

BOOKS & BRIDGE

A harrowing read

JAN LEE embarks on a journey through time to discover issues people faced in China in the 60s

Little Winter's story begins in Beijing 1962, four years before Chairman Mao launched the Cultural Revolution, in this novel by *Oxfordshire Limited Edition* writer Sylvia Vetta (pictured at her recent book launch). It ends in California. Taking the form of letters to her daughter Little Winter hopes that breaking the silence of the past will enable her to see her mother in a new light.



People's Liberation Army, her father an engineer and her love for her childhood friend Weiwei and his sister Jia.

In 1959, Chairman Mao's Great Leap Forward resulted in starvation: peasants forced from the land into state-owned co-operatives making steel; trees burnt and sparrows shot for eating grain. Capitalist Roaders, those

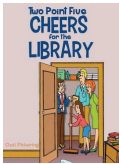
expressing dissent, were punished; the Little Red Book, celebrating the People's Republic of China, compulsory reading.

Meanwhile Little Winter and her friends secretly questioned the God-like Mao. Weiwei was imprisoned and tortured; Little Winter, as an artist, was accused. Years of fear, imprisonment and torture followed for anyone questioning Madam Mao and the Gang of Four. With Zhou Enlai came hope, he would 'steady the ship of state' but brainwashing, the betrayal of friends and family continued. Little Winter mourned the death of her mother; there was joy too: she and Weiwei married but their happiness was short-lived. Vetta's accomplished, harrowing and powerful book is shot through with humanity. The inclusion of real people and events gives veracity to Little Winter's story.

Its publication is timely, with the BBC's *The Chinese New Year*, Michael Wood's *The Story of China* and the drama *One Child* while suppression continues to cast a long shadow on to China's struggle towards democracy. **Brushstrokes in Time** by Sylvia Vetta, Claret Press, £7.99

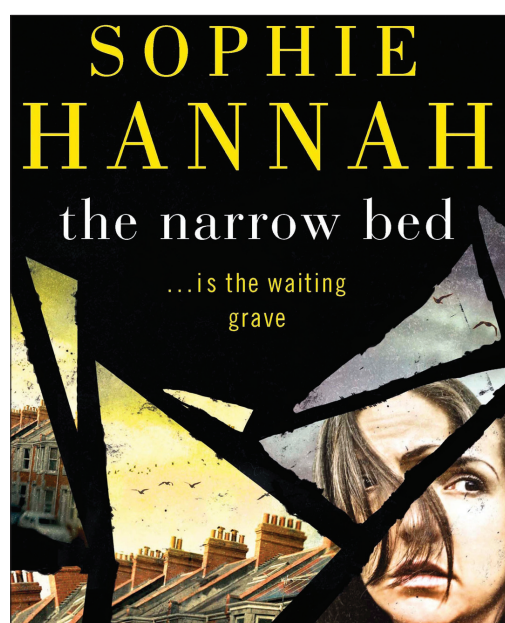
LOCAL AUTHOR

Oxford author Outi Pickering, who is originally from Finland, has clearly called on the knowledge of her day job as an assistant librarian at an National Health Service hospital for her comic novel of office politics... which is set in the library of an NHS hospital.



With characters like Mimosa MacAroon, Vladimir Logoff and Claire Twinstet, Pickering pairs tongue-in-cheek observation with insight into multi-tiered management.

Two Point Five Cheers For The Library, by Outi Pickering, Olympia Publishers, £8.99



An engaging whodunnit

This is the latest outing for off-beat but likeable DC Simon Waterhouse and his wife Sergeant Charlie Zailer, created by former junior research fellow of Wolfson College, Oxford, Sophie Hannah.

They and the rest of the Culver Valley police team must track down a murderer, code-named Billy Dead

Mates because of his habit of killing pairs of friends but the whodunnit element of the plot is a tiny fraction of what makes this a superb read. The characters are beautifully drawn and it's full of subtle humour.

The Narrow Bed, Sophie Hannah, Hodder & Stoughton, £14.99

BOOKINGS

EVENTS FOR BOOKWORMS

TODAY

ALYSA LEVENE: CAKE
Blackwell's Bookshop, Oxford
Call 01865 333623 or visit blackwell.co.uk
£5, 7pm to 8pm

Alysa Levene, author of *Cake: A Slice of History* will be discussing the history behind one of our much loved delicious treats.

Alysa is a social historian at Oxford Brookes University (and enthusiastic amateur baker).

She has researched and published articles and books on a variety of topics which connect with this book: the history of childhood, health, the family and food.

Tickets include a special cupcake treat.

WEDNESDAY

CAROLINE ALEXANDER ON THE ILIAD

Blackwell's Bookshop, Oxford
Call 01865 333623 or visit blackwell.co.uk

Free, 12.30pm to 1.30pm TO COINCIDE with the publication of a stunning new translation of Homer's legendary tale of honour, love, loss and revenge, bestselling author Caroline Alexander will give a free talk on how the West's great epic that decies war, was misinterpreted.

Details of book events can be posted to jaine.blackman@nqo.com

Simultaneous success for Sills and Steer

One of my roles as a member of the English Bridge Union Selection Committee is to commission and edit commentaries for the hands that make up the Bridge England Simultaneous Pairs. This year we have been raising funds for our junior teams, notably the new England U15 squad.

There are two separate events on a Tuesday and a Wednesday early in February with heats held all over the country, including one at Oxford Bridge Club. This year, former Oxford player, Dan McIntosh, playing in Jersey, finished top of the national rankings on the Wednesday. Meanwhile, Alan Steer and Richard Sills scored a massive 69% in the OBC heat on Tuesday. This would normally be enough to win nationally but they were edged out of first place by a pair from West Yorkshire.

Richard has kindly sent me a very modest account of one of the deals (right) which contributed to their success. Richard (South) and Alan (North) bid as follows:

BRIDGE by Nick Smith

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♠
Pass	1NT	Pass	3♦
Pass	3♥	Pass	4♥
Pass	6♦	All Pass	

In Richard's words: "my marginal jump to 3♦ deprived East of the chance to show his club suit below the 3NT level; so he made a phoney waiting bid of 3♥, just to force me to bid again. I bid 4♥ - so now Alan knew the exact 5-3-4-1 shape of my hand. He felt that any further inquiry might only give information to the defence, so jumped to 6♦."

This outcome was not something predicted by the expert commentator, Michael Byrne, who speculated that +460 (for 3NT + 2) would be a top for North-South. Bidding a very thin slam at Pairs tends to give you a top or a bottom.

But the Oxford pair's luck was in as West decided to lead ♠10 against 6♦. When both diamonds and spades broke kindly, it was an easy matter to knock out ♠A, draw trumps and claim five spade tricks, three trumps, ♣AK, ♥A and a club ruff for twelve tricks. Unsurprisingly, this was a complete top across the country.

E/W Vul	♠964
Dealer: W	♥102
	♦QJ42
	♣AK93
♠108	♥Q72
♥KQ843	♦975
♦73	♣A96
♣6542	♠QJ108
	♠AKJ53
	♥AJ6
	♦K1085
	♣7

Of course, one might point out that ♥K lead would have beaten the slam and that does look a better option for West than leading a doubleton in the suit declarer has opened. But if you bid aggressively, sometimes you need a bit of luck with the lead. And they opted for the right slam - 6♠ and 6NT would have had no play.

Alan and Richard were playing at Oxford's Tuesday morning "relaxed" session which is open to players of any level of ability and experience, provided that at least one person in each pair is below the rank of Master in the MP scale.

So the club does not allow strong pairs to attend just to scoop up all the MPs - but they do allow more experienced players to come along to help less experienced players. In fact, our County Chairman, Rob Procter, has started to attend an occasional Tuesday morning session, specifically for that purpose. If you are looking for some Pairs bridge in a friendly and relaxed environment, this is obviously the place to go!

FOR WALKS, TALKS, SALES, FAIRS AND CLUBS SEE LISTINGS IN THE MAIN SECTION