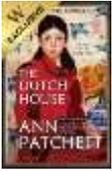
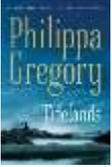
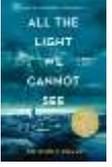
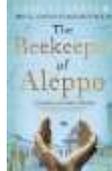


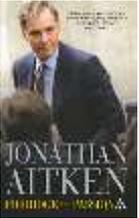
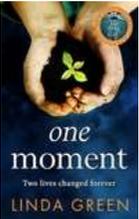


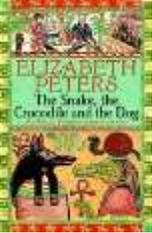
## FOKL Best reads 2020

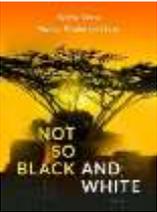
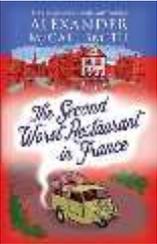
	<p><b>Ann Patchett:</b> <b>The Dutch House</b> (Fiction)</p>	<p>The story of a house in Pennsylvania and of the family who own it through several decades in the second half of the 20th century. It's beautifully written and explores the lives of family members, their relationships with each other and with the house.</p>
	<p><b>Philippa Gregory: Tidelands</b> (Historical fiction, UK)</p>	<p>A move away from her books about the Tudors to 1648 and the Civil War. Set on the coast in the south of the country the story centres on Alinor, a descendant of wise women, crushed by poverty and superstition, who waits in the graveyard under the full moon for a ghost who will declare her free from her abusive husband. But.....</p>
	<p><b>Anthony Doerr:</b> <b>All the Light We Cannot See</b> (French historical fiction, German occupation of Paris 1940-45)</p>	<p>Doerr's novel is an absolutely compelling read. It's the story of two teenagers, a blind French girl and an orphaned German boy, caught up in WW2. The story alternates between the two. As a reader you know that the two will be brought together at some point, but Doerr maintains an incredible suspense as their stories unfold, and there's no fairytale ending. Un-put-downable.</p> <p>A novel with a difference about World War II in that the two main characters are a blind French girl and a young German boy who joins the Hitler Youth and is effectively headhunted by the SS when his talent as a radio ham becomes apparent. Both end up in St Malo, she as a refugee from Paris after the occupation, he in his role in the German forces. The book jumps around in time and place, but each chapter is clearly entitled in order to avoid any confusion.</p>
	<p><b>Julia Chapman:</b> <b>The Dales Detective Series</b> Fiction, Popular crime)</p>	<p>Set in the heart of Yorkshire, the detective duo Samson O'Brien and Delilah Metcalfe solve a series of cases in their home town of Bruncliffe. The stories are at the lighter end of detective fiction, but the plots keep you guessing until the end. Add to that the various back stories not least the ongoing inquiry into Samson O'Brien's suspension from the Met. Roll on book 6.</p>

	<p><b>T P Fielden:</b>  <b>The Riviera Express</b>  (Fiction, Cosy crime)</p>	<p>Set in the late 1950s, The Riviera Express is the local newspaper in the fictional South Devon town of Temple Regis. Miss Judy Dimont, ex wartime Naval Intelligence officer, is the star reporter for the paper and investigates when a famous film actor is murdered on the train taking him to Temple Regis.</p> <p>This is the first in a series of whodunnits featuring Judy, the others being Resort to Murder, A Quarter Past Dead and Died and Gone to Devon. Judy is a very likeable heroine and the period atmosphere of a local newspaper in the 50s is well captured by the author, an ex-journalist. The covers are reminiscent of railway travel posters from my childhood and are a delight in themselves. These are best read in order to avoid spoilers.</p>
	<p><b>Ken Follett:</b>  <b>The Pillars of the Earth</b>  (Historical fiction, 1135-1154)</p>	<p>Set in thirteenth Century Britain and Europe this is some of the best historical fiction I have read. It centres around the building of a cathedral, and is full of historical detail. There are a host of characters, goodies and baddies, and I could not put it down.</p>
	<p><b>Steven Galloway:</b>  <b>The Cellist of Sarajevo</b>  (Historical/fact based fiction)</p>	<p>Based on a true incident during the siege of Sarajevo this is s vivid picture of the horrors of that war.</p>
	<p><b>Helen Macdonald:</b>  <b>Vesper Flights by</b>  (Non-fiction, effect of human beings on nature)</p>	<p>This is a remarkable set of essays and a lovely book to dip into. This is the author of 'H is for Hawk' but I felt she has matured a lot. It is much less obsessively concerned with a single subject and ' is a book about observation, fascination, time, memory, love and loss and how we make the world around us'.</p>
	<p><b>Richard Harris:</b>  <b>Conclave</b>  (Fiction, power struggle story)</p>	<p>This book gave some interesting insights into the "geography "of the Vatican and the way a conclave works, but is full of excitement and has an unexpected finish.</p>
	<p><b>Neville Shute:</b>  <b>A town like Alice</b>  (Historical fiction, romance)</p>	<p>Set during and after the second world war, in UK, Malaysia and Australia and partly based on real life, this story is full of human interest, and was hard to put down.</p>
	<p><b>M L Stedman:</b>  <b>The light between oceans</b> (Fiction, Australia)</p>	<p>A sad but enthralling tale of guilt, love and hatred of Germans after the First World War in Australia. The light is a lighthouse.</p>

	<p><b>Alice Jolly:</b> <b>Mary Ann Sate, Imbecile</b> (Historical fiction, Gloucestershire)</p>	<p>A real tour de force! Sad and absorbing narrative of the fate of the poor in early 19th century, but uplifting tale of the triumph of the human spirit. Narrated in verse by Mary Ann. The other side of history!</p>
	<p><b>Madeline Miller:</b> <b>Circe by</b> (Fantasy fiction)</p>	<p>Circe is the daughter of Helios the Sun God. She is strange, not powerful like her father or gorgeous like her mother but she has a dark power of her own, witchcraft. When Circe's gift threatens the gods she is banished to the island of Aiaia where she hones her occult craft, casting spells and gathering strange herbs and taming wild animals. Among the island's guests is an unexpected visitor, the mortal Odysseus, for whom Circe will risk everything.</p>
	<p><b>Hilary Mantel:</b> <b>Mantel Pieces</b> (Non-fiction)</p>	<p>A thought-provoking collection of remarkable insights into events in her own life and in the lives of others, for example Christopher Marlowe, Britain's last witch, Madonna, the murder of James Bulger.</p>
	<p><b>Christy Lefteri:</b> <b>The Bee Keeper of Aleppo</b> (Fiction, Syria)</p>	<p>Almost too painful to recommend, however the writing is superb. The pain that is inflicted upon refugees fleeing their own countries.</p>
	<p><b>Amor Towles:</b> <b>A Gentleman in Moscow</b> (Fiction)</p>	<p>Set in Moscow from 1922 onwards when Count Alexander Rostov is deemed an unrepentant aristocrat and sentenced to house arrest in the Metropol Hotel. This is a humorous story set against the dismal nature of life in the USSR, full of well-drawn characters. Rostov unexpectedly discovers a new understanding of both pleasure and purpose. A delightful story of history and humanity. It reminded me of our visit to Moscow and St Petersburg in 1990 when everything in Russia was collapsing.</p>
	<p><b>Raynor Winn:</b> <b>Salt Path</b> (Non-fiction, Memoirs)</p>	<p>The Salt Path is an honest and life-affirming true story of coming to terms with grief and the healing power of the natural world. Ultimately, it is a portrayal of home, and how it can be lost, rebuilt, and rediscovered in the most unexpected ways. The account of a couple's journey after having lost their home and had a terminal medical diagnosis. They decided to walk the South West Coast Path with very little money and the capacity to carry only the barest of essentials with them. This is an honest and life-affirming true story of coming to terms with grief and the healing power of the natural world.</p>

	<p><b>Jonathan Aitken:</b>  <b>Porridge and Passion by, former MP and Cabinet Minister</b>  (Non-fiction, Autobiography)</p>	<p>This is the sequel to his best-selling autobiography <i>Pride and Perjury</i> and is the riveting story of his prison sentence (grim) and re-entry into the world of freedom with a new career as an author, broadcaster and subsequently Anglican priest.</p>
	<p><b>Jonathan Aitken</b>  <b>John Newton</b>  (Non-fiction, Religious and spiritual biographies)</p>	<p>An interesting and well-written biography of John Newton, former slave trader, who wrote the hymn <i>Amazing Grace</i> and had a powerful influence on William Wilberforce and the abolition of the slave trade.</p>
	<p><b>Julie Anderson:</b>  <b>Plague (published by Claret Press)</b>  (Fiction, London)</p>	<p>It's a gripping thriller with aspects in common with <i>House of Cards</i>.</p>
	<p><b>Tara Westover:</b>  <b>Educated</b>  (Non fiction, USA)</p>	<p>If I wrote it as fiction no one would believe it. This and 'Mrs America' helped me to understand the origins of the religious right, guns and Trumpian politics in the USA. Westover's journey from an Idaho mountain- girl who, according to the state, did not exist to a Cambridge-educated, sharply intelligent young woman is detailed with candour and grace in this remarkable memoir.</p>
	<p><b>Mary Berry:</b>  <b>Mary Berry Cooks the Perfect</b>  (Non-fiction, Cooking)</p>	<p><i>Mary Berry Cooks the Perfect</i> turned out to be very useful in improving my baking skills during lockdown, although I claim to have actually borrowed it to look at a vegetarian salad recipe. I can definitely recommend Mary's <i>Coffee and Walnut Butterfly Cakes</i> and the <i>Gorgeous Ginger and Chocolate Cake</i>.</p>
	<p><b>Linda Green:</b>  <b>One moment</b>  (Fiction, feel good, story, humour)</p>	<p>Two chance meetings changing the lives of two people forever. A story about how hard life can be when you don't quite fit in, but also how there are always options and one doesn't have to just grin and bear life!</p>

	<p><b>Elizabeth Peters: Amelia Peabody Series</b> (Fiction, Detective)</p>	<p>Searching for an audiobook to borrow from the library during lockdown, I came across Elizabeth Peter's <i>Lord of the Silent</i>, one of the Amelia Peabody series of wryly-comical historical mystery novels, mostly set amongst archaeological digs in Egypt. Having not read any of the series before, I soon realised that the large cast of characters had a lot of backstory and I needed to begin at the beginning. <i>In Crocodile on the Sandbank</i>, we first meet Amelia, an intrepid and independent Victorian. Visiting Egypt, she meets archaeologist, Radcliffe Emerson, who becomes her husband. The series follows Amelia and Emerson from 1884 to 1923 with an ever increasing circle of family and friends, including their son, Ramses. Ramses first appears as a precocious young child in <i>The Curse of the Pharaohs</i>. By the time of <i>He Shall Thunder in the Sky</i>, one of my favourite books, set during 1914/1915, the tone has become darker and Ramses has become very much the action hero of the series. Fans of Baroness Orczy might be reminded of the Scarlet Pimpernel as Ramses, not being able to trust the woman he adores but who has betrayed him, despised by Cairo society for cowardice, while secretly working for British Intelligence on a dangerous mission, has a torturous encounter with his villainous cousin, Percy...</p>
	<p><b>Claire King: Everything Love Is</b> (Fiction, Personal search/reflexions, France)</p>	<p>The book follows the simple life of Baptiste Molino who is more concerned with his past than his future: particularly the mysterious circumstances of his birth and the identity of his birth mother. Moored on his houseboat on the edge of Toulouse, he helps his clients navigate the waters of contentment. His mother's legacy takes time to unfold. The book beautifully takes the reader through the different types of love and how this changes and grows.</p>
	<p><b>Matthew Hall: Coroner Jenny Cooper series</b> (Fiction, Detective)</p>	<p>Lawyer Jenny Cooper is appointed as Severn Vale District Coroner hoping for a quiet life and space to recover from a traumatic divorce. What she inherits is a series of neglected files and a trail of buried evidence. This is the first in a series of books as Jenny embarks on a crusade for justice. A different slant on investigations and it is a gripping read.</p>
	<p><b>Rachel Howzell Hall: Land of Shadows - Detective Elouise Norton</b> (Fiction, Detective)</p>	<p>Set in Los Angeles, Elouise Norton is a homicide detective whose sister went missing (presumed dead) 30 years previously. Her new partner Colin Taggart is fresh from Colorado Springs police department. Could her current case be connected to the disappearance of her sister and will the investigation put Lou into danger from a violent killer? The story twists and turns and is a gripping read. The first in a series.</p>
	<p><b>Dianne Setterfield: Once Upon a River</b> (Fiction, 19<sup>th</sup> Century history, London)</p>	<p>A strange and compelling story about a drowned child that was 'brought back to life'. A Victorian mystery at it's very best, set on the Thames.</p>

	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Isabella Bird: Unbeaten Tracks in Japan</b> (Non-Fiction, Description and travel notes/stories in Japan)</p>	<p>This is something for those who like a bit of vicarious travel – all the thrills, but none of the discomforts of a 19 th -century journey in uncharted territory. As a young woman Bird suffered frequent ill-health and her doctors recommended travel as a way of improving her health. But it wasn't to be the genteel South of France, or a cultural tour of Italy, for Bird. Instead, for about 30 years, she was an intrepid explorer of some of the least visited places on earth. This book is about her visit to Japan in the 1870s, where she sets off on routes through Honshu and Hokkaido till then scarcely attempted by Europeans, accompanied only by a young Japanese fixer. In letters home she recounts all the trials and privations of her journey, but also her fascination with the culture and the natural beauty of the country.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Clare Chambers: Small Pleasures</b> (Fiction, 1950 romantic story, London)</p>	<p>Another strange and rather lovely story about a discovery by a suburban journalist concerning 'a virgin birth'. Delightful, in the Barbara Pym style, and set in the 1950s.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Sylvia Vetta and Nancy Mudeny Hunt: Not so Black and White</b> (Fiction)</p>	<p>The best read for me during lockdown 2020 was “Not so Black and White“. An excellent book for a book club neither too short or too long with plenty to discuss. It should be on the top of your list to read and to offer as gifts at Christmas...If you have already bought your Christmas presents then what about Easter gifts.</p>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Alexander McCall Smith: The Second Worst Restaurant in France</b> (Fiction, Humour, France)</p>	<p>This second adventure of Paul Stuart, a renowned Scottish cookery writer, is a delightful sequel to the best- selling comic novel “My Italian Bulldozer“. I love the humour of Alexander McCall Smith, it is simply joyful, with engaging characters passionate about food and comfy armchair travel... this is a calorie free pick me up for a long winter night ...</p>

<b>Contributors</b>		
Halcyon	Jillian	Dilys
Hannah	Isobel	Marilyn
John	Alison	Pamela
Elizabeth	Sylvia	Rosemary
Mary	Dominique	
Jan	Helen	