

The Lost World Read 2009 (Darwin 200)

Introduction

2009 marked the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin and the 150th anniversary of the publication of *On the Origin of Species*. This dual anniversary was celebrated throughout the world, with much of the celebrations focussed on Britain. One project which united large sections of the UK was The Lost World Read. The Lost World Read was a mass-reading of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* to celebrate both the Edinburgh-born author's 150th birthday and the bicentenary of Charles Darwin. It took place from January 2009 – March 2009 across the South West of England, in Hampshire, Shropshire, and the City of Westminster. Edinburgh and Glasgow were the two major locations in Scotland who participated in the project with support from the Scottish Executive.

The core of the project was the book reading in each city/ region. In total 73,980 books were distributed in both cities as part of the overall project. These were:

- The Lost World
- The Lost World (specially adapted children's version)
- The Lost World reading guide
- The Darwin graphic biography

In addition, there were audio versions of both the *Lost World* children's version and the complete text available for download from the project website.

Summary Results

The facts:

- What was it? A mass-reading of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* to celebrate the author's 150th birthday and the bicentenary of Charles Darwin.
- When did it take place? From the end of January 2009.
- Where did it happen? Across the South West of England, in Hampshire, Shropshire, the City of Westminster, Edinburgh and Glasgow.
- Who could take part? Anyone who was given or borrowed a copy of the book from their place of work, local library, school, visitor attraction or other participating venue.

The figures:

- Overall, 45,000 copies of the full-text version of The Lost World distributed.
- Overall, 64,000 copies of the simplified version of the novel distributed.
- Overall, 41,000 copies of a graphic biography of Charles Darwin distributed.
- Overall, 30,000 copies of a readers' guide to the novel distributed.
- Over 16,000 visits to www.lostworldread.com during the project.
- Over 700 people downloaded the unabridged audio version of *The Lost World* via www.lostworldread.com.
- References to The Lost World Read in the local, regional and national media.

- Over 300 people registered to be added to the central mailing list.
- Over 130 activities UK-wide listed on the What's On pages of www.lostworldread.com.
- Over 60 activities for children took place during February half-term.
- Over 96 per cent of those who expressed an opinion said the content of readers' guide and website was interesting.
- Nearly 92 per cent of those who expressed an opinion said their reading experience had been enhanced by joining the project.
- Over 97 per cent of those who expressed an opinion said they would be interested in joining future reading projects.
- Over 67 per cent of those who expressed an opinion said they had learnt something new about literature by joining the project.
- Over 50 per cent of those who expressed an opinion said they had learnt something new about history and/or science by joining the project.
- Where gender is known, 60 per cent of participants were female and 40 per cent were male.
- All age groups from the under 10s to the over 70s represented in the participants.

Overall Objectives

1. To promote widespread learning about science and Darwin in the year of the bicentenary of his birth.
2. To promote reading and writing.
3. To organise a series of events for all ages covering science and evolution.

The Partners

In England the partners included: Arts Council England (South West), Arts & Business (South West), Darwin's Shrewsbury, GWE Business West, Rolls-Royce, SWIRLS, University of Bristol, University of the West of England, and the library services of Bath & North East Somerset, Bournemouth, Bristol, City of Westminster, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Hampshire, North Somerset, Plymouth, Poole, Portsmouth, Shropshire, Somerset, South Gloucestershire, Swindon, Torbay, Wiltshire.

In Scotland the partners included: Scottish Arts Council, Aye Write! Bank of Scotland Book Festival (Glasgow), Edinburgh UNESCO City of Literature Trust, University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, Scottish Executive, Glasgow Schools, and the library services of Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Some of the Events that took Place

- Bristol: exhibition at Bristol Central Library, Darwin-themed talks at Bristol Festival of Ideas, bulb-planting at Sea Mills, poetry workshop at Westbury-on-Trym, craft activities at Henbury, Lost World theatre experience at Bristol Old Vic.
- Cornwall: exhibition at Falmouth Art Gallery, trails at Newquay Zoo, bedtime reading at Redruth, workshops at Trebah Garden, touring exhibition of Cornish libraries, reptile encounters at St Austell.

- Devon: Conrad Martens' workshop at Exmouth, exhibition at Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery, collage-making in Newton Abbot and Dawlish, reptile encounters at Topsham and Kingsteington, fossil monsters at Sidmouth and Colyton, Horrible Science Show in Plymouth.
- Dorset: reading group discussions at Bridport, Burton Bradstock, Shaftesbury, Stalbridge and Christchurch, story-telling at Dorchester, Blandford and Wimborne, fossil tour at Lyme Regis, Alfred Russel Wallace talk in Poole, fossil painting at Dorchester, Portland, Swanage, Bridport and Lyme Regis,
- Edinburgh: Dino Dig at Our Dynamic Earth, story-telling at Royal Botanic Gardens, workshops at Surgeon's Hall Museums, children's theatre at the National Museum of Scotland, birthday cake at Edinburgh Zoo, readings at the Pleasance Cabaret Bar, animated story-telling at thelostbook.net, workshops at Holyrood Park, science fiction discussion at Augustine United Church.
- Glasgow: Darwin-themed events at Aye Write! Bank of Scotland Book Festival, The Lost World (1925) shown at Glasgow Film Theatre.
- Hampshire: story-telling and crafts at Gosport, children's theatre and talks at Winchester.
- North Somerset: story-telling at Clevedon, reading group discussions at Nailsea.
- Somerset: reading group discussions at Shepton Mallet and Worle, dinosaur toddler-time in Taunton, story-telling in Street, Williton, Nether Stowey and Wells, dinosaur-hunt at Westbury, workshops in Shepton Mallet, talks at Frome.
- South Gloucestershire: story-telling at Bradley Stoke.
- Wiltshire: reading group discussions at Bradford-on-Avon, Marlborough, Salisbury, Warminster and Devizes, quizzes at Highworth and Westbury, story-telling at Salisbury, dinosaur crafts at Trowbridge, Box and Corsham, yeti encounters at Bradford-on-Avon.

Some of the Feedback from Readers

The Lost World has been one of my favourite books for a few years, and I am delighted to know that other people will get to read it - it's too good to just sit on a shelf, gathering dust!

I thought the book was a real period adventure story - exciting, funny and well-written. It was also the forerunner to a whole genre of monster adventure stories.

I really enjoyed the book. It made me feel like a small boy again as it stirred up and fed my imagination that has been neglected for a long time it seems. Not only did I find the story entertaining, I also found the historical context interesting - how people in 1912 lived and spoke and wrote. Such a world away from our own time.

My book group found it an entertaining and well-written romp, despite the cardboard characters and enormous holes in the plot, but felt the racist attitudes of the time would need to be discussed with any children who read it.

It was unanimously voted as a thoroughly enjoyable and exciting read, well written in beautiful English by a true storyteller, who knew how to skillfully weave a tale. Arthur Conan Doyle had the ability to convey to the reader the sense of amazement

and wonder felt by his characters as the story unfolded. It was considered very much a 'Boys Own Story', but even though written in 1912, and possibly classed as politically 'incorrect' by today's standards, our reviewers considered it to be a true timeless classic.

Wouldn't normally have picked up such a book, but found I couldn't put it down. It was a real thriller, very cleverly written yet easy to read. Wonderful escapism at the end of a long, hard day at work.

I very much enjoyed the book and subsequently, our book club's discussion. I am 58 years old female and I don't think there is a "wrong age" to read this book. I know I would have read it with the same excitement in my teenage years. It is certainly not a boys/man's book. I think anyone interested in evolution and science, our planet will find the book a very pleasant read. Thank you for making this available to us in reading clubs.

I found the Darwin biography a little irritating in style. I preferred the author's 'Bristol Story' but that might be because I know a fair bit about Darwin already. (Biology A level and further reading). But I thought the Lost World was a good choice because it reflected the pioneering spirit of the time and was a true marriage of science and fiction.

I think that the story was supercool. I would like it if you can write a story about the lost world again. If you do write a lost world book again can Malone have a girl that loves him? I wonder what Lord John and Edward Malone are doing now. I liked all the characters. My favourite characters are Gladys and Malone.

A real 'Boys' Own' ripping yarn – not a book to be taken too seriously, but to be enjoyed in the spirit in which it was written! There were some delightfully comic moments, – the image of Professor Challenger catherine -wheeling down the hall, locked in mortal combat with Malone, is one which will stay with me! The depiction of the 'treacherous half-breeds' and the faithful Zamba, with his 'honest black face', somehow didn't appear politically incorrect. It just added to the fun, as did the intrepid Lord John Roxton's free usage of the term 'Young fellah m'lad ', when addressing Malone! Professor Challenger himself I found irresistible! A bundle of energy and irascibility, he bounds off the page in full three-dimensional Technicolor! I am neither "a boy who's half a man, nor a man who's half a boy," [the author's intended readership!] – but I loved it!!

This is a book that none of us would have chosen to read but we included it in our Book Group agenda to contribute to the 'mass read'. We found the beginning of the book rather 'stuffy' but all kept going and, once the expedition started, began to enjoy it. "I made myself keep reading and in the end I was captivated". We liked the rich and realistic descriptions of the plants and animals and the larger than life characters. It was like the books we read as a child, full of action and excitement.

This is a young person's book. It is an old fashioned boys own adventure story, and severely dated in its sexist, racist, class conscious language. Not even well written. Too many machinations of plot. The Dinosaur theme has been done to death, and the book does nothing to celebrate either Conan Doyle. Both deserve better memorials

than this. It seems an extraordinary choice for book groups, many of whom are 21st century women. Who wants to read about a lot of self important 19th century men?

The story is great and fun. I like the bit when he climbed up the tree and drew a map of the place where they were. I also like the bit when Gomez chopped the branch and then he got shot by Lord John. I read the children's book because the adult one I think is too much to read, because at school I'm only a level ten. I also like the front of the cover of the book which is Wallace and Gromit.

Exciting adventure, really easy to read. Dated in part, of course, but funnier than I expected and provides food for thought. A really good story.

The Lost World adaptation and Darwin Biography were well done as they included a lot of information while retaining their comic book easy to read style.

I loved reading The Lost World and being part of a national reading project. The book was exciting and intelligent and actually more amusing than I expected. I love Arthur Conan Doyle and though the book is dated it's still a great story. It's always a little shocking to be reminded of racial attitudes from the turn of the century and though I've read comments asking for a warning on the cover I think one has to remember this was written in 1912 and it's interesting for its social history. It has been a great project for exciting my 7 year old son with tales of adventure. He is a good reader already, but many boys struggle and this is a great choice of story to bring them in to the book loving fold. I'm especially pleased this project is part of the Darwin 200 celebrations as my family are big Darwin fans, even my 4 year old girl is a fan of 'lovely Mr Darwin'. More reading projects please.

The Lost World was absolutely brilliant: gripping, exciting and funny. Thank you for providing it, I haven't enjoyed a book so much for a long time.

I really enjoyed this book and am really pleased to have had this book brought to my attention by the Lost World Read as I would not have read it otherwise. I will definitely look out for further events of this kind in the future - a great way to widen my horizons! My enjoyment was enhanced by the knowledge that I was part of a nationwide group of fellow-readers, all going on this adventure together!

I haven't been part of a reading project before but would like to again - being part of a project brought my attention to a book I may not otherwise have read and I enjoyed being part of a nationwide group of readers - and having the background information provided by the guide and the website.

I think 'the big read' is a great idea. I've been really pleased to take part and am looking forward to passing my books onto others.

I like joint reading projects. I really ought to join a book club as it is good to discuss the reading experience. I think since I have been taking part in the Big Reads I have read more books generally and this has prompted recent discussions with friends and colleagues about books we have read.

A good opportunity to read something you may not normally do so, also introduce new readers to the pleasure of reading.

I think this whole thing is a good idea. It got me interested in science and history again, something I have forgotten to keep up with since I left school.

Great idea. What I liked about this one is that it had both an adult and child's version. I got both for me and my daughter to read. It was a great way to encourage her to read more interesting books.

I think [reading projects] are excellent and exciting. My son is 7 and reading well. I love that there are projects to encourage nationwide reading that I can get him excited by as well. It all helps to bring reading out as an important and wonderful resource and pleasure. He's getting the idea that reading can take you to other worlds. My 4 year old daughter loves books and words too, so more projects please.

[Readers' guide] Very clear, informative and well-written. It would be an invaluable tool for teachers of children aged about 9 to 12 years, as it provides the information needed to answer their questions.

[Readers' guide] Plenty of fascinating information about the Sir Conan Doyle and Charles Darwin, so good to see the timeline of events surrounding their lives as well - very well put-together.

[Readers' guide] Made me feel a part of something exciting.

[Readers' guide] I found it made the Lost World book more interesting and made me want to read the full version of the Lost World.

[Website] As a teacher, there was probably less in the way of downloadable or online activities than I was hoping for, but I appreciate the tremendous amount of work that has gone into this project, and the book itself contains interesting activities.

[Website] Good resource, many useful links to all the various areas of interest, a very good effort.

I liked the website. I found it very interesting and informative. I was on it for ages! It would be a good idea for this sort of idea to carry on for other anniversaries.

Budget

Overall, UK wide, The Lost World Read cost £108,475. The detailed income and expenditure are:

Table 1
The Lost World Read 2009: Income

Income	£
Bristol Cultural Development Partnership	44,475
Glasgow Culture and Sport	15,500
Aye Write	8,000
Edinburgh City of Literature	14,750
Scottish Arts Council	5,000
Hampshire County Council	12,500
Science Engagement Grants 2008-09 (Special Events)	12,000
Shrewsbury Council	5,000
Westminster Council	3,000
Others	1,500
Total	108,475

Table 2
The Lost World Read 2009: Expenditure

Expenditure	£
Direction/ evaluation/ administration	15,000
Design/ images	13,289
Books	40,097
Marketing	12,290
Writing	10,000
Distribution	3,874
Audio	4,500
Evaluation material (ACORN etc)	1,400
Events	8,000
Total	108,475

Conclusion

This was a hugely successful project which took place across the UK. Though some found some attitudes in the main book outdated, the vast majority of readers welcomed the chance to participate. Feedback suggests that the aim of promoting learning about Darwin through reading the novel was met. Indeed, requests continue to be made for copies of the books.

Appendix for Bristol

ACORN Analysis of Bristol Participants in Great Reading Adventures since 2004 Where Postcode Known

Category of household	Percentage of Current Base Population	Percentage of Participants in 2009	Percentage of Participants in 2008	Percentage of Participants in 2007	Percentage of Participants in 2006	Percentage of Participants in 2005	Percentage of Participants in 2004
1: Wealthy Achievers – wealthy executives, affluent greys, flourishing families	5.7	14.3	15.1	20.9	23.4	20.5	20.7
2: Urban Prosperity – prosperous professionals, educated urbanites, aspiring singles	25.4	32.2	16.6	24.8	23.0	13.4	13.0
3: Comfortably Off – starting out, secure families, settled suburbia, prudent pensioners	25.4	24.6	32.6	33.5	29.1	30.6	33.9
4: Moderate Means – Asian communities, post industrial families, blue collar roots	19.5	12.8	19.6	12.1	15.0	21.5	20.5
5: Hard Pressed – struggling families, burdened singles, high rise hardship, inner city adversity	23.9	16.1	16.1	8.6	9.5	13.9	11.6
Unclassified							0.3