

BESSIE QUINN: SURVIVOR SPIRIT

by URSULA HOWARD

Ursula Howard's experience working in adult literacy and communal publishing, plus her directorship of an international literary research centre at UCL, has obviously provided Howard with all the skills required to put together this exceptional family biography.

Howard's grandmother, Bessie was one of ten children parented by Catholic Irish immigrants, refugees from the aftermath of Ireland's devastating famine in the mid nineteenth century.

The family started life again in Gallashiels Mills, in the Scottish borders, with Bessie, then aged two, in 1881.

In 1904 Bessie left her tenement home, to establish a new life in England and it was in Keswick, whilst working as a cook in at the Newland Guest House, that Bessie met Howard's grandfather, [Arthur] Cecil Howard who was staying as a guest.

Keswick at the turn of the century was a lively place offering an assortment of holiday activities, including Keswick's Cumbrian motor-cycle rallies which gave Cecil a welcome chance to get out of London and escape his work at the bankruptcy courts.

Cecil's father Ebenezer, was the pioneer of the City Garden Movement, which was the inspiration behind Henrietta & Samuel Barnett's Hampstead Garden Suburb.

As a married couple, Bessie and Cecil moved into a semi-detached Arts and Crafts cottage in Asmunds Hill where they brought up their two sons. Tragically Bessie did not survive the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1919, and was buried in the Golders Green Crematorium.

Amplly illustrated throughout with almost 60 contemporary photographs, this book gives us a fascinating insight into the fast changing times from 1845-1922.

Both Bessie and Cecil's extended family are explored in detail and Howard has provided a clear family tree, stretching from Bessie's Irish grandparents through to Bessie's own grandchildren.

A map has also been included showing the journeys of Howard's maternal great grandparents from Ireland's west coast to Galashiels Mills and also that of her grandmother Bessie's from Galashiels Mills to North West London.

'Bessie Quinn' is family research at its very best and Suburb residents will no doubt find the references to HGS fascinating.



A BRAND TO DIE FOR

by ALEX PEARL

We are introduced to the book's Soho ad agency via newbie Brian Finkle, job seeker straight out of art school, an only child, newly liberated from living at home with his anxious Jewish parents who continue to worry about him.

Brian is offered an immediate job whereby he and the readers are plunged head first into the frenetic workings of an advertising agency. The louche atmosphere and badinage of the 1980s is wonderfully conveyed by Pearl.

The first half of the story revolves around the creative processes of developing an exceptional pitch for real coal fires and Brian's talent is given free rein, yet it is another seemingly dormant plot line that provides the real action when the serious work of homicide detection moves centre stage. The book now becomes a fast paced thriller with the introduction of several new characters and locations.

Pearl's ability to convincingly convey these different elements lends a sense of intrigue and mystery to the novel.

Brian and his colleague Angus, get into far deeper and murkier waters than either could ever have imagined taking them (and the reader) along an exciting and action packed journey.

Anyone who wants a fast paced read will enjoy this book with its unpredictable twists and turns, often darkly comic along the way.



DEAD THIN

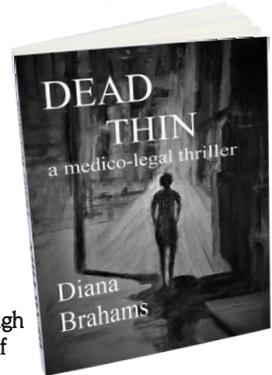
by DIANA BRAHAMS

As with her previous novel 'Lovers and Brothers' Diana Brahams rewards her readers with a gripping tale, containing a plethora of unexpected events and outcomes, which in their turn create an engaging roller coaster reading experience.

The convoluted world of commercial pharmaceutical companies is laid bare through the personal and professional experiences of Dr Raymond Reiss, the medical director in charge of essential clinical trials of a new wonder slimming drug. The author's in-depth knowledge of both the legal and medical world creates a convincing backdrop and atmosphere. The skillful use of dialogue moves the story along without a dull moment.

There is a large cast of players and the setting encompasses both the US and Britain, each with their specific concerns, which Dr Raymond Reiss has to negotiate his way through. Reiss is a multi-layered character – both fall guy and manipulator, so the reader is left undecided about him.

An ideal holiday read, this novel with its focus on the western world's obsession with quick fix dieting, is a gratifying leisure time treat.



The original production, with Caroline Taylor as The Vixen, with the foxcubs played by local children. (Photo: Laurent Compagnon)

HGO wins prestigious 'Offies' Opera Award

DAVID CONWAY

Hampstead Garden Opera, founded 30 years ago at the Suburb Institute, has won, against stiff competition, the prestigious 2023 Opera Performance Award from the 'Offies' – the celebrated annual prize-giving ceremony which reviews Off West End performances. HGO's award, given at a packed Alexandra Palace on 12th February, was for its production of Janacek's opera 'The Cunning Little Vixen' at Jacksons Lane Theatre, Highgate, in November 2022. Collecting the

award on behalf of the production were HGO's Chairman, David Conway, the show's music director Lada Valesova, and two of its lead singers, Caroline Taylor (The Vixen) and Toki Hamano (The Forester). In accepting the Award David praised the singers, musicians and production crew who had made the production such a success. "The award is also a tribute to all the young singers that HGO exists to promote," he added. He also urged the audience to come to HGO's next production at Jacksons Lane in May, Handel's satirical opera 'Agrippina'.

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