

Room to Read Book Group
Report by Annie Clouston
***Square Haunting* by Francesca Wade**

This non-fiction book tells the story of five women feminist writers who lived around Mecklenberg Square in Bloomsbury. All had, for their time, radical ideas, each carving out an intellectual space and “a room of one’s own” in which to think, write and inspire others with the kind of independence that only the time (interwar) and place (a radicals’ enclave) could give them. The women were: H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) a modernist poet, Dorothy L Sayers - writer of detective novels - think Lord Peter Wimsey, Jane Ellen Harrison - classicist and translator, Eileen Power, broadcaster and pacifist, and Virginia Woolf, novelist.

The book has a lengthy chapter on each woman, setting them in their context and exploring the relationships that mattered to them. Most of us found the work hard going but the women, particular the lesser known - Jane Harrison, HD and especially Eileen Power - were impressive in terms of their intelligence and their output.

Eileen Power was a hugely influential academic, who while being very socially aware, an internationalist, and the longest resident of the Square, also seemed like she could be less serious, even frivolous, loving fashion and dancing, and a writer of books for children and preparing broadcasts for the BBC, was also a great supporter of the League of Nations and pacifism:

“There is no more powerful means of binding nations together than by the infinite multiplication of these tiny invisible threads of personal contact and mutual understanding”. We were more or less agreed that this was a book for dipping into rather than reading from cover to cover, though undoubtedly it was immaculately researched and well written. We gave it 3.5/5 for book group discussion and rather less for recommending to friends.

Next books:	17 August	<i>Amy and Isabelle</i> Elizabeth Strout
	21 September	<i>Dark Places</i> Gillian Flynn
	13 October	<i>Let the Great World Spin</i> Colum McCann