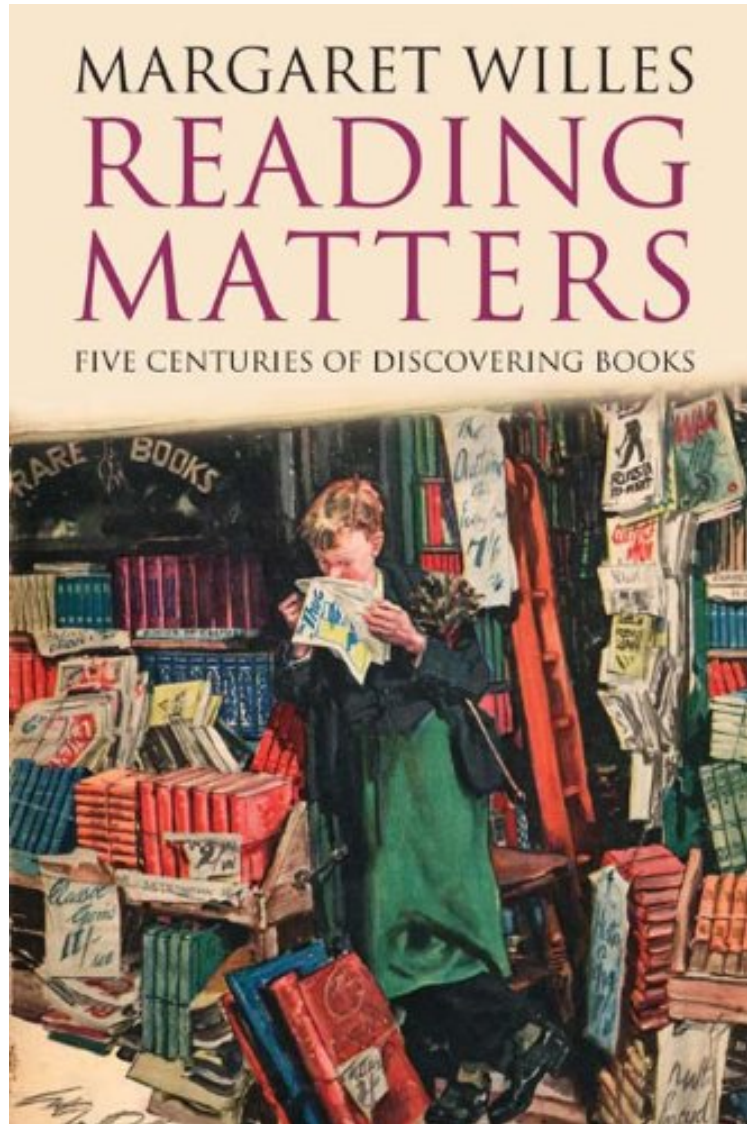


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Reading Matters: Five Centuries of Discovering Books

Margaret Willes

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Margaret Willes : Reading Matters: Five Centuries of Discovering Books before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Reading Matters: Five Centuries of Discovering Books:

3 of 15 people found the following review helpful. IronyBy David A. NovakThis book explores the links of imagination that animate; but these animations come with the price of full attention. Read well!10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. light and charmingBy Radcliffe CameraWilles has produced a rather charming treatment of book culture through the experiences of a variety of readers/collectors from the early modern period on. Some

obvious names are there (Pepys and Soane) and some not so obvious (Charles Winn and Denis and Edna Healey). The buying, collecting, and reading habits of each is examined and used as a frame for digressions that illustrate interesting and important developments in book culture during the period (e.g. the rise of newspapers, book auctions, notable booksellers, Penguin books). This works well in chapters on the 'larger than life' figures like Pepys and Soane, but some of the digressions threaten to overwhelm lesser known figures. More needed to be said about what makes Charles Winn really interesting; and I am still wondering what kind of books make up the collection of 17,000 or so that Denis Healey and his wife have amassed. The breadth of treatment is impressive (as are the plates and illustrations), but at times this leads to superficiality (thankfully the interested reader can pursue subjects further through the notes and bibliography).

It is easy to forget in our own day of cheap paperbacks and mega-bookstores that, until very recently, books were luxury items. Those who could not afford to buy had to borrow, share, obtain secondhand, inherit, or listen to others reading. This book examines how people acquired and read books from the sixteenth century to the present, focusing on the personal relationships between readers and the volumes they owned. Margaret Willes considers a selection of private and public libraries across the period—most of which have survived—showing the diversity of book owners and borrowers, from country-house aristocrats to modest farmers, from Regency ladies of leisure to working men and women. Exploring the collections of avid readers such as Samuel Pepys, Thomas Jefferson, Sir John Soane, Thomas Bewick, and Denis and Edna Healey, Margaret Willes also investigates the means by which books were sold, lending fascinating insights into the ways booksellers and publishers marketed their wares. For those who are interested in books and reading, and especially those who treasure books, this book and its bounty of illustrations will inform, entertain, and inspire.

From Publishers Weekly Book collectors are an eccentric but persistent lot, as Willes shows in this history of the buying and selling of books. With an emphasis on Great Britain (one chapter is devoted to Thomas Jefferson), Willes, former publisher of the National Trust, tackles her subject with considerable learning and with a gusto atypical of a scholarly volume. Of especial interest are insights on Samuel Pepys's diary entries on books acquired; the first memoir of an English bookseller in 1705, *The Life and Errors of John Dunton*; the significance of the spread of coffee houses in Britain during the 18th century (not unlike the Starbucks effect on the Internet generation); the 16th-century origins of the Frankfurt Book Fair and the paperback and bookstore-chain revolutions of the 20th century. The role of women as collectors and disseminators, from Bess of Hardwick in the 16th century to Oprah Winfrey, is notable. There's a wealth of information here, though some chapters cohere more successfully than others, and a somewhat breathless final chapter surprisingly omits and e-books as they relate to collecting. 90 illus. (Nov.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. "[Willes] tackles her subject with considerable learning and with a gusto atypical of a scholarly volume. . . . There's a wealth of information here."—Publishers Weekly