

## » Books

# Dusty image of the antiquarian bookseller is totally shaken up

In the 70s, two young women broke into the very masculine world of running a bookshop. But far from being some intellectual ivory tower, it was a life of gossip, travel and crime, reveals Ruth Sands

» In the early 1980s, the Ham&High wrote an article about two young women living in Belsize Park running a wonderful antiquarian bookshop. The shop was full of early illustrated books for children, frilly Victorian greeting cards, instructions on the proper behaviour of ladies and those who aspired to that condition and quirky travel books. It was dedicated to anything odd and amusing – as long as it was on paper.

Monika Sears and myself started the business from our Belsize Park homes in about 1970 and graduated to our own shop in Marylebone, on the corner of Marylebone Street and New Cavendish Street.

No longer young and now retired, we have culled the day books which we kept throughout our working lives to create a book about books. The day book was intended to record all the orders, sales, projects and reminders but quickly extended to gossip,

successes and failures – both private and professional. The book was kept away from the prying eyes of our growing sons. It took them a while to cotton on to the fact that the world of antiquarian books was not only some intellectual Elysium where their saintly mothers worked. The day book was home to anecdotes about batty customers, stolen books, international book-fairs and even broken hearts.

### Suspicion

We are probably the last remnants of generations of women brought up in old-fashioned homes when the tradition was to be handed from father to husband, carefully sheltered from the blast of freedom that was the 60s. Nevertheless, we lost an illusion or two among the cartons of books. Two women venturing into a business partnership aroused anxiety at home and suspicion outside it – even though we only did it because of our love for books.

Still, we made it work. For a while, the business thrived and the friendship endured. We closed the shop with heavy hearts, when the famous business rate fell on us and the landlord demurely asked for a 200 per cent increase in rent – all in the same year. It made it impossible to sell an “old” book from a shop at a price that we could demand without blushing.

The book is a testimony of our years together in the world of antiquarian books, where eccentricity was encouraged and profit a side issue. It is also the story of the snub we endured as women in a then very masculine business and the advantages we did not hesitate to grab.

■ **Don't Forget To Lock It Away: Tales Of Fiction, Friction And Friendship by Monika Sears with Ruth Sands, £6 is available online and can also be purchased from Ruth Sands at [ruthsands@talktalk.net](http://ruthsands@talktalk.net).**



■ Ruth Sands and Monika Sears whose shared love of books saw them going into partnership

## Fox cub inspires tale

A brother and sister team have paired up to create a children's book inspired by a fox they saw on Hampstead Heath, writes *Anastasia Bow-Bertrand*.

Olis the fox is the creation of Swiss Cottage writers, Marianne and Daniel Raye, and features in the book *Olis And The Big Outside*.

The siblings, aged 11 and 21, wrote the book last year after spotting a lone fox cub – prompting them to create an imaginary world and storyline for the creature.

### Curious

The opening illustration invites us into the cosy burrow of a friendly fox family and we meet Olis, the musketeer of this tale.

Olis, whose home is Swiss Cottage – near to that of his creators – is curious and keen to discover the outside world.

“As a child, everyone is curious about the world and wants to discover who and where they are,” says Marianne, who studied at the Prince's Drawing School in London and is behind the ink and watercolour images.

“We took childhood memories and connected them,” says Daniel. The pair have dedicated the tale to their late elder brother, Sergei.

The book is for two to five-year-olds and the pair plan to continue the theme with more stories of Olis' adventures. Meanwhile, young fans can read more about Olis' life at [www.olisfox.com](http://www.olisfox.com).

■ **The book is available online, £8.99. A launch event will be held at Waterstone's at the O2 shopping centre in Finchley Road on December 11 at 12pm.**

## Mystery and magic as chess pieces come alive

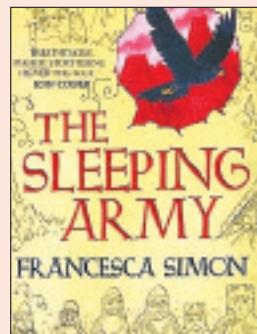
**THE SLEEPING ARMY**  
by *Francesca Simon*  
Profile Books, £9.99

Yes, this is by the Francesca Simon, whose *Horrid Henry* series has sold a staggering 15million copies worldwide and, no, this isn't the latest adventure of that particular little rascal, writes *Danny Van Emden*.

Instead, Simon has turned her attention to a slightly older audience, boys and girls of eight and over – and the result is a captivating read for all those with adventure in their hearts. In fact, from Adam Stower's enchanting cover artwork onwards, this feels like a classic.

The *Sleeping Army* is the story of Freya, very much a contemporary young Brit. Her parents' divorce has left her feeling confused and compromised and, when her father muddles sleepover nights yet again, she has to spend the evening with him at work.

But, this being adventure fiction for children, Freya's dad doesn't work in an office or shop, he's employed at the British Museum – and that's where Freya's adventures unfold. One other salient point that



would have grabbed my attention with lightning speed had I been lucky enough to come across this as a child is that, although Freya lives in modern-day Britain, it is one with a significant twist: the Norse gods are still worshipped and Christianity is faintly recalled as an exotic religion of yore.

### Adventure

Slinking her way around the museum to kill time, Freya is intrigued by the Lewis chessmen pieces, which is the cue for her to stumble into the adventure of a lifetime as the pieces awaken from their long slumber.

OK, so falling into an unknown world to solve a quest might ring a few bells, but it is the heroine herself who really elevates *The Sleeping Army* into something very special.

Freya is very much her own, ordinary self – and one which many children will readily identify with. She's getting to grips with a fractured family life and regards herself as a pretty regular kid with all the ups and downs that that entails. In fact, when she does awaken three chessmen and journey with them to Asgard, she herself remains mortal – although it is her job to rescue the goddess of Youth as the Norse gods are aging rapidly and losing power.

If our intrepid schoolgirl cannot do this, she will be frozen into a chesspiece herself.

Children will lose themselves in the mystery and magic – perfect as the evenings lengthen and just the ticket to turn young readers onto further great mythological stories.

■ **Bring this review with you to receive 20 per cent off *The Sleeping Army* at England's Lane Books or West End Lane Books.**

## Hastings on the horrors of war



Sir Max Hastings will be at Waterstone's in Hampstead next week.

The military historian, journalist and author will be talking about his new book *All Hell Let Loose: The World At War 1939-1945*.

The book is a thorough investigation into the Second World War and encompasses his previous works on the topic. It has been described as the history book of the year by critics.

Hastings was editor of *The Telegraph* and the *London Evening Standard*.

■ **On Wednesday (November 23) at 7pm.**