Wymondham were going to be housebound, lonely and frightened, then they needed books more than ever. In addition, we knew that many of our volunteers needed something to

do, to preserve the mental health benefits that being part of the bookshop brought to them.

Our Directors swiftly put a team to work. Across several locations volunteers variously took phone calls, received deliveries of books in their homes, rang customers for payment, and then



Working with the door open was cold. Christine knitted us fingerless gloves to help keep us warm!

delivered books across Wymondham. The new technology allowed our book groups to continue to meet over Zoom, and we held weekly socials for volunteers to continue to enjoy the conversations they would have had in the bookshop.

Once we'd realised we had the resilience to do this, we found that we could be

innovative, as well. As the lockdown continued, we turned our attention to how we could reach customers who might be feeling isolated. Soon we'd created a catalogue of available books to email out weekly to 600 customers. And when the December lockdown was announced, just after we'd invested in all our Christmas stock, we started a YouTube channel with author interviews, so that people could still have access to the conversations they'd always enjoyed when visiting us.

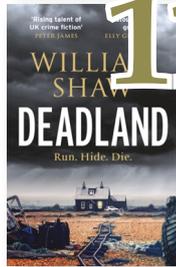
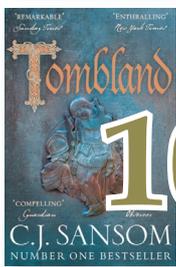
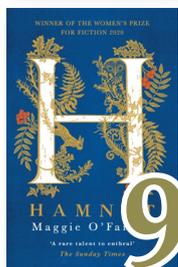
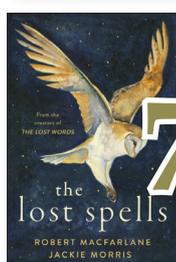
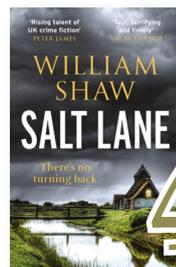
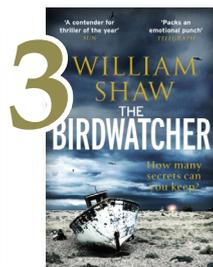
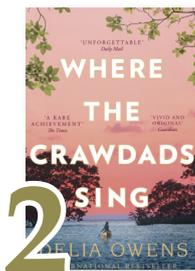
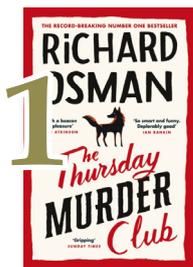


“We were concerned for the wellbeing of our friends and neighbours. If the people of Wymondham were going to be housebound, lonely and frightened, then they needed books more than ever.”



Some customers were hardly touched by the pandemic, but we know that some will struggle to ever recover from the effects of last year: they have rung us when they were bereaved, or just to talk, or to order books so they'd at least see the delivery person during their day. And they have told us that the books, the email newsletter, and the videos kept them connected, and hopeful for returning to the life they'd enjoyed. We are so pleased that the coordinated effort of our team made a small difference for them, and now things are opening up, we hope to continue to be part of their moving forward.

Bestsellers 2020-21



Schools offering

At Kett's Books we know that friendship is the best way to persuade someone to read. We want to be another voice, separate from parents and teachers, to convince children and reluctant readers that reading is great fun!

We now offer a dedicated service to support schools and other community groups.

- Regular communication
- Assemblies
- Online and live author events
- Sample boxes
- Discounts
- Advice on selections

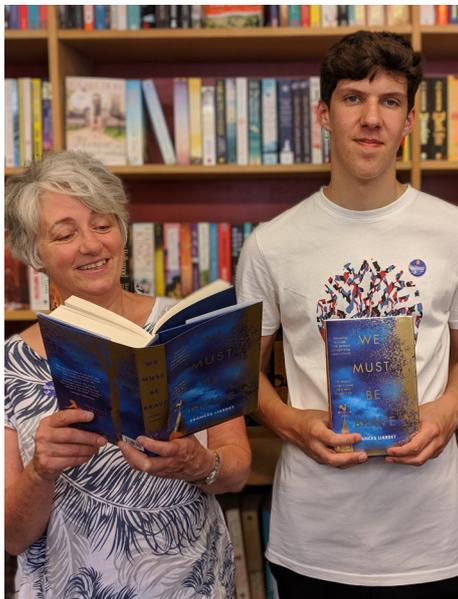
We want to be part of your pupils' journey to a lifetime of reading joy.

Please email outreach@kettsbooks.co.uk to discuss these or any other ideas you may have.

FOR THE GOOD: PEOPLE

When we started running the bookshop as volunteers, we had already committed to put people before profit. We are legally obliged to invest back into the bookshop, and it is our joy to give back to the community.

A more subtle investment is that we see our volunteers as our first community.



We know that if they feel included and appreciated, that we will build an atmosphere where customers will feel safe and welcome, too.

The invisible injury of Covid will remain with us for a long time. Books are great healers, but so is the kindness that we

hope people encounter when they come to our bookshop. We hope that people leave Kett's Books believing that you can run a business where moral and social beliefs are priority, and that the world can be a better place.

10 things we've learned...

1. **Conversation** is the best way to spread the love of reading.
2. Our **community** also includes those believe in the same things as we do.
3. People want to **help**.
4. Someone, somewhere, wants every single book. **Helping** them find it is the tricky bit.
5. We are **diverse** because we are all **different**. We are **inclusive** if everyone feels safe and welcome.
6. There's always more to **learn** about stock control.
7. Authors really like to **talk** about their books and sometimes just need to be asked.
8. The **Subscription** scheme met a need we didn't know about: some people want you to choose the book for them.
9. We should meet **people** where they are – and it turns out authors hang out on Twitter!
10. People can't get **excited** about things they don't know about.

FOR THE GOOD: WHERE WE WORK

From the beginning we understood that if Kett's Books stood for Wymondham, then it needed to stand for the other independent businesses as well. We weren't sure where to start, but wanted to facilitate conversations between the businesses, so that we could each encourage customers to do more of their shopping on our high street.

In late 2020 Tracy came across the Totally Locally campaign, a national celebration of independent

businesses. After a visit from the founders Wymondham was accepted into the scheme, and Wymondham's first Fiver Fest happened February 2020.

By the October festival, we'd been through lockdown, and everyone was cautious about what was around the corner. Despite the uncertainty 40 independent businesses joined us in creating a £5 offer to entice shoppers to come into town to discover great products, great values, and make

the town a better place to live.

Kett's Books recognises the social and economic contribution of our independent businesses. And we need a thriving high street in order to ensure our own success. Kett's Books' customers are in a position to extend their support of community resources by supporting the other expert, passionate, committed shopkeepers, encouraging others to do their shopping in town – and making new friends along the way.



FOR THE GOOD: PROFIT

How do you assess the profitability of a year in which we were forcibly closed to the public for months at a time?

Especially when we measure success by this simple question: Do we have enough money left to keep growing the shop and our community?

We are grateful for the furlough programme, the government grants, and the generosity of our landlord, all of whose support put us in a position to be

able to play 'the long game': even when worries were heavy, we had financial backing so we knew we could keep going. Our strategy was to make sure that Wymondham knew that we were here, every day, answering the phone and emails from our different homes, finding a way to get books in your hand.

Our Finance Team could show you graphs and charts, but what you're really interested in, is will we still be here?

And the short answer is, we have every intention that Kett's Books will still be here, extending the welcome and friendship for a very long time.

About Kett's Books

Kett's Books is a Community Interest Company (CIC), which means that it is a business which uses its profits to achieve public good. We currently have one paid member of staff.

The business is run by a number of volunteers, whose roles include working in the bookshop, supporting behind the scenes, acting as a voting member, or joining the Board of Directors. The CIC structure allows each member one vote in decisions about the direction the shop will take.

"...we have every intention that Kett's Books will still be here, extending the welcome and friendship for a very long time."

Customers recognise that we create social benefit and choose to come back to us, because they are buying into something more important than just books.

Produce income to be able to operate with stability and principles, to the benefit of schools and the community

Sell quality products at fair-trade prices to like-minded ethical people



Thanks

'The greater good' we talk about is a virtuous circle. We are able to continue to serve our community, because so many are good to us. And so we say thanks, to such a small portion of those who deserve it:

- To our volunteers, for remaining with us, even as the journey changes
- To our neighbours, who over the years have shovelled snow, taken in parcels, held a key, brought us coffee, watered flowers, and been generally good company
- To our landlord, for continuing generosity and understanding our mission
- To our lenders, who in addition to their original generosity, then deferred repayment to make sure we would survive the pandemic
- To the booksellers and industry: we're in it together
- To the schools who have allowed us to support them in introducing a deep love of books
- To the members of Kett's Books, who believe in us enough to legally sign up to it
- To the Friends of the shop, whose loyalty gives us a stability we can plan for
- To Doug, for everything from taking down shelves in the night to appearing in the morning with a click-and-collect ticket booth
- To Johnny, for brilliant graphic design once again
- To Fran and all the team at Waitrose, for sharing the opportunity to make people really happy
- To all the authors who have joined us for Books At Lunchtime, or even come to visit us
- To all the pom pom makers and snowflake cutters for our Christmas window
- To our customers, whose conversations grow us and sustain us
- To those we will get to know, who will soon join us in our adventures
- To the Directors, who meet weekly to sensitively and bravely ensure Kett's Books is doing what it set out to do, all those years ago
- To Wymondham, without whom we would have no name, no one to work for and no one to work with.

Kett's Books is an independent community bookshop in Wymondham

Open 9:30am-5:00pm
Monday to Saturday

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