



THE GREAT READING
ADVENTURE 2005



MELANIE KELLY

HELEN DUNMORE AND
THE SIEGE

EVALUATION
REPORT

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An initiative of Bristol Cultural Development Partnership:





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Helen Dunmore with her editor, Juliet Annan, Andrew Kelly, director of Bristol Cultural Development Partnership, and the Lord Mayor, Cllr Simon Cook (Image by Martin Chainey)

INTRODUCTION

On Thursday 6 January 2005, Bristol's third Great Reading Adventure was launched at Watershed Media Centre with speeches, readings, animated film, lindy-hopping and the sounds of Artie Shaw.

This annual initiative led by Bristol Cultural Development Partnership (BCDP) seeks to bring communities together by encouraging everyone to read the same book at the same time. Its key objectives are:

- To promote Bristol as a centre for literature.
- To encourage debate and learning about Bristol.
- To help develop standards of literacy.
- To create new art inspired by literature.

Following Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* in 2003 and John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* in 2004, the main book chosen for 2005 was *The Siege* by Bristol-based author Helen Dunmore. The novel tells the poignant story of the suffering and survival of civilians in wartime, focusing on the first terrible winter of the 300-day siege of Leningrad in World War II. In addition to distributing thousands of copies of the novel to schools, colleges, libraries, the business community and members of the public, a readers' guide, activity packs and website were also made available to provide background material on Helen, the events at Leningrad and Bristol's own wartime experience. Helen has lived in Bristol for nearly 30 years and the Great Reading Adventure formed part of a yearlong celebration of Bristol creativity. 2005 also marks the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II so it was apt that the Great Reading Adventure chose a book that allowed readers to reflect on the devastation and camaraderie of that period. Helen and the organisers were keen to

encourage the sharing of wartime reminiscences and family stories before they are lost forever.

At the launch, words of welcome and support were given by Andrew Kelly, director of the BCDP and founder of the Great Reading Adventure, Bristol's Lord Mayor, Cllr Simon Cook, Nick Capaldi, director of Arts Council England South West, and Adrian Tinniswood, chair of the South West Heritage Lottery Fund committee. Helen Dunmore, who has championed the project since 2003, spoke of how she had come to write *The Siege* and what she hoped readers would take from it. This was followed by a selection of readings from the novel by Kim Hicks and Mike Drew. They also read from *Carrie's War* by Nina Bawden, one of the books being used by younger participants in the project, and accounts of the Bristol blitz. Aardman Animations' *War Story* was shown. This is a stop-motion short film using sound excerpts from an interview with Bill Perry who had worked at the BAC aircraft factory in Filton during the war. The launch ended with a high-energy dance routine from Hoppin' Mad, recreating the joyful spirit of the VE and VJ celebrations.

Speaking on behalf of Bristol City Council, the Lord Mayor said:

Like Leningrad Bristol was under siege in the Second World War. The fantastic Bristol Great Reading Adventure will mean that as well as having the shared pleasure of reading and talking about the same book, Bristolians will be able to learn about their past.

In the afternoon, he visited St George CE VC and Fair Furlong Primary schools to promote the reading of the 2005 children's books: *Carrie's War* and Helen Dunmore's *Tara's Tree House*, both of which feature stories of evacuees.

Bristol's *Evening Post* is an essential partner in the project, providing extensive news coverage of the events along with features and letters on the issues raised. On the front cover of the paper's launch



Top Kim Hicks reading from *The Siege* (Image by Martin Chainey)

Above Graeme Puckett and Ann Peskett of Hoppin' Mad (Image by Martin Chainey)



The Lord Mayor with pupils of Fair Furlong Primary School (Image by Martin Chainey)

day edition was a photograph of an elderly doctor treating an emaciated child during the siege. Beside it were the words:

This haunting photograph from a wartime siege in which one million people perished was the image city author Helen Dunmore chose to illustrate the best-selling novel she hopes will encourage Bristol people to join the third Great Reading Adventure.

This was potentially a more challenging book to promote in comparison with the fun and thrills of Stevenson's pirates and Wyndham's triffids, but with the sensitive support of the *Evening Post*, it was possible to engage the Bristol public in the project and encourage them both to read *The Siege* and connect to their city's past.

The 2005 Great Reading Adventure officially ended on 3 March 2005, World Book Day, though the reading of the books and some of the activities continued. Reflecting on what had been achieved, Andrew Kelly said:

Each year the Great Reading Adventure gets better and better. It was good to be able to work with a locally based author, one of our leading writers of literary fiction, and the response from the Bristol public has been magnificent. The book has struck a chord with all ages, with especially emotional responses coming in from those who experienced Bristol under siege.

This report summarises the findings from the evaluation of the project. It combines statistical data collected by the organisers and their partners with qualitative feedback gathered from self-completed questionnaires, interviews and correspondence. Each Great Reading Adventure is distinctive and the project seems to go from strength to strength. What remains constant is the enthusiasm and commitment of the participants, and the quality of the reading experience.

Key findings

- 4,500 copies of *The Siege* and 5,000 of the special readers' guide were distributed free of charge along with 1,000 each of the children's books.
- 2,839 requests for a copy of the book and/or guide were received from members of the public.
- 65 education packs were distributed to schools and colleges.
- Over 2,600 people borrowed *The Siege* from the Bristol library service from January to March.
- The daily archive photograph of Bristol in the blitz in the *Evening Post* is estimated to have been seen by around 180,000 people a day.
- Most ages and all socio-economic groups participated in the project across the Bristol city-region.
- The project website had a total of 18,040 visits between January and March.
- The project was the topic of local, regional and national media stories.
- All those who expressed an opinion thought citywide reading projects were an excellent or good idea, and over 98 per cent would consider participating in future events.

HELEN DUNMORE ON THE GREAT READING ADVENTURE 2005

My overall impression is that this year's Great Reading Adventure was organised with great professionalism, energy and effectiveness.

Although I had had some involvement with the Great Reading Adventure over the previous two years, I did not really know what to expect this year. It was daunting, as well as very exciting, to realise that thousands of people in my home city were going to read one of my novels and one of my children's books.

The readers' guide was very important, I think, and a number of people commented to me that they had found it interesting as background, and had liked the blend of text and images. This was the first time that the Great Reading Adventure team had worked with a living author, and so we were all experimenting. I had a long interview with Melanie Kelly (who wrote the guide), and several email exchanges with her, and saw the text at draft stages. She took great trouble over obtaining illustrations, too. The high quality and authenticity of this brochure meant a great deal to me.

I was surprised by the extent of the media coverage; I had not expected so much to happen. The *Evening Post* support for the project was vital, I think. Their coverage was in-depth, high quality, and consistent. It ran for the duration of the project, and I'm sure that this drew in many new readers. A lot of people mentioned having seen the *Evening Post* coverage. Articles in the national press, and local TV and radio coverage were also mentioned to me by readers, but not as often as the *Post's* articles and pictures.

I also enjoyed the events, because the readers who came were so well informed and had so much to say. They had a lot of ideas and questions, and it's quite unusual for an author to be able to talk to readers in such depth about a book.

Bristol libraries and their staff have given a huge amount of support to the project. I know they have been encouraging readers who come into libraries to try the books, and to become involved in reading groups, or to send off for a copy of the book or guide. Lots of people have commented to me about library displays of the Great Reading Adventure books, and how much they liked them.

Readers seem to like the continuity of the Great Reading Adventure, and the fact that it develops from year to year and is very much a 'Bristol' thing. Several readers talked to me about previous books which had been chosen, or what might happen in years to come. This kind of sustained cultural opportunity appeals to a lot of people, and more readers seem to get drawn in each year. I like the idea of not breaking links which have been formed with readers, but developing them.

This is a personal reaction – there are aspects of the Great Reading Adventure which I have missed out, such as the work in schools, but this is only because I was not so much involved in them.



Helen Dunmore (Penguin)

DISTRIBUTING THE BOOKS

Penguin Books Ltd supplied 4,500 copies of *The Siege* along with 1,000 copies of Nina Bawden's *Carrie's War*. Egmont supplied 1,000 copies of Helen Dunmore's *Tara's Tree House*.

Both publishers gave generous discounts. Because of the difficulties Penguin was experiencing in distributing books from its central warehouse, the copies of *The Siege* were sent direct from the printers to avoid delays. BCDP was forced to pay full price for advanced copies from local bookshops due to this problem.

Nearly all of the children's books were given free to participating schools and colleges. The bulk of *The Siege* copies were used as follows.

The Siege:

- 1,100 to Bristol libraries.
- 307 to schools and colleges.
- 2,228 to members of the general public on request.
- 200 to the members of the Business Book Club.
- 100 to Bristol City Council members and officers.
- 100 at launch event.
- 100 at Bristol *Evening Post* Literary Lunch.
- 100 at Cities Under Siege Weekend.

Only the Business Book Club members were charged for this provision. For £250 (plus VAT) they receive a set of 20 copies for their staff along with support material. The funding received from book club members helps to subsidise the books given away free.

The Bristol Library Service purchased 27 large print editions and 14 audio editions of *The Siege* plus ten *Carrie's War*, 30 *Tara's Tree House* and 30 sets of eight other titles by Helen Dunmore. There were no community language editions available. These purchases supplemented the Helen Dunmore material and children's books already kept in stock.

Covers of the books used in the 2005 Great Reading Adventure (Penguin and Egmont)



PUBLICISING THE PROJECT

For previous Great Reading Adventures, promotional material has been produced for the project featuring a custom-made image of Wallace and Gromit provided by Aardman Animations.

It was felt that this would be inappropriate for *The Siege* considering the more serious subject matter of the book. Instead Qube Design Associates adapted Soviet-style layouts and lettering to make a striking design showing a weeping woman at a headstone engraved with the hammer and sickle and the date 1942. This was used on:

- 5,000 promotional postcards distributed to various venues.
- 15 large-scale six-sheet posters displayed at Adshel sites.
- 1,000 small posters for display on notice boards.
- Four banners hung in the city centre.

All the promotional material, along with the guides and website, were designed by Qube. Following evaluation of the impact of publicity used in 2004, less material was printed for 2005 but it was used more effectively. As the postcards were not sent direct to those on the project mailing list (to reduce postage charges) these were of limited value and will not be used again.

Publicity was also achieved through extensive media coverage, particularly in the local press, and through personal contact by members of the BCDP team and the project partners. In addition, 5,000 flyers, designed by Qube, were distributed to publicise the Cities Under Siege Weekend. Watershed, the venue for the talks and film screenings, included a descriptive paragraph in its February printed programme for this event (they had been able to devote two pages to the Science Fiction Weekend held in 2004 when there had been less pressure on space).



Promotional poster for the project

PUBLIC RESPONSE

By the project's official close, a total of 2,839 requests for a free copy of *The Seige* were received from members of the general public (this compares with 1,650 received for *Treasure Island* and 3,618 for *The Day of the Triffids*). Requests were still coming in after this date, although the supply of books had been exhausted.

Take-up was slower than in 2004 when all the free copies were allocated in six days. This is partly explained by not directly contacting those on the mailing list and the limited radio coverage on launch day. Of the first 2,000 requests received:

- Around 74 per cent of requests were sent on coupons printed in the *Evening Post*.
- 23 per cent of requests came from those registering by email via the website.
- Two per cent came by telephone.
- One per cent from people using the reply slip on the postcard.

The percentages for 2004 were 55, 23, six and 16, respectively.

In March, a random sample of a thousand people who had requested a copy of the book were sent a questionnaire asking them what they thought about the project. At the time of writing this report, there have been 241 replies, a response rate of around 24 per cent. Despite introducing pre-paid envelopes in 2004 and a prize draw in 2005, the number of responses continues to be disappointing although the information that is received is extremely useful.

Nearly all the questionnaires were completed fully with few questions left unanswered. Of those who replied, 77.8 per cent had first found out about the project from the local press, 10.5 per cent from local radio or television, 3 per cent from posters in the library and 1.7 per

cent from the postcards. The rest had learned about it from the on-street posters, personal contact, their school or college, the national press and the Internet. This shows an increase in the role of the local press: around 53 per cent of those who responded in 2004 had first heard of the project via this medium and 19.5 per cent from local radio or television.

Requests came from all over the BS postcode area. This included Almondsbury, Alveston, Ashley Down, Ashton Gate, Avonmouth, Backwell, Bedminster, Bishop Sutton, Bishopston, Bishopsworth, Bitton, Bower Ashton, Bradley Stoke, Brentry, Brislington, Broomhill, Cadbury Heath, Chew Stoke, Chipping Sodbury, Clevedon, Clifton, Clifton Wood, Clutton, Coalpit Heath, Combe Dingle, Compton Dando, Congresbury, Cotham, Downend, East Harptree, Easton, Eastville, Emersons Green, Filton, Fishponds, Frampton Cotterell, Frenchay, Hanham, Hartcliffe, Headley Park, Henbury, Hengrove, Henleaze, Horfield, Keynsham, Kingsdown, Kingswood, Knowle, Knowle Park, Lawrence Weston, Little Stoke, Lockleaze, Long Ashton, Longwell Green, Lower Claverham, Mangotsfield, Monk's Park, Montpellier, Nailsea, Oldland Common, Patchway, Paulton, Pill, Portbury, Portishead, Pucklechurch, Redfield, Redland, Sea Mills, Shirehampton, Sneyd Park, Soundwell, Southmead, Southville, St Agnes, St Andrews, St Annes Park, St Georges, St Judes, St Pauls, St Werburghs, Stanton Drew, Staple Hill, Stapleton, Stockwood, Stoke Bishop, Stoke Gifford, Thornbury, Totterdown, Uplands, Warmley, Westbury-on-Trym, Westbury Park, Weston-Super-Mare, Whitchurch, Wick, Winterbourne, Witherwood, Wraxall, Yate and Yatton.

As registration was restricted this year to the BS postcode to give local people priority, there were few requests from further afield. Some guides were taken to St Petersburg by a colleague of Helen Dunmore. Next year the Great Reading Adventure will be regional, covering the whole of the South West.

Using the ACORN classification system, it has been possible to ascertain the socio-economic backgrounds of the majority of those who requested a copy of the book. This is based upon a postcode analysis that identifies particular household types. Postcodes of 2,202 of those who submitted a request were analysed. Table 1 provides details.

Table 1: ACORN postcode analysis of requests

Category of household	Percentage of requests received 2005	Percentage of Bristol population as a whole	Percentage of requests received 2004
Wealthy Achievers – wealthy executives, affluent greys, flourishing families	20.5	6.0	20.66
Urban Prosperity – prosperous professionals, educated urbanites, aspiring singles	13.4	23.0	13.04
Comfortably Off – starting out, secure families, settled suburbia, prudent pensioners	30.6	23.7	33.92
Moderate Means – Asian communities, post industrial families, blue collar roots	21.5	21.9	20.50
Hard Pressed – struggling families, burdened singles, high rise hardship, inner city adversity	13.9	25.5	11.56
Unclassified*			0.32

Source: amh/ BCDP

*In 2005 analysers excluded the unclassifieds before calculating percentages (total of 68 from original submission of 2,270).

Top Business West staff member with book
(Image by Martin Chainey)

Bottom Fair Furlong pupils reading *Carrie's War*
(Image by Martin Chainey)



A different classification system had been used to assess the background of those participating in the first Great Reading Adventure, so it is not possible to make a direct comparison across the three years.

All groups were represented in the age analysis of respondents to the questionnaire. The greatest concentration of requests came from those aged 66-75, compared with 46-55 in 2004. Table 2 provides details.

These figures only refer to individual readers of *The Siege* and do not include the younger people who participated in the project through schools, colleges and libraries.

A random sample of just over 1,800 of the requests for books indicated a male:female split of 31:69, which is similar to the 33:67 division for *The Day of the Triffids*. All of the respondents who described their ethnic origin were white.

Table 2: Age of questionnaire respondents

Age group	2005	2004	2003
Under 10	0.0	0.9	2.2
11-14	1.3	10.0	2.2
15-18	0.0	2.8	1.4
19-25	0.9	4.0	0.7
26-35	4.8	13.5	9.3
36-45	13.2	11.5	13.7
46-55	15.1	19.5	23.0
56-65	20.0	16.0	19.4
66-75	27.0	14.0	28.1*
Over 75	17.7	7.8	–

Source: BCDP

*Note in 2003, the oldest category was over 65.

READING THE SIEGE

Only seven per cent of those who returned a questionnaire had read the chosen book before, compared with 37 per cent in 2004 and around 50 per cent in 2003. Some found it heavy going, and a few gave up, but most stayed with it and were rewarded by having a revelatory reading experience, in terms of the type of book they might enjoy and the knowledge they gained of Leningrad.

Typical of the comments of those who would not normally read Helen Dunmore, 'literary' fiction or stories set in wartime were the following:

Beautifully written. Gripping. Very moving but unsentimental. I had not read anything by Helen Dunmore before but since then I have read Mourning Ruby and Zennor in Darkness. I will certainly read more of her works. Thank you for the introduction.

Not a book I would have chosen, but I'm glad I read it. Interesting to see the life endured by people in another country in times of war. I shall read more by this author. Thank you to those who have/ are working on this project.

This was a great way to make me read a book I wouldn't otherwise have heard of or chosen to read. I found it was an intricate exploration of the hardships of war. Also a great way to boost the profile of a local author.

I didn't think I would enjoy this book because of the subject matter but I did. It did lose me a bit at times, but I know if I had read the readers' guide beforehand it would have alleviated the problem. I was drawn into the book, imagining how these people could have

existed under such terrible conditions, how strong they must have been, what horrific sights they had seen. It got me thinking how many people today could have survived such awful conditions and circumstances.

I would not normally choose to read this book. I am old enough to remember as a child what horror stories coming out of concentration camps and war zones evoked in us all and my husband was one of the first troops to enter Belsen and was always haunted by that experience. So I am amazed to report that I 'enjoyed' (no, was spellbound) by The Siege and thought that Helen Dunmore managed to give us a very believable impression of the privations and the varied reactions of people to them. Surprisingly, as she did not even cover the end of the siege, she managed to leave us feeling that in spite of all the terrible things that happened that the human spirit would triumph and life would return to normality.

It was apparent that overall respondents had taken far more time to write comments on what they had thought about the book than in previous projects. Among the most common words to describe the book were 'interesting', 'thought-provoking', 'believable', 'informative' and 'moving'. Many respondents remarked how they felt they were sharing the characters' experience. One wrote:

I felt when reading that I was almost in Leningrad. I could feel the tiredness in digging the defences. The hunger when there really wasn't any real food. The terrible feeling of the extreme cold. The relief that Anna had survived in the last pages.

Another wrote:

Films I have watched in the past have not dealt with how it really was for every day living in such detail, only books like this can. I had the greatest respect for people who endured this war (any war) but now feel humbled. Thank you.

Helen Dunmore (Bristol United Press)



It was particularly interesting to read the personal memories that came through in the responses from those who had lived during the war. These included the following:

Excellent. I lived in Bristol through the blitz. Lost my mother, father and sister. It was hard but not as bad as Leningrad. It brought feelings back.

I saw Coventry burning from 60 miles away. I was on leave (Royal Navy apprentice) during one of the Plymouth blitzes. Whilst realising what devastation the air raids brought to our cities I wondered how our civilian population would have reacted in any siege condition; though if you think about it we, ie our population, couldn't have survived as there would have been very little or no chance of any supplies reaching the UK from overseas. So we would have been unable to survive the terrible experience suffered by the Russians in Leningrad. The book, albeit fiction, presented a very emotive picture of human suffering and resourcefulness.

As I was young in the war here on rationed food, it brought back a lot of memories and made me realise how lucky I was although my parents lost their home and we only had what we stood up in. I thought the book was brilliant; I lived it with them.

I am still reading it as my sight is not good. So far excellent! I with my family was buried with a direct hit in the house. Only for the standing of one wall and my father, did we manage it. Got out alive but lost everything. Horrid times but lucky to be all alive.

Really thought provoking. Good read. When Anna lost her hair grip I was reminded of the time I lost two. As an evacuee one fell from my hair into a whole deep pile of dead leaves/ bracken/ etc. So my sister told me to drop my remaining one and it would fall on top the first! No chance at all! Lost both. Conveys the lack of food/ fuel graphically – hope it makes younger generations realise their different life style.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading The Siege. As I was a young child during the war, seven years old when war was declared, I could imagine the noise of guns and bombs exploding as I read. The author captured the horror very well. I have passed the book on to my daughter. I hope she will appreciate what it is like to live under such terrible conditions.

Such comments showed that the project had succeeded in encouraging some people to share reminiscences of the war. The responses also showed that through reading the book, some people had learned more about the past. Comments included:

I really enjoyed the historical facts in the book. I'd never realised just how much the Russians had suffered in the siege.

Excellent! It was thought provoking and extremely moving. Some of the images will remain with me for ever. Helen Dunmore is to be congratulated on writing such an account of the awful struggle faced by the people of Leningrad. It was so much more than a history lesson!

A very moving book. Took a lot of 'getting into' but then I couldn't put it down! I was four years old when the Second World War started but during the war (I lived in Bristol until 1941) I had no idea what went on in other countries.

Hard to believe how anyone survived the lack of food, water and the terrible weather. Human endurance at its best. Almost unbelievable to think of the suffering and tragedies. It has had so little publicity compared to others' suffering in the war. We have never known of the details described in this book. Quite harrowing.

Found it very atmospheric; even though I knew a bit about the siege it made me feel quite panicky about my own store cupboard! You could feel the cold... A good choice of book; anything to remind people of what has happened in the past, and to expand their knowledge.

Frozen ladder in Bristol in wartime (*Bristol United Press*)

Having heard even during the war years the plight of those in Russian Front lines, this has brought a more vivid picture of a family involved in such conflict and tragedy. An eye-opener, may I say.

I thought it gave a good insight into Leningrad's experiences in the Second World War – previously I only knew of Bristol's experiences. It was also interesting to learn about what it was like for the families, rather than the government.

Very hard to put down. We were told very little about conditions in Russia during the war and it has been a revelation to find out how terrible their conditions were, compared to our own rationing and bombing.

Nearly 93 per cent of respondents who expressed an opinion felt the Great Reading Adventure and its associated activities had enhanced their experience of reading *The Siege*. Among the general comments about the project were:

Please do more projects like this. Instils a sense of taking part.

This is an excellent initiative. Who cares about titles like City of Culture – this is a positive initiative to acquaint people with quality literature.

I have taken part in all three of the Great Reading Adventures. I love getting a free book through the post and trying out a novel that I would not normally try. Please do more of this – it makes me proud to be a Bristolian!!!

It seemed particularly fitting that the respondent whose questionnaire was drawn for the prize of a set of Helen Dunmore's novel had written:

I think The Siege an excellent read. I have never read a book before in my life following a very embarrassing episode at school. But this has certainly whetted my appetite for more. I hope to continue to read and enjoy a pastime that I thought was not for me.



SUPPORT MATERIAL FOR READERS OF THE SIEGE

An illustrated readers' guide was produced for the 2005 Great Reading Adventure, which was sent out with copies of the book and also distributed through schools, libraries and bookshops. The guide told the reader about Helen Dunmore and her work, looked in detail at *The Siege*, and provided background material on the events at Leningrad and the attacks on Britain.

It also included a selection of Helen's poems. The guide was heavily illustrated. Among the images used were some scenes of Leningrad taken from the Leningrad Album at the Mitchell Library in Glasgow, and photographs by Jim Facey of the Bristol blitz.

Of those who returned a questionnaire, around 72 per cent had used the guide (a increase over the previous two projects) and, of those who expressed an opinion, nearly 97 per cent found it useful or very useful. A couple of respondents wondered if it was really necessary to produce a guide and if it might have been better to buy more books instead. This is an issue for careful consideration. It is generally thought that the guide can add value to the reading experience and enhance the sense of being part of a wider project. It is also recognised, however, that not all readers feel the need to be offered this opportunity.

Among comments received were the following:

I thought the readers' guide an excellent work, as it fills in all the historical background, gives you information about Helen Dunmore and her work, including her poems, and includes a section on the Bristol blitz. I have passed on my copy of The Siege to a friend, but will keep the readers' guide.

As with the previous two years the guide added to my enjoyment of the book by giving background material. The questions were very helpful for my reading group's discussion.

A valuable accompaniment, which provided context (about both the subject in terms of historical context and author) before reading, and supplementary information after reading the book.

Extremely informative – the historical summary was clear and concise especially for anyone without a historical grounding in the topic. The Russian photos were incredibly poignant and well chosen. So were the Bristol ones – it was a very good idea to remind Bristolians of the city's experience of the war in comparison with Leningrad's. The poems were an unexpected bonus – I loved them! Worth keeping as a book in its own right.

An excellent booklet and one to reread and keep. I've just read it again and it has made me want to read the book again. Though I knew a bit about Bristol's Blitz, it was helpful to have personal notes etc. A very good and helpful guide.

Lavishly produced – a joy to read. I particularly enjoyed the poems and looking at the pictures. I found reading the analysis added to my understanding of the novel.

Some wanted more background information and analysis of the book. This was available on the website but many of those who responded did not have Internet access. Other than producing an even bigger guide in future, which would raise further questions about cost-effectiveness, it is unclear how this might be achieved.

One of the aims of the project was to raise awareness of historic events. The guide was an important means of achieving this, through the choice of images and the background information. Comments included:

Bristol Grammar School pupils at launch
(Image by Martin Chainey)



The readers' guide was a revelation. I realised that although I was alive during that period of history I knew very little about Russia's involvement in the 1939-45 war.

Was surprised to see the destruction of buildings in Bedminster and Bristol during the war. Something I've never thought about. Glad not to have lived during the bombing of these or other places.

Not knowing any details of the siege, I was surprised it lasted as long and was so horrific. It made me want to know more. I am horrified.

The guide should be very useful for class/ individual projects on the war '39-'45. I am keeping mine with my personal evacuee notes.

Has raised my awareness of Russia's situation during this period.

It also prompted personal reminiscences including the following:

Our home was bombed on Good Friday 1941, six months before I was born. My mother was in the shelter in Bedminster with my five brothers and sister. My father was on duty as an Air Raid Warden so the project had a lot of interest for me. The pictures of the Bristol bombing showed how much damage we had to live through.

It took me back to 1939. I was ten years old and the guide gave me a lot of interesting facts.

It was a very helpful pre-assessment of the book and the author – and of Bristol during the war of which I remembered a little being three when the war started and seven when it finished but it still brought back memories.

Some thought the comparisons with Bristol – used to develop a local empathy with the characters and the situation of the novel – were overstated. One respondent wrote:

Having experienced the blitz, living through it as a child, I can state quite categorically that the privations endured were as nothing

compared to that experienced by the people of Leningrad and other war torn European cities. We were in great danger and we were scared, but we were never cold or hungry.

A PDF of the guide was included on the Great Reading Adventure website. The site provided further background and bibliographic information along with news and reader contributions. All the text was compatible with the Royal National Institute for the Blinds' JAWS speech output system with the exception of the PDFs: Word versions of these documents were used to overcome this problem. Table 3 provides a summary of visits and visit lengths during the project.

Table 3: Website visits 2005

	Visits 2005	Average visit length 2005	Visits 2004	Average visit length 2004
January	6,355	7.44	4,564	5.51 mins
February	6,387	6.30	3,797	3.57 mins
March	5,298	7.54	2,338	7.05 mins

Source: E3 Media

Of those who returned a questionnaire, 13 per cent had visited the website. This was fewer than in previous years. Nearly 97 per cent of those who expressed an opinion found the site easy to navigate and 67 per cent felt it had helped in their enjoyment and understanding of the book. Few additional comments were made about the website. One respondent wrote:

The website was really easy to use. I felt confident giving my details (something I hardly ever do on websites). The content really made me want to join Bristol's big read. Really good to be part of something accessible to most people in Bristol. It was such a joy to receive a free new book through the post. You cannot imagine the pleasure it gave me! Well done!

Another who did not visit the site wrote:

We do not all own or have access to computers and the 'net'. ... Please make all information available in print form so that we can all join in fully... I know that the intention is to draw the largest number of people to the project but the scholars and bibliophiles amongst them still look to the printed word! Please do not forget us.

As in previous years, although the quality of entries to the art and writing competitions featured on the site were high, they were disappointingly few in number. One reason for this was that schools did not have the degree of access to the Internet – and thereby the entry forms – that had been anticipated. For future projects it will be preferable to give them hard copies of the forms along with the rest of the support material. A later deadline may also help.

Only a few comments and stories were received for the readers' contribution pages, but these were nevertheless fascinating contributions. The following is taken from an email sent by a man who was a teenager during the war.

The incendiary bomb was burning fiercely away behind the back bedroom's door causing Dad to open the door on to the burning bomb.

My parents had a three section screen immediately behind the door to normally stop any draught as in those days there was no central heating in most homes. This screen was made of wood and covered with a kind of wallpaper, all of which was well ablaze. The screen being behind the bedroom door made it very difficult for Dad to get the hose directed at the fire without twisting awkwardly. Unfortunately this is what he did and later his Doctor found that he had twisted the ligaments of his heart possibly at that moment, but this could not be proved, of course. From the fire-watching lectures I had attended, I knew it was dangerous to pour water on to an incendiary bomb as the oxygen in the water just fuelled the bomb and would make it burn more fiercely and I am pleased to say that my Dad knew this as well so he concentrated on extinguishing the flames on the fire screen and surroundings. In the meantime, acting on what I had learnt at the lectures we were told to drop the bomb into a bucket of water as with so much water it would extinguish the bomb. To do this I used a broom handle to poke a hole in the ceiling under the bomb having first placed a bucket full of water directly underneath. I am glad to say this action was successful and extinguished the bomb. Dad carried on extinguishing the fire upstairs with the great help of Mum doing all the hard work of pumping the water up to him with the stirrup pump. No mean task as it was much harder work than to pump the water along on the level.

With all that was going on at the time the Blackout still had to be maintained and a very keen Air Raid Warden picked up an ornamental sea shell in the garden and threw it through the only remaining pane of glass in the bedroom window shouting "Put that light out!". The light of course was the light of the incendiary bomb burning as there was no other light on! We have often laughed about it since.

THE GREAT READING ADVENTURE AND BRISTOL LIBRARIES

One of the aims of the Great Reading Adventure is to encourage people to make more use of their local libraries. Bristol Library Service has been involved with the initiative from the outset. The libraries' involvement is crucial for positioning the project within the local community and making it widely accessible. The libraries also provide a useful link to targeted literacy initiatives, something that will be developed further in future years.

The service monitored loans of all editions of *The Siege* and the other books used in the 2005 project across the city. Table 4 provides details.

Table 4: Loans of the 2005 Great Reading Adventure material January-March

	January	February	March	Total
The Siege	1,319	713	580	2,612
The Siege (large print)	34	12	10	56
The Siege (audio)	17	12	10	39
Carrie's War (all editions)	31	27	17	75
Tara's Tree House	21	44	20	85
Other Dunmore adult titles	274	231	243	748
				3,615

Source: Bristol Library Service

Total loans for *The Day of the Triffids* full text edition in January to March 2004 had been 1,289 so this represents a significant increase, possibly because it was a less familiar book. In the six months prior to the project there had been a total of 40 loans of *The Siege*.

The highest levels of activity were recorded at Henleaze, the Central Library, Bedminster, Redland, Stockwood, Knowle, Clifton and Westbury, but all branches recorded some loans during the course of the project. Among the comments picked up informally by library staff were:

I didn't want to read The Siege before because I thought there would be horrible things in it, but it wasn't like that at all.

We've just read The Siege because of course we had to read the Bristol book.

I would not have read it if it had not been the Bristol book, but I really enjoyed it.

I was surprised you picked such a modern book, but I enjoyed it.

Cynthia Martin has pioneered Bristol Library Service's reader development and community initiatives. She has been closely involved in the Great Reading Adventure from the start and the book to be used in 2006 was suggested by her. She said:

The positive coverage the project receives helps in raising the profile of the Library Service across the city. The Great Reading Adventure is a good product with good support facilities and library users look forward to taking part. We had a particularly strong response from reading groups this year and it was a real bonus having Helen's involvement with our special afternoon event on 26 February (see Reading Groups section for further details).



Members of the staff reading group at Bristol Central Library (Image by Martin Chainey)

Library staff, too, enjoy being part of the project and it gives them growing confidence to engage with the public. They actively look at ways to promote the chosen book and to encourage borrowers to take a copy.

The project is open to all our readers but in the future we would aim to be even more proactive in encouraging reluctant or emergent readers to take part through our targeted literacy programmes.

Fiona Hamilton and Claire Williamson, the project's artists in residence, each held children's workshops at libraries in Central Bristol and Redland. Karin Littlewood, illustrator of *Tara's Tree House*, visited the Central Library during half term week for a morning illustration workshop with children and an adult's masterclass in the afternoon.

A total of 52 people took part in the library workshops (numbers were restricted because of the limited space available). The following poems were written with Claire in the Central Library, the first as a group, the second by an individual participant:



Claire Williamson at Sunday afternoon workshop at Central Library (Bristol United Press)

Treehouses and Vegetable Plots

Tap tap! Bang Bang!
What's that noise?
I think it's a hammer
chiselling a lot
building a tree house
above the veg plot!

*Carrots, broccoli, potatoes, peas
Onions, lettuces, sweetcorns, please!*

From a little seed
You get a little root
From a little root
You get a little shoot
That turns into...

*Carrots, broccoli, potatoes, peas
Onions, lettuces, sweetcorns, please!*

Bumber bumber bumber
Dig Dig Dug
I love digging
Except the slugs (and especially the snails)

*Carrots, broccoli, potatoes, peas
Onions, lettuces, sweetcorns, please!*

I hear the eating going chomp chomp chomp
I'm so tired I go zonk zonk zonk
And I dream of...

*Carrots, broccoli, potatoes, peas
Onions, lettuces, sweetcorns, please!*

In the Andersen Shelter

Broken glass, bombs are breaking windows
 Boom!... bombs dropping
 Anxious, the bombs might drop on us
 Everything around us burnt.

Kate Davenport, director of the Bristol Library Service said of this year's Great Reading Adventure, that it 'had a different feel because a live author was participating in it'. Using a more contemporary novel, albeit one set in the past, also made a difference: the book was not a familiar classic that people had either read before or had opinions on already. The choice was 'a tremendous success with literary readers'. The challenge for next year, when the book will be *Around the World in Eighty Days*, will be to build on that success while at the same time actively involving new or marginalized groups alongside the established library users. She felt that the project was less inclusive than previous ones. Having versions of the chosen book next year suitable for younger readers will work better than having separate children's books as happened this year. Kate noted that other cities organising mass reading projects use contemporary cross-over books rather than classics or literary fiction and wondered if this would be worth thinking about for 2007 and beyond. It would look 'less staid' and have a broader appeal.

Kate said that 'the library service couldn't not be involved' in Bristol's Great Reading Adventure. She was disappointed how few people who returned questionnaires had first heard about the project from their library and suggested that it would be worthwhile considering promoting the book via libraries before the launch. People could reserve their copies in advance. This would 'heighten anticipation and get people on board from the very start'.



Although the Library Service's advisor for children and young people thought the workshops created enthusiasm for writing, illustrations and stories, Kate felt in the future it would be preferable to provide more activities that depended upon actually reading the book. There are a number of targeted projects managed by the library for young people, for example with perpetrators and victims of crime in regeneration areas, and workshops could be offered to them during the half-term period.

Karin Littlewood masterclass (Bristol United Press)



THE GREAT READING ADVENTURE AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

To help teachers organise classroom activities that would enable children to join in the Great Reading Adventure, education packs were distributed to 65 centres of learning across the city. These ranged from nursery age to adult learners, covered the private and public sectors, and included special schools, the Bristol Hospital Education Service and the Learning Resource Centres of the City of Bristol College.

The lack of a specific book suitable for very young readers meant some nursery schools felt unable to participate this year, hence a reduction in participation levels from 2004 when 73 education sites were involved.

The packs contained:

- A teachers' guide for *Carrie's War* and/ or *Tara's Tree House*, providing background information on the author, a summary of the book, information about World War Two, word search puzzles and suggestions for writing and art activities (100 each of these guides were given away, which were printed free of charge by Mail Marketing International).
- Multiple copies of *The Siege*, *Carrie's War* and *Tara's Tree House*.
- *The Siege* readers' guide (it was thought the photographs of Bristol would be useful even if the text was inappropriate).
- A copy of *Siren Nights*, a collection of diary entries and correspondence about the Bristol blitz, published by Redcliffe Press.
- Posters, postcards and readers' guides.

Order forms were sent by BCDP to schools and colleges in September 2004 to ascertain which books were required. The packs were distributed before Christmas. An update letter was sent to all participants in early February, which included details of the children's art and writing competition.

Following the success of the artist and writing workshops offered in 2004, Fiona Hamilton and Claire Williamson were appointed to the project to lead a series of half-day sessions for students. Table 5 lists the 24 sites that they visited.

Only nine workshops had been provided to schools in 2004 so there was a significant increase in provision. Requests for workshops were received from 56 schools but there was not sufficient funding to meet demand. Workshops were allocated on a first come, first served basis. The chosen schools were contacted by letter on 28 September 2004 and told to liaise direct with the artist to find a mutually suitable date and time. Reminders were sent by email to those who did not respond to this request in November, December and January, at which point the workshops were reallocated. It was a time-consuming process setting the workshops up as it was difficult to make direct contact with the teachers during the school day: a more effective booking and acknowledgement system is needed for 2006. Preparation time for each of the artists was increased from half a day in 2004 to a full day this year but was still not enough and this will also be reviewed for future projects. One school cancelled the workshop at an hour's notice: the organisers felt it only right to honour the artist's fee for her wasted time and did not offer another date to the school.

One school wrote to say that they felt their pupils had not been inspired by the experience but other comments were favourable. They included the following:

Fair Furlong Primary pupil (Bristol United Press)



Great to have a professional poet in school to encourage the children to verbalise their feelings about the books. Thanks Claire Williamson.

You provided us with Fiona Hamilton for a morning which was brilliant. We made a fantastic Tara's Tree House and did some great drama!

Claire Williamson (author) came in and worked with children, helped them plan and write their own story based on Tara's Tree House. Also answered questions from children about her writing. [Led to] some high quality work from children.

Table 5: Art and writing workshops (non-library)

School	Workshop leader	School	Workshop leader
Air Balloon Hill Junior	Fiona	Hengrove Secondary School	Claire
Belgrave School	Fiona	Horfield CE VC Primary	Fiona
Bristol Cathedral School	Claire	St George CE VC Primary	Fiona
Broomhill Junior	Claire	St Patrick's Catholic Primary	Claire
Chester Park Infant	Fiona	Stockwood Green Primary	Fiona
City Academy	Fiona	Summerhill Junior	Claire
City of Bristol College x 2	Fiona	Two Mile Hill Junior	Claire
Connaught Primary	Claire	Tyning Hengrove Junior	Fiona
Elmfield School for Deaf Children	Fiona	Upper Horfield Primary	Claire
Embleton Primary	Claire	Victoria Park Community Infant	Fiona
Fair Furlong Primary x 2	Claire	Waycroft Primary	Claire
Gay Elms Primary	Fiona	Youth Education Service	Claire



Lord Mayor reading to pupils at St George Primary
(Image Martin Chainey)



Top Fiona Hamilton at Belgrave School
(Bristol United Press)

Above Claire Williamson at Embleton Primary School
(Bristol United Press)

The artists were able to develop their material as they felt appropriate. The following outline was used by Fiona Hamilton in a workshop based on *Carrie's War* held at Belgrave School for special needs pupils on 13 January 2005.

Setting the scene

- Bring in 1940s suitcase containing items for journey as evacuees and place in middle of floor.
- Talk about *Carrie's War* with students.
- Identify main characters.
- Read extract from book to set scene.
- Introduce idea of travelling with Carrie and Nick – preparing to go – packing suitcase – not knowing where going or for how long – feelings of children and parents – what will they need? Special objects they want to take.

The suitcase

Students have brought own special objects (eg teddy, photo, toy, ornament) and talk about these, why they are special to them (experience feelings/talk about connections with family members and previous generations)

Ask 'What could be in the suitcase?' – students make suggestions

- | | |
|--|-------------------------|
| • Clothes | • Toys |
| • Food | • Ration book + coupons |
| • Washing stuff – soap | • Candles |
| • Pen paper and envelopes for writing home | |

Open the suitcase and show items – including week's rations of sweets (2oz/57g), butter, cheese, ham and sugar and clothes that Carrie and Nick can wear in enacted scenes

Make ration books

Make ration books using copy of actual front cover of ration book, and coupons, which they stick inside – in the acted scene, this will be a prop, with Mother telling them not to lose it – it's precious

Drama activity

Get into small groups

Preparing to go – Carrie and Nick with parents/other family members pack and go to station, met by Miss Fazackerly (who will escort them on the train), say goodbye

Bring out – what they pack, advice from mother, one child is reluctant, one child is cross (or other feelings), mother tries to encourage

Each prepares a scene (may write down outline)

Perform, using props and costumes

(If time do scene in village hall where children are allocated to families)

Discussion

About the activities, matters arising

Read final extract of *Carrie's War* and encourage all to read on!

The following story was written by Year 4 pupils at Embleton Primary School in a workshop with Claire Williamson 25 January 2005. It is based upon the theme of separation from Tara's Tree House but contains imagery from the 2004 tsunami in the Far East. Claire allows participants to develop the stories or poems in directions they find most interesting, using the Great Reading Adventure book as a starting point.

Lost in the Tsunami

Sarah shivered. She was high up in a coconut tree. There was a knot inside her belly. As the thunder growled in the distance water dripped onto Sarah's face.

'Mum, dad! Mum, dad, where are you?'

The last thing Sarah remembered was being on the bright sunny beach with her family. Then a big wall of water smacked down like a house falling.

Now she looked around to see where she was and almost nothing was standing. What had happened to her house? Where were her parents? Sarah wondered what had happened to them. She wanted to know if they were dead or alive. She knew she had to locate them.

'I need to know where they are', she said in a whispering voice.

Sarah decided to try and climb down from the tree. It was a high coconut tree and the branches were slippery. She moved her leg.

'Ouch!'

She saw it was bleeding. Sarah held onto the branch. Her hand slipped. She fell. Slowly Sarah got up and noticed that her clothes were torn. She shouted for her mum and dad again but there was still no reply.

Sarah stood at the bottom of the tree, she could smell coconuts. As she started walking she could taste the salty sea in the air. Her bare feet touched the smooth sand. She heard a noise from the other side of the beach. It sounded like her mum and dad but there was no-one there.

Slowly, Sarah walked in the direction of her house and worried about what she would find. Ahead she could see what was left of her white house. She tiptoed nearer and slowly opened the sodden door. It smelt putrid. Wallpaper hung from the walls. Her chair was floating in the water, her bed had tipped over and all her toys were missing. She turned round and saw a shadow on the wall. For a moment she thought it was her parents but when she went to have a look it was just a heap of bricks.

'I hate Tsunamis!' cried Sarah. She clenched her fists together because the water had destroyed her home and taken her family. She felt so angry she kicked the door of her old bedroom and ran out of the house.

As Sarah dashed outside she bashed into Mr Longwell-Green who was Sarah's next door neighbour. They talked about Sarah's parents and then Mr Longwell-Green started to tell Sarah about his daughter. When the wave came he had tried to hold onto her hand but their hands were so wet that it slowly slipped away. She screamed and was washed away by the strong current and he never saw her face again.

Mr Longwell-Green decided to try and find Sarah's parents with her. He suggested that they should go to the hospital to see if they were there. Sarah walked sluggishly down the road to the hospital. When she got there she could smell infected open wounds and heard people shouting and screaming in pain. She noticed that there were little drops of sick and blood all over the place.

Sarah ran down all the corridors searching for her parents. She was huffing and puffing by the time she got to the last corridor. She looked at every bed but still couldn't find them. She prayed that they were there somewhere.

'Sarah!'

She turned suddenly and couldn't believe that her mum and dad were in front of her. She ran over to them and gave them both a huge hug. As she held onto them the sun came out of the clouds. She was so happy that she had found her family. Sarah looked up and saw Mr Longwell-Green. He was pleased that Sarah was with her parents but felt sad that he would never see his little girl again. Outside, a family of monkeys was staring up at the calm blue sky. He wondered if his daughter was peaceful now.

The following story was written in a workshop at Fair Furlong Primary School by Chelsea Maggs based on Tara's Tree House.

'Cluck cluck'. 'Moo moo'. 'Oink oink'. 'Baa baa'.
'This place is giving me a headache and it stinks.'

It's a wispy day and clouds are drifting by. The Floyds lived in the country. Carol came from the big city. She'd never been to the country before. She went to the country because the war was on and she needed to go away from the city. With all the bombs she might get hurt, so like lots of children, she's an evacuee.

Mrs Floyd called Carol down to help her make butter. When Carol first started she was grumpy but after a while she got the hang of it. Carol liked feeding the lambs the best. But still the Floyds weren't mum and dad. Mrs Floyd let Carol plant a pear tree and grow veg. Carol began to start liking farm life.

After a couple of weeks the pear tree was nice and strong. Mrs Floyd took Carol out to buy wood. Mr Floyd built her a tree house. Carol loved her tree house!

After five years Carol went back home. There wasn't a lot of her city left undamaged. When she started school back home the children in her school made fun of the way she talked. One of the children said, 'Oh, why do you talk so funny.'

'Tara! are you coming downstairs for tea? Lisa, Mr Giavani's granddaughter, is coming.'

Nan shook herself. She would always remember that time when she had lived on the farm and her old tree, also the little lambs. Her veg has probably been eaten but she will always remember her farm, always!!!



A new art form explored this year was dance. Graeme Puckett and Ann Peskett of Hoppin' Mad, who had performed at the launch, led workshops teaching some of the moves from popular dances of the 1940s. These were offered to older students at sites that had some previous performance experience on the assumption the participants would not be too intimidated or self-conscious to join in. A three-hour session was held with HND Dance students at the City of Bristol College. Two one-hour sessions were also held at the college for a group of students with learning difficulties. Another workshop was held at Bristol Grammar School for an after-school group. In addition to being enjoyable, the sessions introduced participants to a new form of dance they might never have had an opportunity to experience, one whose history was of relevance to their reading. On the basis of this pilot, other performance workshops may be offered for future projects.

In March, a questionnaire was sent to all those who had received education packs asking for details of what had taken place at their sites. All respondents said their students generally enjoyed the books. Around 74 per cent had made use of the *The Siege* readers' guide, 63 per cent the activity packs and, surprisingly, only 16 per cent the website.

Comments on the reading experience and descriptions of activities that had taken place around it included the following:

Gay Elms Primary: (*Carrie's War* and *Tara's Tree House*) [Liked] *Carrie's War* invoked a lot of emotion but also kept them absorbed. *Tara's Tree House* they could relate to. In addition they were really excited to have new books – something often overlooked. [Activities] Drama activity related to *Carrie's War*. Used *Tara's Tree House* as part of Read a Million Words week.

Upper Horfield Primary School: (*The Siege*, *Carrie's War* and *Tara's Tree House*) [Liked] Terrific range of responses – and we used the books with our gifted and talented kids. *The Siege* – year 6, range of non-fiction text that was accessible and prompted lots of questions. *Carrie's War* – children from years 4 and 5 surprised themselves by getting 'hooked' on the 'old fashioned' children's story. *Tara's Tree House* – year 3 – enjoyed the story and found the factual sections fascinating before rereading the book. Congratulations on generating differentiated material on the same theme. It really worked here.

Sea Mills Infant School: (*Carrie's War* read to Year 2) [Liked] Links with war and work we do around Remembrance Sunday etc and treehouse idea. Some of Year 2 have seen *Carrie's War* on TV. [Disliked] Some long narrative passages. [Activities] Had visitors to school (ex-pupils) who were in forces and we linked the book, their visit and job details with our November project on war/ remembrances.

Below Hoppin' Mad with HND students at the City of Bristol College (*Bristol United Press*)

Above left Hoppin' Mad at the launch
(Image by Martin Chainey)



Air Balloon Hill Junior School: (*Carrie's War*) [Liked] They liked the fact they were reading the same book as lots of other people. [Disliked] The book was quite hard and as a school we decided to read as a class, but lots of classes gave up as the children didn't get into the book.

Summerhill Junior School: (*Carrie's War* and *Tara's Tree House*) [Liked] They were able to read them! Able to relate to own feelings. Linked in with other class work made it more enjoyable. Able to use with other resources ie ICT, video. [Disliked] Having to share one book between two as we couldn't buy any more.

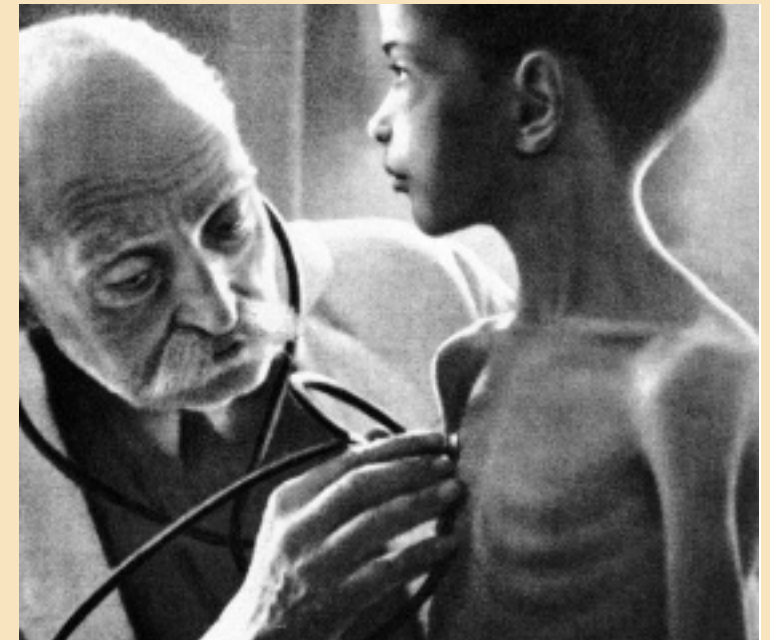
Avon Primary School: (*Carrie's War* and *Tara's Tree House*) [Liked] Great links with history 'Children of WWII' so lots of points of reference. We used *Carrie's War* to study character build-up. Children enjoyed links to our history work. Y3 enjoyed guided reading with *Tara's Tree House* – good use of empathy. [Disliked] Nothing. Children really loved reading a whole novel together. So much guided reading is 'extracts'. [Activities] Was very much linked to Y5 history. We visited Swindon STEAM museum for their 'We'll meet again exhibition'. Excellent day. Very good to receive 'guided read' size packs. It has been a busy term. Maybe more activities would have been done in term 6 when SATs out of way.

St Anne's Infant School: (*Tara's Tree House*): [Liked] The relationship between Tara's experiences and her nan. The illustrations. Hearing about factual events before they were born. [Activities] Lots including we designed our own tree houses; wrote letters from Tara to her parents explaining things she'd done/learned about.

Fair Furlong Primary School: (*Tara's Tree House*) [Liked] Easy to read. Enjoyed the link to history work on World War Two. Liked the 'flash back' element. Enjoyed follow up activities we did. Project very well managed, support from Claire [Williamson] excellent – really useful for children to work with a 'real' author.

Belgrave School: (*Carrie's War* and *Tara's Tree House*) [Liked] They liked the characters and the mystery in *Carrie's War*. They were interested in the suspense created by the novel. They also enjoyed watching the video. Many children wanted to continue reading the books at home. [Use of packs] The information sheets were helpful. We read stories from *Siren Nights*. The pack was used for discussion and drama activities. [Activities] We had a drama workshop about children being evacuated. Many children talked to grandparents about the war. We have really enjoyed participating in this scheme and are really grateful for your hard work.

Generally, the respondents were happy with the way the project had been managed, although the timing had not been suitable in some cases, and all wanted to be included in future Great Reading Adventures.



BRISTOL EVENING POST AND OTHER MEDIA COVERAGE

For the 2003 Great Reading Adventure, the *Evening Post* ran a 51-part serialisation of the whole of *Treasure Island* with colour illustrations sent in by children and in 2004 a local artist was commissioned to adapt *The Day of the Triffids* as a 12-part full-page comic.

In 2005, a daily archive photograph with accompanying explanatory text was published on the letters' page of the paper throughout the project. In addition, the *Evening Post* carried more than 20 features and picture-stories on the Great Reading Adventure and provided a dedicated reporter as a point of contact for news items. Events linked to the project were highlighted in the various listings sections. It is estimated that the coverage was worth over £168,000 in terms of sales of equivalent advertising space.

The support of the *Evening Post*, a newspaper proud of its active involvement in the life of the city, is essential to the success of the Great Reading Adventure. The partnership is mutually beneficial. It establishes contact with readers and contributes to the *Evening Post's* award winning role as a campaigning community-focused newspaper. Nearly 76 per cent of those who returned a questionnaire and who had participated by more than 'just' reading the book, had read some or all of the coverage. One wrote:

I thoroughly enjoyed the archive photos of Bristol in the war printed in Evening Post. Very evocative taken with the book.

The daily readership of the newspaper is estimated to be 180,000. Hundreds of personal blitz stories were sent in by readers inspired by the coverage. In addition, some of those submitting order coupons from the paper for *The Siege* wrote accompanying letters with reminiscences of the war. These included the following two extracts:

I am very interested in the history of the blitz of Bristol.

I lived a few fields away near the Whitchurch Airport at Knowle during the war and as a young child remember the huge planes flying over our house so low you could see the pilot. Several houses in our and surrounding roads were bombed. It was a terrifying time for me as a child and I suffer from claustrophobia to this day, having to go about in the dark into deep underground cramped shelters when the air raid sirens went off. I was always silently petrified. I have a lot of memories about that time. I also remember the prisoners of war. Their camp was in the fields between Willington Road and Airport Road.

I come from a large family – seven brothers and six sisters. When I came along most of the older ones had left home or married so it was like my mum had two families. The second eldest was my brother Sidney James (Jim). He fought in the desert against Rommel and another of my brothers was fighting in Burma. So my poor old mum had quite a worrying time as well as coping with the blitz.

We had a huge thick book in our house and when I was older, after the war, I was shown in this book a picture of my brother in law who had been a prisoner of war in Singapore. His name was Eric Pratchett (Badge). He was a boxer – either a flyweight or bantam. Badge was a super chap and married my oldest sister Lily. They had two daughters when he went away to war. When he came back after release they had another daughter whom they called Joy, for obvious reasons...

I hope you don't mind me writing this to you. Seeing the article in the Evening Post brought it all back to me. I have been reading the Evening Post since I was about 12. I would patiently wait for my mother to finish it and then read it front to back. I was a right little book worm and loved reading anything I could.



Facing page Image used on front page of Bristol *Evening Post* on launch day

Above David Facey, son of wartime photographer Jim Facey, with Richard Burley of the Bristol Record Office (Image by Martin Chainey)

I was born at 4 Glentworth Rd, Clifton Wood in 1938. My brother was born in 1935 and my sister was born on May 14 1944, during the last air raid on Bristol. All of us were born at this address and my mother lived there until 1999. We spent many air raids in the cellar under stairs until they built an air raid shelter in the hillside at the bottom of our road.

I can remember the bombing of houses in Bellview Crescent and houses to the right of the steps to Constitution Hill. There were two or four houses flattened on one side of the small cul-de-sac behind our garden. I actually saw hot shrapnel on our back garden path and we were very lucky as the back end of a bomb came down through the ceiling. We pulled the wardrobe out from the corner and the case was resting on the floor. We had it for years but when our mum died we could not find it...

My father was in the RAF and came home on leave. I remember him saying the air raid started as he came up the road and he saw bombs explode on Nos. 1-7 Bellview Crescent as he walked up the path to our house. He said some were killed but that's all I know.

I hope you do not mind me adding this letter. It may be of interest to you and you may be able to enlighten us also.

In addition to the coverage in the *Evening Post*, there was local broadcast coverage on BBC Points West, ITV West and BBC Radio Bristol. *Venue*, Bristol and Bath's weekly magazine, also had two pieces about the project, in addition to listings of events. It was not possible to monitor wider coverage as, unlike previous Great Reading Adventures, the project did not have the resources of a PR company. However, in addition to the local media there was trade and professional coverage including references in *The Bookseller* and *Arts Industry*. The project was mentioned on the websites of *The Guardian* and the BBC. There was also a feature article in *The Daily Telegraph*.

A big disappointment was the last minute cancellation of a day's filming for BBC's Six O'Clock News involving local schools, the library, a reading group, Helen Dunmore and Andrew Kelly. The engagement of Prince Charles and Camilla Parker-Bowles was announced that morning and the cameraman was whisked away to Tetbury. It was also disappointing that Liverpool's mass reading project, inspired by the Great Reading Adventure though performed on a smaller scale, received the high level of national coverage Bristol dreams of.



ITV West at Fair Furlong Primary on launch day
(Image by Martin Chaaney)

THE SIEGE AND BOOKSHOPS

With so many free and loan copies of the selected book circulating in the city, it has previously been difficult to engage local bookshops in the project, although *Treasure Island* did briefly top Blackwell's bestsellers list in 2003 during the first Great Reading Adventure. However, for 2005 and *The Siege*, bookshops had a greater incentive to be involved as the project provided an opportunity to promote a contemporary living author.

A total of 500 additional copies of *The Siege* were ordered by the Bristol shops, all of which were signed by Helen on launch day. Helen was impressed by the commitment of the booksellers who had set up special displays that included her other backlist titles. She was accompanied on her tour by Juliet Annan, publisher at Viking Books and Helen Dunmore's editor, and Louisa Symington, Publicity Director Generic PR for the Penguin Group.

Juliet said:

As a publisher of a list and the editor of many books, I am constantly aware of how difficult the market is at the moment – with publishers, booksellers, librarians and the authors themselves all struggling to reach the consumer – in other words, the reader. It was therefore incredibly uplifting to go to Bristol on a grey January day, and see the tremendous enthusiasm with which the media and the people of Bristol had embraced the Great Reading Adventure. What an extraordinary bonding, enjoyable experience the mutually read book can still be – and indeed due to ventures like this, is now more than ever.

Louisa has provided support for all the Great Reading Adventures to date, and the success of the project has encouraged the company to initiate other mass reading activities, including the 2004 Great Thames Read, featuring Jerome K Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat*.

Louisa said:



Helen Dunmore at branches of Waterstones on launch day (Images by Martin Chainey)

Penguin was, once again, delighted to be involved with our third Great Reading Adventure in Bristol. As with the two previous books, Treasure Island and The Day Of The Triffids, Creative Bristol did an extremely professional and thorough job galvanising the whole city to read Helen Dunmore's The Siege.

It is every publicist's dream to get off a train after a two-hour early morning train journey from London to be greeted by piles of the local paper with your author's book on the front page – and this happened to us on the launch day of the Great Reading Adventure in January. It was a great start to our '7 Cities, 7 Books' birthday campaign, and we look forward to working with Creative Bristol next year on a South West read as part of the bicentennial celebrations of Bristol's 'adopted son' Isambard Kingdom Brunel.



THE CITIES UNDER SIEGE WEEKEND



Top John Penny talking about the Bristol blitz
(Bristol United Press)



Above Still from *Kanal*

On the weekend of 5-6 February, a selection of feature films showing civilians under attack in wartime were shown at Watershed Media Centre, interspersed with talks on different aspects of the experience of being under siege. In addition, Helen Dunmore was interviewed on stage by Sara Davies of BBC Radio 4. Sessions were held in the Waterside 3 area (capacity 80). Films were free and talks were £3.00/£2.50. Table 6 provides audience figures based on the number of tickets issued.

Gilda O'Neill was due to talk about London's East End on the Sunday afternoon but the session was cancelled because she was unwell. There were some technical difficulties at the screening of *The North Star*, scheduled to be shown on Sunday morning, and this was

abandoned. Even before these changes, this was a smaller programme than had been developed for 2004, as it had been decided that it was better to allow more gaps between sessions and also to avoid running sessions on the Sunday evening. More tickets could have been sold for Helen Dunmore if there had been a larger room as people were turned away on the night.

No formal evaluation took place, but those who attended seemed to enjoy the occasion and audience members asked some interesting questions of the speakers. However, the considerable effort needed in managing and promoting such a weekend does not seem to be matched by the level of interest from the paying public. For future projects, it might be preferable to concentrate on themed day schools at the University of Bristol or similar educational activity.

Table 6: Audience figures for the Cities Under Siege weekend

Date and time	Title	Audience
5 February 11.00	<i>Carrie's War</i> (U)	60
5 February 13.30	Bristol at War: John Penny A talk about Bristol's wartime experience, including the showing of 'A City at War', a documentary which uses contemporary colour film footage shot in the city.	56
5 February 16.15	The Bombing of Dresden: Frederick Taylor An in-depth look at the historical and contemporary context of the attack on Dresden in World War Two.	34
5 February 18.00	Gijs van Hensbergen on 'Guernica' An examination of the hidden history and politics of Picasso's astounding painting based upon Nazi Germany's bombing of the Basque town.	49
5 February 19.30	Helen Dunmore interview	80
5 February 21.00	<i>Kanal</i> (12)	46
6 February 16.15	<i>Hope and Glory</i> (15)	55
Total		380

READING GROUPS

The Siege was used by a number of Bristol reading groups, 30 of which are registered with the Bristol Library Service (around 12 of these signed up to the service for the first time as a result of this project). It is difficult to assess accurately the full take-up by reading groups as some independent groups may not have registered with a library, despite borrowing the books from there, and others will have used bought or free copies.

Eighteen groups were represented at the event 'An afternoon with Helen Dunmore for Bristol Reading Groups' organised by the Library Service and held at the Fortune Theatre on 26 February. More would have booked if space had allowed. There were 75 members of the public and six staff members. Feedback for the event was positive. Specific comments included:

Helen was very knowledgeable about her subject.

She took our questions seriously.

I've only one question – can we do this again next year?

We've never been to anything like this before and we did not know what it would be like – it's been really good.

When's the next one?

A few respondents to the readers' questionnaire had been involved in reading group discussions. One wrote:

Marvellous. Well written, very gripping. A very good choice. My reading group (10 women) all enjoyed it. We had a really good discussion without any effort because we could identify with Anna caring for her family... As with the previous two years the guide added to my enjoyment of the book by giving background material. The questions were very helpful for my reading group's discussion.

The Siege was read by a new reading group of first year medical students run by Tom Sperlinger of the University of Bristol's English Department and Louise Younie of the Medicine Faculty. This is part of an ongoing development project in which students are encouraged to draw upon what they have learned in their course when reading in the group. Copies of the book were distributed at their first meeting on 20 January and were discussed on 17 February. Tom provided the following report:

I thought you might be interested to hear a little about the discussion at the medics reading group.

Ten people came – from a pool of about 15 students – and others who couldn't make it sent e-mails with their thoughts on the book. Three of the students had been to see Helen Dunmore read; and were delighted to have met her and had their books signed. They gave some interesting context.

Nine of the students liked the book, and one fiercely disliked it: which gave the discussion a very useful shape and made each of us articulate what we had liked in a more convincing way.

The student who disliked the book was in part questioning whether it felt authentically 'Russian'. One of the students had grown up in a Communist country and she defended passionately the realism of Dunmore's depiction, in particular details like the queues for bread.

We read aloud and discussed page 271, where Andrei feels the pull between 'his accurate, professional diagnosis' and the one italicised

Staff of Business West (Image by Martin Chainey)



word that reminds him of who it is in front of him: Marina. This was very interesting as a means of thinking about a medical perspective through fiction. That is, the students were able to relate it both to their experiences of study and training as medics and to their own thoughts about and responses to Marina as a character.

Curiously, there was a long-ish discussion towards the end about cannibalism, which many people felt was hovering in the background; not only explicitly – in the rumours Anna hears – but also perhaps in the moment where she tastes her own blood and is shocked by it.

With a little persuasion, the students have chosen to read Crime and Punishment for the next meeting; as a way of thinking about Russia (and perhaps inspired too by Anna's love of Russian literature). It's an ambitious choice. I think The Siege was a good place for us to start.

So: thanks again for the copies.

SUPPORTERS OF THE PROJECT

The Great Reading Adventure received funding and support in kind from Arts Council England South West, Bristol City Council, Bristol *Evening Post* and Press Ltd, Business West, City Inn, Heritage Lottery Fund, Mail Marketing International Limited and Arts Council England/Millennium Commission through the Urban Cultural Programme. All supporters were keen to be involved in a high quality project that was of benefit to a wide sector of the community through encouraging reading, civic participation and pride, new creativity and an interest in history. Sponsor logos were featured on the printed material and the website. Around 40 per cent of questionnaire respondents said they recalled some sponsors. Bristol *Evening Post* had the highest level of recall. Bristol City Council, the National Lottery, Penguin and Arts Council England also had high figures. A number of companies were wrongly identified as sponsors, including University of Bristol and the BBC.

Members of Bristol Cabinet (Image by Neil Phillips)



It should be noted that it is difficult to judge the level of recall with any accuracy on a self-completed questionnaire: respondents may have referred to the readers' guide before replying, for example, or guessed. It is difficult to get funders' involvement publicly recognised with just a logo but there are few opportunities for promoting this more explicitly. Although recognition is unlikely to be the main priority for funders getting involved, they may well have a secondary consideration of having their own work understood and appreciated through the association with the project. For the future, it would be worth considering how funders and other supporters should be presented.

Arts Council England South West (ACESW) is a partner in BCDP. This was the first year in which the project had received direct funding under the Grants for the Arts scheme. Nick Capaldi, director, says that ACESW has two primary goals in supporting ventures like the Great Reading Adventure:

- To have a good and interesting literary project.
- To get people reading and involved in books.

On those terms, the 2005 Great Reading Adventure was 'a great success'. This year's particular strength was having the involvement of Helen Dunmore: readers could have a direct connection with and reaction to a living author, increasing their awareness of the writing process. Nick feels that although the access to copies of the books is essential, the success of the project is dependent upon the quality of the events and the other forms of active engagement. Finding and drawing out the Bristol relevance of the chosen book is important. He was at first uncertain how this would work with a book set in Leningrad but as the project unrolled it became obvious that the comparisons were there. He said that 'nothing obvious springs to mind' when it comes to thinking of new activities that might be needed in the future but did suggest that having some of the events in less obvious locations would be useful.



Top Nick Capaldi, Arts Council England South West (Image by Martin Chainey)



Above Adrian Tinniswood, Heritage Lottery Fund (Image by Martin Chainey)

This was also the first time funding had been received from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). Adrian Tinniswood, Chair of the HLF Committee for the South West, said prior to the project's launch:

HLF is delighted to support initiatives such as Bristol's Great Reading Adventure which provide innovative, accessible and entertaining ways of encouraging people to reminiscence and learn about our heritage. I am sure the 2005 Adventure's commemoration of the civilian experience of World War Two will be particularly engaging for the people of Bristol. The project itself and the coverage in the Evening Post will provide many opportunities for people to share their stories and learn more about their city's past.

Of those who returned a questionnaire 78.5 per cent thought they had learnt more about the war as a result of the project and 3.5 per cent thought they had not only because they knew about it already having lived through it. Adrian said that the Great Reading Adventure 'was a really good project for us to support' and congratulated the organisers for their achievement, saying 'the impact and coverage was astonishing'. He had had concerns that using a different book for younger children might have diluted the universal appeal this time round, and was pleased to hear that for 2006 the same book, in various complete and abridged versions, will be used.

BUDGET

The first Great Reading Adventure cost just under £68,000 to run. The second cost £65,000. Table 7 provides details of income and expenditure for the 2005 project (some of these costs represent in-kind support from BCDP and its partners).

Table 7: Great Reading Adventure 2005

Expenditure	2005
Management and evaluation	25,458
Design and publicity material	5,837
Launch event	419
Website	3,900
Books and readers' guides	20,480
Education packs	1,222
Workshops	4,956
Events	2,390
Postage and telephone	3,781
Travel	1,500
Miscellaneous	695
Total	70,638

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Top Sue Giles at the City Museum and Art Gallery showing Luftwaffe maps of Bristol bombing targets (Image by Martin Chainey)

Above BCDP board members (Image by Martin Chainey)

Once again the Great Reading Adventure demonstrated that Bristol is able to run a citywide project that engages a wide range of people in a single book, inspires discussion and debate, encourages reading, writing and artistic creativity, and enhances social capital through the building of networks across the community.

As with previous projects it was also fun for those involved. In addition, it had its own distinctive quality compared with previous Adventures. All questionnaire respondents who expressed an opinion thought citywide reading projects were an excellent or good idea, and over 98 per cent were interested in participating in future projects.

The Great Reading Adventure is now an annual event and provisional plans have been made for the next two years. In 2006 Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*, a tale that celebrates the thrills and inventiveness of Victorian travel, will provide the opening to a yearlong celebration of Isambard Kingdom Brunel. In 2007 a novel will be chosen that reflects Britain's cultural diversity in the year that marks the 200th anniversary of the abolition of slavery.

Many of the recommendations made following the evaluation of the 2004 Great Reading Adventure were implemented for 2005. These included:

- Restricting the free book distribution to the BS postcode area.
- Involving the *Evening Post* from the outset in planning the project.
- Including Word versions of documents on the website in addition to PDFs.
- Getting material to teachers before the Christmas break.
- Asking teachers who requested a workshop to complete a booking form giving all contact details and a specific description of what they required.
- Getting material to the libraries before Christmas.

- Allowing for additional preparation time for artist workshops in the budget and allowing longer breaks between sessions during the weekend of films and talks.
- Adding a question on the gender of the respondent to the self-completed evaluation questionnaire and considering offering a prize draw as an incentive for returning the form.
- Having a membership scheme by which companies donate money in return for packs of books and guides.

Recommendations that were not implemented but will be considered for the future were:

- Finding a more cost-effective means of distributing books to the general public that still entails keeping a register of interest but does not incur postal charges.
- Arranging some event to mark the culmination of the project.

The key recommendations following the 2005 Great Reading Adventure are:

- Working more closely with the Library Service's literacy initiatives and its targeted projects involving young people.
- Considering announcing the name of the chosen book in advance of the launch event, to generate interest from the start.
- Not producing promotional postcards.
- Having a more effective booking scheme for the schools' workshops, and making more links to the curriculum.
- Making more use of day schools at the University of Bristol's Lifelong Learning department, rather than focusing on talks and films.
- Reviewing the project's overall objectives to ensure they are strategic and measurable.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Great Reading Adventure project is a collaborative effort and thanks are due to the organisations and individuals who provided the data and feedback used in this evaluation report. Thanks too to all those who completed and returned questionnaires, and sent in letters and emails. Our thanks to all those who provided funding and support in kind for the project.



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