

THE BOOKLOVERS' CLUB NORTHERN BEACHES INCORPORATED



(Incorporated in NSW under the Associations Act 2009)
No: Y2222011

1395b Pittwater Road, Narrabeen 2101

MEETINGS: 2nd and 4th TUESDAY each month from 10am

Website: <https://tinyurl.com/bookloversnb>

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& Louisa Baker

FEBRUARY 2026

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

We had a stimulating and lively start to the year with a presentation by Joanna Nell of her latest novel "The Funeral Crashers". Joanna is a northern beaches resident and former G.P. Some 45 members, guests and prospective members attended this talk and Joanna also joined us for lunch.

In January we also held a discussion where the participants talked about books they had read over the December/January break. A complete list of these books will be attached to a forthcoming bulletin.

We are indeed fortunate to have two presenters from our own membership speak to us over the months of February and March. Nathalie Apouchtine will speak in February about her book, published in 2025, "No Way Back". This book traces the history of her aristocratic Russian family post the revolution in 1917 and their lives and travels in France, Canada and Australia.

In March, at our AGM, Sue Alexander will speak. Sue is a former tennis player and business Woman, poet and writer.

March is our AGM, and it will be my swan song as I exit the president's role and give another of our members the opportunity to guide our club and assist it to prosper. I am hoping that this meeting will be well attended as a way of showing your support, and as we also have a fascinating speaker in Sue. In order to vote at this meeting, your annual subscription is required to be paid.

We are also calling for anyone who is interested in the role of president to nominate, as most office bearers will re-nominate. We do have one candidate, so if there's someone out there who would like to influence the course that the club takes over the next 3 years, please come forward and nominate.

Maria Tomaino
President

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 62nd Annual General Meeting of the Booklovers Club Northern Beaches Incorporated will be held at Berry Hall at The Tramshed on Tuesday 10th March 2026 at 11am. Please come along and support Booklovers Club. Our member, Susan Alexander will be the Speaker at the AGM, talking about one of her books. More information in the March bulletin.

In order to vote at this meeting, members are advised that their annual subscription of \$40 must be paid before this date.

A nomination form for committee membership is attached to this Bulletin and members are invited to nominate for a position on the Committee.

Nominations Close 23rd February 2026
Nominations to be emailed to the Secretary Carolyn Darmanin at
cfdarmanin@bigpond.com

BIRTHDAY DRAW

Oops!. I forgot about this didn't I? I was so busy on the door with the amazing attendance we had for our first Author talk that I forgot all about our birthday draw.

However, make sure you come to our February author talk as I will make it up to you if you had a January birthday. I will do one draw for January and one for February. Remember, you have to be present to win the book voucher. Good luck.

Chris Horton

AUTHOR FOR FEBRUARY – Nathalie Apoutchine



Every family has fascinating stories from the past. Unfortunately many of us do not become interested in them until it is too late and the relatives who could tell us those stories have passed away.

In exploring my family's past for *No Way Back* I have been both unfortunate – and fortunate. I never knew my grandparents: three died before I was born, the fourth lived on another continent. But I have been lucky in that several relatives in my grandparents' generation left behind accounts of their lives and times: diaries, memoirs, letters, photos... Not a replacement for being able to speak directly to my grandparents, but a treasure trove nonetheless.

I was able to interview members of my parents' generation, in Canada, France and Russia. They described their own experiences and witnessing of historic events and they also told me more about their parents' lives and experiences.

While wanting to know more about my predecessors, I have always wondered how people experience turbulent times – how they cope and survive. The twentieth century was not short of dramatic world developments and my relatives found themselves in the middle of some of these: world wars, revolutions, civil war, multiple migrations; in Russia, France – and eventually Canada and Australia.

I travelled to many of the locations where these events occurred to try to get a sense of places which held so much significance for my family.

My goal was to tell about what they lived through and saw through their words, to bring to life these major events. In my own reading of histories, I have always felt a greater understanding and connection to the events being described when there is personal involvement and reflection on what happened: how it played out, how it affected ordinary people, how they coped and moved on – and whether the impacts echoed down the generations.

Of course memory is fallible and often unreliable. Everyone remembers events in different ways. Besides, some record their memories with ulterior motives: to address their descendants specifically, to commemorate a place or time, or sometimes to try to justify their roles in the events. But their experiences and the impacts of them have a truth of their own.

If I occasionally questioned the “facts” in my relatives’ memoirs, I did not question the validity of their memories. At the same time, I wanted to place them firmly within the historical record. This meant searching archives and extensive research in historical texts. But then historians also often disagree – especially on the interpretation of events: why they happened, what they meant, their ongoing significance.

This can be particularly problematic where part of the past one is exploring is of a country where there has been systematic altering of history for propaganda purposes. Still, working in the post-Soviet era, I was able to access archives that had been closed for decades and to consult the work of Russian historians finally able to research more freely. They added to a broad range of sources in the West, on the Russian Revolution, Civil War and the birth of the Soviet Union.

Researching French history of the twentieth century had a different set of complications: the decades of re-examination and debate over events in the Second World War. French historians, and society more generally, have grappled with questions of collaboration, guilt, revenge and punishment – or non-punishment. The discovery of new information about the past, and analysis through the prism of the present, mean many issues in history are hard to put to rest.

I also conducted extensive research on the movements of people, whether as refugees or migrants. While the Russian exodus after the Revolution made up the first major refugee wave of the twentieth century, such mass migration is now something all too familiar, amid the political and social upheaval around the globe. The experiences of migrant countries like Canada and Australia over the twentieth century are part of my family’s story too.

While trying to reconcile differing accounts of the past is challenging, the variety of tellings means history is not frozen – the understanding of any period is dynamic. Keeping in mind the fluidity of history and the pitfalls of eyewitness accounts, I embarked on my task: to blend all these sources into a coherent account of major events in Russia and France in the first half of the twentieth century that would be informative and as accurate as possible. And engaging and interesting for the reader.

Researching and writing *No Way Back* has been a fascinating journey. I have learned more than I can quantify – both about my family and the crucial events through which they lived. I hope readers of the book find the results of my work equally fascinating.

Nathalie Apouchnine

AUTHOR FOR JANUARY

Our author for January was Dr Joanna Nell talking about her book *The Funeral Crashers*.

For Joanna Nell, storytelling was an early passion, but one she only pursued later in life. Joanna grew up in Bromsgrove, a small market town in the middle of England. Her mother was a hairdresser and her father owned an electrical store. As a result, her home was filled with televisions – and it was through these screens she first fell in love with stories. Books soon followed.

‘From the very first book my parents read to me, I remember being impatient for more stories, so much so that I taught myself to read before I started school’

Growing up she was a shy and bookish kid who was badly bullied. And so, she took comfort in the imaginary. Her ability to create stories grew into a love of writing when at age eight her parents bought her a typewriter for her birthday.

‘I loved the escapism of writing and being able to control what happened to my characters when the real world was, at that time, confusing and overwhelming. I never dreamed of becoming a published writer back then because it seemed too conceited an ambition.’

Life had other plans for Joanna, who at 13 won a scholarship to Bromsgrove school. During these years she developed a love of science and became conflicted between what she should pursue.

‘In the end, I faced a choice and chose the scientific route that led me to a career in medicine.’

She went on to study medicine at Cambridge and Oxford universities and then trained as a general practitioner.

‘I never lost my desire for creativity, however, channelling it into my flowery essays at university – much to the frustration of my tutors, I suspect – and later into writing expansive case notes on all my patients. I still consider medicine as much an art as a science,’ she says.

In 2003 she emigrated and settled down in Australia with her family. Years later in 2012, while working as a mother and full-time GP, Joanna was thrust back into the world of writing. After a fall that required hamstring surgery and six weeks of bedrest, she enrolled in an online creative writing course through the Australian Writers Centre.

‘From the moment I submitted that very first assignment, I felt a visceral shift deep inside me, as though something that had been stuck had finally released. It was the first time I’d really done anything purely for myself, and at first it felt like an indulgence, but I’ve never looked back.’

After successfully getting several short stories published Joanna finally found the courage to submit her first novel to agents and publishers. While this novel has never seen the light of day, her second novel *The Single Ladies of Jacaranda Retirement Village* was picked up by an agent and became a national bestseller.

‘I attended a literary speed dating event in Sydney in 2017 and delivered a three-minute pitch, in what felt like a single breath, to the person who became my first agent. She read the manuscript in a day. Within 24 hours there was a three-way bidding war between publishers, something that I still struggle to believe. Having waited many years, I became a published author overnight.’

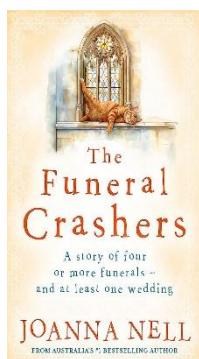


Joanna has since gone on to write *The Last Voyage of Mrs Henry Parker*, *The Great Escape from Woodlands Nursing Home*, *The Tea Ladies of St Jude's Hospital*, *Mrs Winterbottom Takes a Gap Year* and most recently, *The Funeral Crashers*. Her books are celebrated for their witty, lively and uplifting portrayals of older characters – and her works reflect her own advocacy for positive ageing.

‘When I was a child, I spent a lot of time around my active grandparents and saw them as great role models for positive ageing. As a medical student I gravitated towards older patients. Not only were they more interesting from a medical point of view, but I found them more stoical and less impatient with a rookie like me. I often became so engrossed with their stories that I was reprimanded for taking too long to see the patient.’

Joanna’s work as a GP and specifically her work at retirement villages and nursing homes have inevitably influenced her work – all her published novels have followed the lives of older characters.

‘Although all my characters and plotlines are purely fictional, and the Hippocratic Oath prevents me from sharing any details from inside the consulting room, I inevitably draw inspiration from the everyday encounters with my patients. This is especially true of my older patients whose challenges with an ageing mind and body I witnessed first-hand. This allowed me to view ageing from a different perspective, not as a disease to be cured, but as an inevitable stage of life that we all face. This experience certainly influenced my writing and my desire to tell more positive uplifting stories about ageing. All my books feature older characters discovering either new friendships, romantic relationships or community, as social connection has been shown to be one of the strongest protective factors in ageing.’



Joanna’s latest novel, *The Funeral Crashers*, also draws from her experiences with older adults. It’s a heartfelt story that follows Martin Pottinger and Grace Cavendish, two older characters who are dealing with loss and grief: Martin is still reeling from the guilt of losing an old lover, while Grace has withdrawn from the world since the death of her daughter. When the pair meet at a funeral at All Souls Church, they connect over a shared joy of singing hymns during the service. Afterwards, Grace suggests to Martin that they attend another funeral together to sing at, and a friendship develops. Soon, they are crashing a string of

funerals, and along the way they find purpose, community and even a surprising twist of fate – becoming the inheritors of a large estate.

‘The novel began as a number of seemingly unrelated cues. The initial seed was sown during a fireside conversation on a winter retreat with my writing group. Someone brought up the subject of crashing funerals. I remember jumping up and down, and pleading with them to let me steal the idea for a novel. This happens a lot when writers get together. Everything is fair game!

‘Once I had the title, I found the other elements fell into place. Naturally as we get older, we attend more funerals of people we know. My father-in-law happened to mention that he enjoyed attending funeral wakes for a “good feed” and, because he was a gregarious man who loved a chat, for the company. When I started talking about the idea for the book, I was surprised by how many people told me they knew a funeral crasher.’

We see this reflected in the novel, with Martin and Grace discovering how this newfound activity of theirs is shared with many others. It soon becomes clear that, for many, funerals are indeed a place of connection.

‘When my father-in-law passed away, I was struck by the poignancy of his funeral, and realised how important these rituals are, both in bringing the family together and as a vital source of connection in a society that is increasingly segregated. Humans have a fundamental need for connection and loneliness is literally a killer. Equally, modern society has become very uncomfortable with death, both talking about it and accepting it.’

While death is central to *The Funeral Crashers*, the novel is told with humour and warmth. We see how Martin and Grace gradually grow more confident and livelier as they begin to reconnect with the world. Both of them reckon with their pasts and in the process create new friendships, jobs and even fall in love again.

‘I’ve learned that in approaching dark or sensitive issues, humour helps. In fact laughter has always been an important tool in both my work as a doctor and as a writer. I try to use humour both to put my patients at their ease, but also to encourage them to look at their situation in a different way.’

While Joanna’s depictions of ageing offer readers an insight into the spirit of these characters, she’s also forthright with the challenges that come with this next phase of life. ‘I don’t sugarcoat ageing. My characters often live with common complaints including mobility issues, memory loss and incontinence, and they experience pain, sickness and grief. Basically, everything that makes us human.

‘In a world where loneliness is now considered a major health issue, I hope that readers will realise how essential connection is to wellbeing and perhaps reach out to someone in their community who is alone.’

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY – Library Open from 10am

Club Day and Author Talk Open from 10 am	February 10th	March AGM 10 th
Management Committee meeting 12 pm	---	10 th
Book discussion	24 th	24th

Assistant Librarians' Roster February 2026

	TUESDAY		THURSDAY
3	Louise Matthews	5	Hilary Macorison
10	Club Day Glenys Murray, Jennifer Seal	12	Chris Horton
17	Wendy Austen	19	Wendy Webb
24	Discussion Glenys Murray	26	Chris Hughes

BOOK DISCUSSION

February 24th: *The Process of Reading* presented by Glenys Murray.

In our next Book Discussion we will be trying something a little different. Instead of discussing the various aspects of a particular book we will broaden our perspective to consider the actual process of reading itself.

To stimulate this discussion we will start with a short (6 minute) video about how reading actually changes the way our brains work. We will then consider a series of questions, mostly derived from ideas raised in the video, many of which will call on your own experiences of reading. These questions will include topics such as how reading can convey real emotion, how reading is not a “natural” function, the differences in comprehension and retention when reading via audiobooks, ebooks and print books, and even contemplating the future of books and libraries. Looking forward to hearing your perspective.

March 24th: *The Wind Knows my Name* by Isabelle Allende presented by Jill Thompson.

April 28th: *The Buried Life* by Andrea Goldsmith presented by Kerry Scotland.

From the Librarian

There are no new books this month. I need suggestions from all of you. Anyone in the Club can suggest a book or books for purchase. This is how we ensure that the book collection isn't skewed towards one or two genres. All you need to do is send me an email, or give me a review at a meeting. If you send me an email, please include author, title and year of publication, plus a small description of the book. Thank You.

Glenys Murray

BOOK DISCUSSION (from 13 December 2025)

A Great Act of Love (by Heather Rose) opens with the crime of murder, and we are introduced to the main characters of the novel Caroline and her father Jacques- Louis Colbert, who born into the French aristocracy is a scholar, a philosopher, apothecary, healer and vigneron.

The title of the book, A Great Act of Love is the description that Cornelius (a main character in the book) gives to the journey that Caroline the main character takes to follow her father, who has been transported to Van Dieman's Land. Carline eventually indentures him to work in the vineyard that is attached to the cottage she has bought and produce champagne, which is a long-held dream of his.

What follows does not go according to plan in many ways and follows the characters through trials and tribulations as the plot line weaves in and out of eras and goes backwards and forwards in time tracking the characters' lives.

“The book is a work of fiction drawn from many accounts of history” says the author.

The book is also a metaphysical exploration. It has woven into its fabric questions around knowing, being, identity, time and space. The writing is lyrical in its description of the natural world, and it is very well researched.

Whether it answers all the questions it poses remains to be seen.

Libby Ciok

NOTE: See Nomination Form for Committee positions on the next page

The deadline for the March Bulletin will be 20th February 2026

BOOKS OPEN DOORS

THE BOOKLOVERS' CLUB NORTHERN BEACHES INC

NOMINATION FOR OFFICE/COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

We, the undersigned nominate
(Name of candidate)

as a candidate for the position of

Proposer's signature
(Print Name)

Seconder's signature
(Print Name)

I, the candidate, declare that I am
prepared to accept office as if elected.

I declare that I am a financial member of more than 1 year and that I reside at

.....
.....

Dated Signature of Candidate