**RAB2 Issue 3, April 2020 ‘Recommend a book e-mail project’ edited Tony + Barbara Holden** @ thbhholden@gmail.com see our website - www.tonyandbarbaraholden.com

**Greeting - RAB2 issue 3** - We have a variety of recommendations and interesting reviews. Thinking of all the enjoyment we get from reading I recalled Jeanette Winterson and her mother-figure in ‘Why be happy when you could be normal? [2011].’ If you don’t know the novel, I’d say ‘she’s a bit of a monster.’ The paragraph reads; “I asked my mother why we couldn’t have books and she said: ‘The trouble with a book is that you never know what’s in it until it’s too late [page 33].” We’ll be in contact nearer the time for the August issue. We hope, thanks to daughter Siân, to add this issue to our website soon – we also hope you might visit it, subscribe for free, and see all that we are putting on – www.tonyandbarbaraholden.com

**This project ►** is all about ‘recommending’ books. We need ‘author, title, publishing date’ and why you want others to read this book! In say up to 250 words or 50. ‘Discernment is all’ might be our slogan. We are aiming to ‘publish’ in April, August and December.

In A/Z of author first name

**Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo [Winners of the Nobel Prize, Professors of Economics at MIT] ‘Good Economics for Hard Times – Better Answers to our Biggest Problems’ [2019]** - Why doesn’t migration follow the law of supply and demand? / Why does trade liberalisation often drive unemployment up and wages down? Can anybody really explain why and when growth happens? / This revolutionary book tackles these questions and shows how economics done well can help us solve the thorniest social and political problems of our day. From immigration to inequality, slowing growth to accelerating climate change, we have the resources to address the challenges we face but we are so often blinded by ideology. / It offers new thinking on how to tackle extreme poverty by developing a society based on compassion and respect. / There are fascinating case studies. Why did it take many years and much investment to get handmade carpets from a group of Egyptian villages to access a market in the USA? / Why is it that if there is unemployment in one area and work in a neighbouring area people resist moving to find a new job? / The authors explore “sticky economics” - the impact of human nature on the apparently straightforward issues of supply and demand – and why economic theory is often proved wrong. / These award-winning economists look at a whole range of issues which as you read make you wonder what their solution is going to be. I was amazed to discover at the end that a French Catholic charity, ATD Fourth World, was quoted as an example of best economic practice. Why? Because their work starts with respecting those who are down-trodden and excluded and builds their confidence in their own future. “Hope is the fuel that makes people go.” A Jesus form of economics? [Paul Regan]

**Anthony Horowitz ‘The house of silk’ [2011]** – is a Sherlock Holmes story ‘officially approved by the Conan Doyle estate.’ It is based on Watson looking back at a case that hadn't been 'disclosed' before! Horowitz did it very well – see https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-15553421 [Di Rhodes].

**Dana Arnold ‘Art history a very short introduction’ [2019]** – Although short, this is a detailed and ideas-packed journey through art history. Dana Arnold tracks the Western corpus; the many different cultural forms of art within our world; and the changing commentators with their key-interpretations. When we look at a work of ‘art’ we use our brains and logic and words. But we also use our senses to ‘see’. “[There are] the problems of writing about visual experience – the art we experience through sight but articulate using words [DA page 89].” So, Bridget Riley has: “[Drawing as] an exercise in looking.” It is a very enjoyable read as are others in this 700 title Oxford series – https://www.veryshortintroductions.com/ [Tony Holden].

**David Edwards ‘Christianity – The First Two Thousand Years’ [1997]** - Why did Christianity triumph 300 years after the crucifixion of its founder? What were the conditions which produced Byzantine Orthodoxy or the Reformations which convulsed the 16th century? Why have the churches so prospered in Africa while remaining a tiny minority in Asia? / This account provides us with a survey starting with the birth of Jesus and tracing the development of the church over 5 continents. He shows how Christianity has taken root in cultures and societies in different periods of history. He gives the historical, political and philosophical contexts in which the various changes have taken place. / He is remarkably well read and has a detailed knowledge which he puts across lucidly and freshly with no expectation that the reader will have any theological education. But he does explain the theological debates and the intrigues which gave rise to many of the disputed formulations of faith which still bother us today. / This is not an outsider’s view of Christianity. It is one man’s informed insider take on the spirituality and development of Christian thought over hundreds of years. / He does not gloss over the often unseemly history of the struggle between church and state for influence and power. He describes in excruciating detail the shenanigans behind the formulation of the creeds. But he also provides us with a challenging standpoint in looking back also to ask what will be the shape of Christianity in the next 2,000 years? [Paul Regan].

**Diana Athill ‘Somewhere towards the end’ [2008]** – I turned back to Diana Athill and this award-winning biography [her dates are 1917-2018] for personal reasons. It is extremely useful on ageing and living and dying – and it is written, as all her work, with huge verve and style [Tony Holden].

**Elif Shafak ’10 minutes 38 seconds in this strange world’ [2019]** - It is a complex, highly imaginative, very readable reflection on the theme of ‘this strange world.’ The novel is clearly structured. The context is Istanbul Turkey and it is the story of sex-worker Tequila Leila and her five friends. Her life story is told from the viewpoint of “in the first minute following her death.” Its strong and political theme is made visual in the one photo at the end of the book which is of the ‘Cemetery of the companionless’ in Turkey. So, what happens to ‘the companionless’ and outcast is at one level to do with Istanbul. At another it turns on [plays with almost to the point of ‘farce’] fact and fiction, living and dying, memories, creative imagination, places and people, time and sequences – and [unlikely] friendships. For Elif Shafak biography see – www.elifshafak.com [Barbara and Tony Holden].

**Florian Coulmas – ‘a very short introduction – identity’ Oxford University Press [2019] -** Florian Coulmas is Professor of Japanese Society and Sociolinguistics at the IN-EAST Institute of East Asian Studies at Duisburg-Essen University. His name, work, qualifications all ‘point-up’ issues to do with identity. He digs deep into culture, language, psychology and philosophy: all subjects close to home, dear to my heart, important to me! ‘Who am I and who are we?’ are major questions. They are important to each of us as we seek to live an ‘examined life’ [Plato-Socrates]. They are also important as [with our globalization, mega-cities and fears about identity and diversity] we seek and need to live without conflict. It is usually a mistake to define or describe yourself as only having one identifier. This is a clear, demanding and highly enjoyable book [Tony Holden].

**Ian Rankin ‘In a house of lies’ [2018]** - If you haven’t read Ian Rankin or got to know John Rebus – don’t miss this. If you like Edinburgh, humour, complex and ambiguous leads, first rate plots – here we go. This is policing and villainy with the outstanding DI Siobhan Clarke, the retired John Rebus and gangster Cafferty as the old enemy: and many more. Throughout reading these almost 430 pages there is another presence: namely actor Ken Stott as Rebus and Claire Price as Siobhan in one of the TV versions [Tony Holden].

**James Runcie ‘The Road to Grantchester' [2019]** - For anyone who has previously read the Grantchester series of novels or seen TV adaptations, in my opinion this [prequel] is a deeper, much more thoughtful read. / One blurb reads: “It is 1938, and eighteen-year-old Sidney Chambers is dancing the quickstep with Amanda Kendall at her brother Robert's birthday party at the Caledonian Club. No one can believe, on this golden evening, that there could ever be another war. / It explores the reasons that lead Sidney to become a C of E priest and sets in train a number of themes that are picked up in the later detective series.” / It's not a difficult read, but engrossing. [Rachel Hobson].

**John le Carré ‘Agent running in the field’ [2019]** - I’ve read and watched many ‘le Carré novels over the years. I haven’t read his more recent books. But this was a requested gift. Here we have the John le Carré voice [s], cleverness and detail. It is London and Europe and Russia. It is the current UK politics and the notion that Brexit and President Trump and President Putin are very bad news indeed. The enjoyable comment and diatribes are a mix of languages with their diplomats, spies, gangsters, idealists! The story reminds me somewhat of the phrase ‘games people play.’ But in this game of ‘mendacity’ there is always more than a hint that someone is going to get clobbered. It’s a lot more subtle than the current TV-film genre with its hyper-active ‘kill them with your own bare-hands’ approach. His narrative twists and turns revealing any and every ‘wickedness in high places’ that might come to light post-Brexit. He offers drama, suspense, humour, complexity, depth – and, strangely, a lurking sense of enduring values [Tony Holden].

**Joyce Gould ‘No Ordinary Woman: A Memoir of Jo Richardson MP’ [2018] –** recommended [Anita Pollack].

**Julia Langdon ‘Mo Mowlam: The Biography’ [2000**] - recommended [Anita Pollack].

**Martin Westlake ‘Slipping Loose: the UK's Long Drift Away From the European Union’ [2020**] - recommended [Anita Pollack].

**Michelle Obama ‘Becoming Michelle Obama’ [2018]** - Countries like people are many things. Michelle Obama was First Lady of the USA 2009-2017. Her autobiography is interesting, nuanced and very readable. It’s excellent on the formation of a person within a family [Chicago, Princeton, Harvard]. It’s strong on identity [black, woman, lawyer]. I especially liked how she handled her life-question ‘am I good enough yes I am’ over against ‘what she calls ‘swerving’ – not always being totally agenda-set. Her description of Barak Obama and their life together is of course insightful. His formation was in part influenced by his time as a community organizer in Chicago. [On a personal note I did brief training in 1990 and then, as part of my Methodist Church national job, was a Trustee for five years, of what is now UK Citizens Organising]. Anyhow, I greatly enjoyed this at two levels - as a story of exceptional people – exceptional and African-American and a woman. Secondly as a detailed and grounded run-through of how we humans can aim high and be caring, inclusive people [Tony Holden].

**Philipp Ther ‘The Outsiders – refugees in Europe since 1492’ [2019] –** He is direct, incisive, knowledgeable, evocative. His own experiences across Europe are huge. It is a long read with detailed academic notes for those who wish to check-out his story. His analysis is huge and his use of 15 case studies calls to mind TV images and history that all of us hold in common. My own life experience especially in the London Borough of Newham is writ large. His account makes watching current coverage of the flight from Syria all the more historically meaningful – and desperate. Publisher Princeton has: “European history has been permeated with refugees. The Outsiders chronicles every major refugee movement since 1492, when the Catholic rulers of Spain set in motion the first mass flight and expulsion in modern European history. // Ther examines the major causes of mass flight, from religious intolerance and ethnic cleansing to political persecution and war” [Barbara Holden].

**Reni Eddo-Lodge ‘Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People About Race’ [2017]** - The title suggested that this book might make uncomfortable reading for this ‘white person’. It did and there were moments that I wanted to protest that she was not being entirely fair. This, however, is not a book about ‘fairness’. Rather it is about the racism and injustice experienced by black citizens of the UK. Amongst other things Eddo-Lodge explores white privilege, feminism and identity politics. She critically compares these, to their detriment, with the sharp experiences of black people in our clearly damaged nation. The author’s anger is a necessary part of the book. Necessary because it’s to be hoped that those she won’t talk to anymore will read it and notice that, far from having gone away, racism is a present reality. Her anger is not, though, without hope. She writes ‘Change is incremental, and racism will exist long after I die. But if you’re committed to anti-racism, you’re in it for the long haul. It will be difficult. Getting to the end point will require you to be uncomfortable’ [Ron Smith].

**Robert Harris ‘The Second Sleep’ [2020]** - There are a number of dystopian novels being circulated at the moment. The Handmaid by Margaret Attwood is one and it was dramatized last year on television. Testament is a follow up which I am waiting to read, as The Handmaid ended very obliquely. However, this novel has a similar setting. It is set in mediaeval times which at first seem perfectly normal. But the reader gradually realises that their archaeological finds include some rather odd items. For instance, a black rectangular object with the design of an Apple with a bite out of it pictured on the back! Why in mediaeval times are they digging up mobile phones? It becomes obvious that the earth has been subject to an apocalypse and started again in 660, its now 1468 and everything is back to the basics of that previous period of time. / The main character is a young priest who has been sent by his bishop to a remote village to bury their resident priest. He becomes very involved with the local people and discovers that the dead priest had been investigating archaeologically an area nearby, digging up finds of various sorts from before the apocalypse. This is of course totally heretical and deserving of trial and probably the death penalty. / Did this elderly priest die of natural causes or was it a genuine accident? There is some mystery here. The young priest cannot help himself, he starts to investigate both the death and then later the archaeological site. When I heard the book dramatized on the radio the plot was well shown but much of the detail was missing. I really enjoyed reading all the extra detail when I got an unabridged copy of the book. Robert Harris is a well-known writer of many books and this is his most recent. The descriptions of the poverty and attitudes of the villagers are very realistic. / I found the ending rather bizarre (and a little unsatisfactory) but the tension of the whole story was well held. Will there be more to come as with Margaret Attwood's novels? [Andrea Moles].

**Rosina Harrison ‘The Lady’s Maid - my life in service’ [1970’s republished 2011]** - She was lady’s maid to Lady Astor for 35years. A fascinating social history and lots of big names! [Barbara Martin].