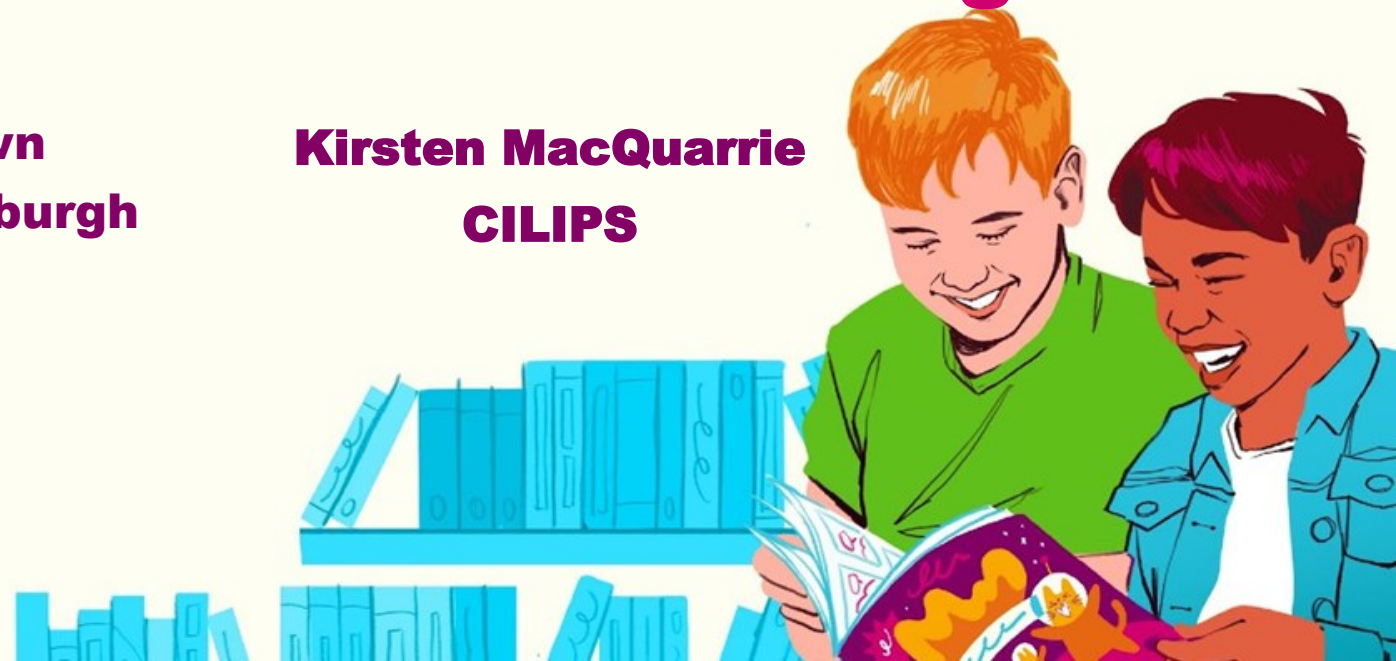




The Future of Books and Reading

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Declines in reading enjoyment and engagement

There is evidence of global declines in (book) reading enjoyment and engagement ([Loh et al., 2025](#)) across the lifespan, amplifying interest in this area.

The Future of Books and Reading paper aimed to set out a positive narrative, providing five themes to frame future thinking and discussion: Enjoy, Engage, Empower, Enrich and Expand.

Today, we plan to reflect on these themes within the context of libraries and library professionals.



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ENJOY

There are many ways to enjoy books and to enjoy reading, and readers seek out different types of reading experiences.

Nurturing reading enjoyment is about promoting reading in personally meaningful ways by understanding and supporting individual (and collective) motives for reading.



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ENJOY

Bookbug (libraries across Scotland)

Free story, song and rhyme sessions for children aged 0-5 and their parents/carers, building social and language skills.

The focus is on fun!

Books and songs in English, Gaelic and Scots (the three official languages of Scotland, plus British Sign Language).

Makaton sessions and tactile books for children with Additional Support Needs.



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ENGAGE

Reading engagement is central for positive reading experiences and outcomes.

While often regarded simply as time spent reading (i.e., behavioural engagement), reading engagement also includes cognitive and affective components.



ENGAGE

Glasgow Women's Library

At the UK's only accredited museum dedicated to women's history, GWL's Adult Literacy and Numeracy team supports women with a diverse range of personal and professional goals: from filling out job applications to creating recipes, writing poems or studying for the Life in the UK test as a new arrival.

'I have learned that being labelled a failure at school was not my failure. I now know I love learning, and what's more, I'm great at it... the library helped me unwrap lifelong chains, and taught me trust, belief and self-worth. You have handed me hope.'



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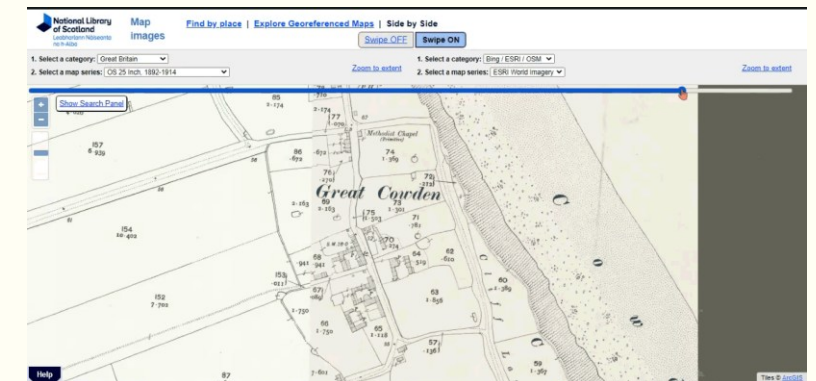
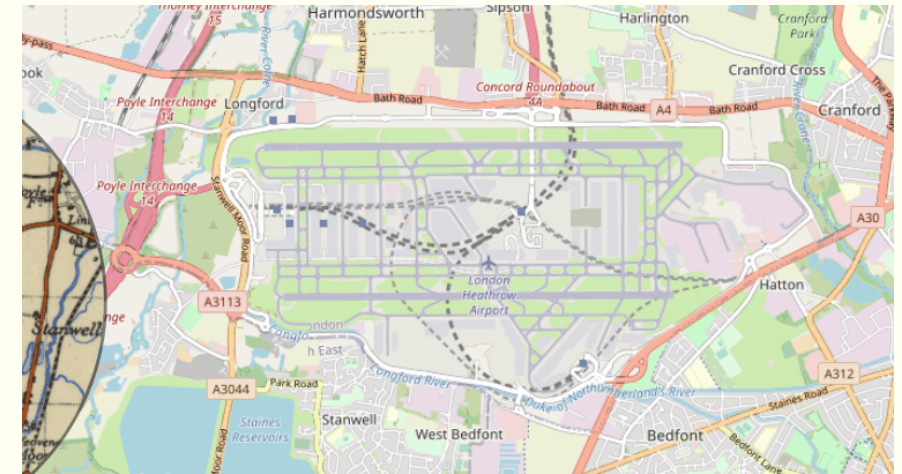
The Transformative Space of the Library (2022) by Dr Holly Porteous, Dr Juliette Wilson and Professor Kathy Hamilton

ENGAGE

National Library of Scotland (Edinburgh and beyond)

Inspired by COP26, which took place in Scotland in November 2021, tools like the **NLS Spyglass Viewer** (top) and **NLS Side-by-Side Viewer** (bottom) use past and present library collections to give patrons a vivid, visual sense of the reality of climate change and combat climate mis/disinformation.

'We learn what interests patrons, what is important to them and what they would like to see. They can help us see things in a different way and help us find better ways to provide climate change information.' **Louise Speller, NLS**



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EMPOWER

Books and reading can be a source of empowerment, when readers see their lives, identities, experiences or interests reflected in what they read.

Access to information is also a source of empowerment – supporting lives and learning.



EMPOWER

Macmillan Cancer Support, libraries across Scotland

Volunteers use the uniquely trusted space of the public library to offer drop-in practical, emotional and financial support and signposting for all ages.

'Although I am computer literate, I couldn't bear the thought of trawling through different websites for the information...' **Service user**

'About half the people who come in to see us have a cancer diagnosis, about 30% are friends and family. The others vary: sometimes support workers looking for resources, or carers seeking information...'

Annmarie Galbraith, Glasgow Libraries



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EMPOWER

Menstrual and menopause literacy, University of Dundee

Complementing the university's statutory duty to provide free period products – The Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Act 2021 – the Period Library features menstrual education books and resources, known as the 'Period Power' booklist, as well as events for students and staff to develop their **menstrual literacy**.



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ENRICH

Books and reading can enrich lives through their potential to support intellectual, academic, social and emotional growth.

Reading engagement can mitigate against economic disadvantage, and is associated with positive economic and life outcomes.

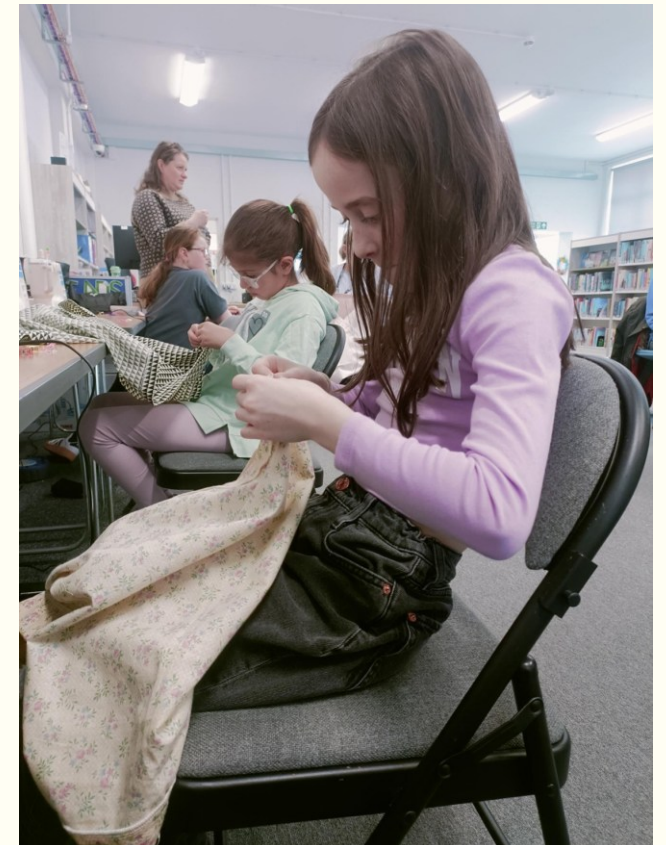


ENRICH

Threads of Change, West Dunbartonshire Libraries

Tackling climate injustice in a community where 27.6% of children live in poverty whilst equipping youngsters with new life skills, as well as educating them on the environmental and ethical impact of fast fashion (which contributes approximately 300,000 tonnes of waste to UK landfill annually).

'One mum was almost in tears as she didn't think it was something her child could have coped with or have the ability to do. Taking part boosted the girl's confidence, and mine too.' **Suzie Short, project deliverer**



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ENRICH

‘On feminist librarianship’ The Bookseller

‘By tackling social isolation and disseminating evidence-based health information in a trusted setting, we know that libraries save the NHS in England £27.5 million every year. But what about the stories – librarians are in the literal and literary business of stories – we cannot put a price on?’

That of groundbreaking author Kerry Hudson who grew up in extreme poverty and recalls how, without her girlhood libraries, "it is no overstatement to say I wouldn't be alive today"? Or of the gentleman who visited my alma mater branch Blantyre Library daily and spoke of how those days consisted of a choice between "the library and the bookies": both warm, both enticing and both (back then, at least) open?’



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Comment

Every £1 invested in libraries generates a return in social value of £6.95. By contrast, for every £1 invested in banking, £7 in social value is lost.

Kirsten MacQuarrie

EXPAND

Reading practices and how we define 'reading' is continuing to evolve.

Children, young people, adults and older adults need a range of knowledge, skills and experiences to use texts to positively support their lives and their learning.



EXPAND

Generative Artificial Intelligence Skills in Schools (GenAISis), Aberdeen and school libraries across Scotland

A project funded by Responsible Ai UK, delivered in partnership by CILIPS, Robert Gordon University and school librarians across Scotland.

Co-creating a toolkit and educational cartoon stories to foster critical conversations around transparency, trust, bias, inclusion and privacy.



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EXPAND

Rewriting Wor(l)ds, Edinburgh and beyond

A research programme investigating how creative, play-based interaction with poetry can enhance young people's experiences and understanding, and promote long-term literacy engagement to improve their daily lives.

Featuring tech-supported interventions (e.g. the ReWriter app) but grounded in research-practice partnerships, with libraries key to helping ensure that benefits are embedded in and for real-life communities.



<https://rewriting-worlds.ed.ac.uk/>



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ACTION

- Policies
- Professionals
- Provision
- Pedagogy
- Promotion
- Publishing
- Participatory approaches
- Partnerships



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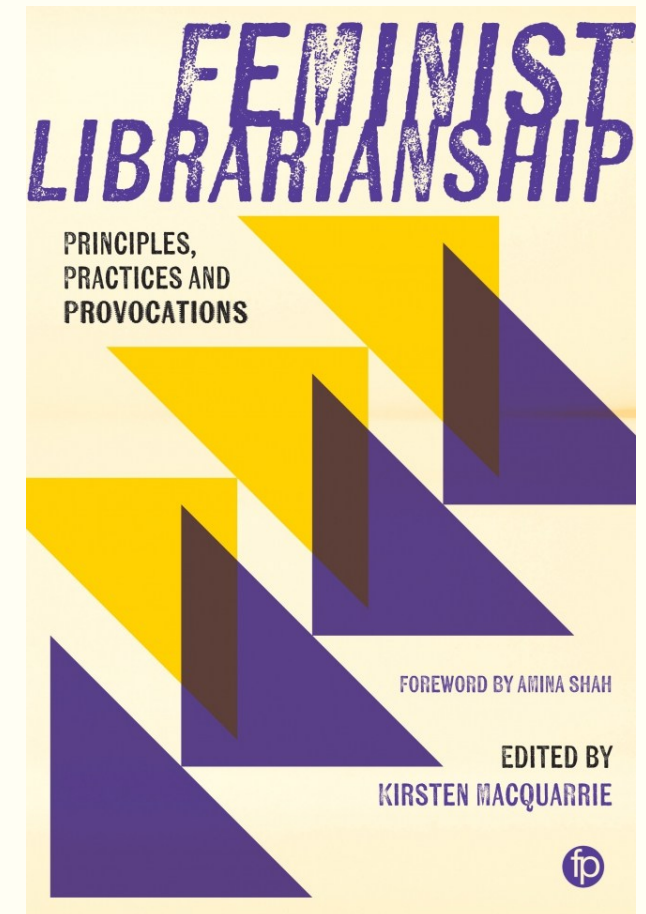


ACTION

‘This book evidences the case that investment in libraries is an investment in women.’

Conversely, that means cuts and closures are not just misguided. In impact, they are misogynistic.’

<https://alastore.ala.org/femlib>



Thank you for listening

Opportunity for questions, reflections and discussion....

Literacy Lab: <https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/literacylab/>

CILIPS: <https://www.cilips.org.uk/>

A copy of these slides are available in the 'talks' webpage of the Literacy Lab



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