


## Book Club

# Travels with Charley

At a party in 2001 a friend and I discussed the idea of starting a Reading Group. We put an article in *The Wychwood* asking if anyone would like to join a new group. We decided to limit it to ten members enabling everyone to participate and meetings to be accommodated in the average sitting room! We get together from September to April with no meeting in December when everyone is very busy. In March and April we each suggest books for the following year and then take it in turns to host the meetings and present the book for that month.



 John Steinbeck *Travels With Charley*

We have read a wide variety of books from classics to newly published, but we do have a rule that they must be in paperback to keep the cost down. The member presenting the book gives a short introduction and then we discuss what we thought of the book - sometimes this is quite long and heated, other times it's very short! We have a cup of tea, a biscuit and a chat to finish off. I have read a lot of books that I would otherwise

probably not have read; most I have thoroughly enjoyed but there has been the odd one that I wish I had never picked up!

**Gail Huntingford**

## Our Latest Read

This September we read *Travels with Charley* by John Steinbeck, my choice so I introduced it. First published in 1962, only six years before Steinbeck's death, it is an account of his travels with an amusing and faithful companion Charley, a black standard poodle purchased in Paris. As a group we found few of us had read Steinbeck's first successful novel, *Tortilla Flat* published when he was 33 years old, this was followed by titles we were familiar with such as *Cannery Row*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Of Mice and Men* and *East of Eden*.

There is so much in *Travels with Charley*; politics, history, religion, philosophy - all his life's interests in one epic - and what a journey! He set off for a year in a specially converted vehicle

mobile home cum all-terrain vehicle hoping to journey across every US state, leaving his wife (the third Mrs S) to rendezvous only a couple of times. With a black President in the White House it now seems extraordinary to read his account of the cheerleaders in New Orleans trying to prevent school integration, who turned up daily to shout abuse. What a contrast with the rest of the book full of lyrical descriptions of beautiful places. Steinbeck was sad to see so much land being built over, and thought surely a time must come to limit population and save the marvellous wilderness.

Do read this book - and have a map of the USA to hand.

**Janet Shackle**