

LET'S DO IT. LET'S READ BOOKS TOGETHER!

Oprah Winfrey does it in the USA. James Naughtie does it on Radio 4 with half a million people listening. Thousands of people do it regularly in the UK. It has been suggested we start doing it here in the Wychwoods.

What are they doing ? Getting together to read and discuss books. They are called Reading Groups and they are not just a passing craze. One group, the Bristol Friendly Reading Society, dates back to 1799. But they have certainly become popular in the last few years, with 50,000 Reading Groups now in the UK and rising.

How do Reading Groups work ? It's very simple: Members choose the books they want to read; they buy or borrow them from the library; and then they meet, usually once a month, to discuss them. They meet in members' homes, in pubs, libraries, bookshops, village halls Most Groups choose paperbacks because they're cheaper. (Some bookshops offer discounts whilst some libraries will lend a number of copies).

Reading Groups have started in all sorts of ways. Newspapers and magazines have launched them, bookshops and libraries have promoted them, employers have encouraged them in the workplace. We hope this article will start one here.

Rules ? The only rules are those made by the members. Numbers ? The same – some Reading Groups have five members, others 15. Some Groups just read and talk. Others enjoy refreshments as well – one all-male Group revolves (literally) around a bottle of whisky. Others develop a social life as well.

And what kind of books ? Again, that's up to the members. You can choose thrillers, biographies, travel, memoirs, poetry, plays ... whatever takes your fancy. Some Groups read one book a month, others more.

Among the authors most read by UK Reading Groups are Ian McEwan, (Enduring Love), Ann Tyler (Ladder of Years), Jane Smiley (A Thousand Acres), Louis de Bemieres (Captain Corelli's Mandolin), Pat Barker (Regeneration), Frank McCourt (Angela's Ashes), Beryl Bainbridge (Every Man for Himself), Arundhati Roy (The God of Small Things), Sebastian Faulks (Birdsong), and Margaret Atwood (Alias Grace).

If you would like to start a Wychwoods Reading Group, please contact Gail Huntingford, South Lea, Mawles Lane, Shipton-u-Wychwood. 01993 830424; or Peter Burns, 6, Mount Pleasant, Swinbrook Rd, Shipton-u-Wychwood. 01993 830554.

If you want to know more about Reading Groups: Jenny Hartley has written their history and the findings of a survey of over 350 UK Groups. Published this year by Oxford University Press @ £5.99.