**2nd Chapter**

Our choice for April 2018 was The Essex Serpent, the cover of which filled Waterstone’s window at the end of last year being their choice of Booksellers’ Book of the Year. Sarah Perry’s novel is set in London during the 1890s, a city that is mad about sciences and in particular palaeontology. Newly widowed, Cora leaves London for the wilds of Essex. A keen amateur naturalist, she hears of the Essex Serpent, a folk tale apparently come to life and terrorising the Blackwater estuary where the reverend William Ransome is the local rector. She meets him and is strongly attracted to him. Cora considers the serpent could be a relic from a previous age, a living ichthyosaur, whilst William sees the legend as a nuisance to trouble his parishioners. Despite their differences their attraction is an intellectual one and the novel is enlivened by their debates on scientific and medical discoveries of the Victorian era. There are many more characters whose relationships create multiple themes in this novel woven together in such a subtle way as to be seamless. What seems a story about superstition and a strange prehistoric monster becomes an exposition of the Victorian era in microcosm. An exhilarating and demanding read.

Our second choice, Somebody I Used to Know by Wendy Mitchell, was a Sunday Times best seller. The author, diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer’s at the age of 58, chronicles her cognitive decline and finds herself wondering what happens when you lose your memories, how will you be able to live in the future, how do you conceive of love when you can no longer recognise those closest to you? There is still a person in there, she concludes, forgetful, yes, confused, often, but still in need of love, laughter and conversation. Wendy, a mother of two daughters, fears she will lose any future she thought they would have together. Her memory continues to fail and in a bid to stave this off, she sets up ingenious prompts such as her iPad pinging to remind her to take her medication, post-it notes everywhere and buying a pink bicycle to recognise it when she is no longer allowed to drive her car. The book is not depressing, sad maybe but life-affirming and deeply moving more so.

If you would like to know more about this Book Club contact: Margaret Clarke on 01283 813709