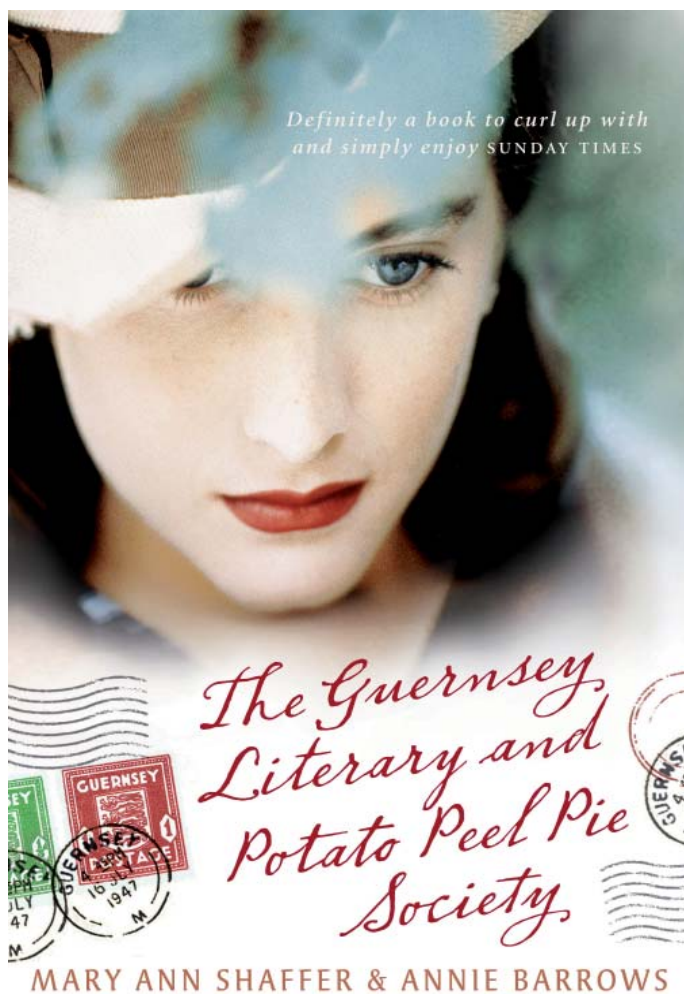


ALLEN & UNWIN



# READING GROUP NOTES

Contents: About the book (2) About the author (2)  
Suggested points for discussion (2)  
Further reading (3) Resources (3)

## About the book

*A moving tale of the power of friendship, books and love set on Guernsey during World War Two.*

It's January, 1946, and writer Juliet Ashton sits at her desk, vainly seeking a subject for her next book.

Out of the blue, she receives a letter from one Dawsey Adams of Guernsey — by chance, he's acquired a secondhand book that once belonged to Juliet — and, spurred on by their mutual love of Charles Lamb, they begin a correspondence. When Dawsey reveals that he is a member of the Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society, Juliet's curiosity is piqued, and it's not long before she begins to hear from the other members. As the letters fly back and forth with stories of life in Guernsey under the German occupation, Juliet soon realises that the society is every bit as extraordinary as its name. There's gawky Isola, who makes love potions to sell along with her vegetables; Eben, a fisherman with a passion for Shakespeare; Will, erstwhile ironmonger and the creator of the famous potato peel pie; and Dawsey himself, a farmer with a shy manner and a tender heart.

Most poignant of all are the memories of Elizabeth, the founding member of the society, who fell in love with a German officer, saved a starving prisoner, and was sent away to a concentration camp, leaving her child behind.

Sustained by books and one another, the islanders have battled the bitter hardships of World War Two. Juliet, entranced by their stories and their spirit, decides to visit Guernsey to meet her new friends properly.

A moving tale of the power of friendship, books and love, *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* will beguile the heart and mind.

## About the author

Mary Ann Shaffer was born in 1934 in Martinsburg, West Virginia. She became interested in Guernsey while visiting London in 1976. On a whim, she decided to fly to Guernsey but became stranded there as a heavy fog descended and no boats or planes were permitted to leave the island. As she waited for the fog to clear she came across a book called *Jersey Under the Jackboot*, and so her fascination with the Channel Isles began.

Many years later, when goaded by her own literary club to write a book, Mary Ann naturally thought of Guernsey.

Mary Ann died in February 2008. She knew that this, her only novel, was to be published in thirteen countries. She left a husband and two daughters.

## Suggested points for discussion

- ☞ How did you feel the style of the novel influenced the story? Can you imagine how the story might have unfolded had it been presented not as a series of letters but narrated perhaps by Juliet? Or by one of the islanders?
- ☞ What did you think of the tone of the novel? Did you find the use of humour appropriate to a novel set in war-time?

- ☞ How successfully do you feel Shaffer created unique voices for each of the letter-writers? What methods did she employ to achieve this?
- ☞ 'Men are more interesting in books than in real life.' What do you think of Isola's assertion about men, with reference to the characters in this novel?
- ☞ 'You must not glorify such people in *The Times*.' How did you feel reading Adelaide Addison's letter to Juliet? Did it amuse you that her persuasive letter had precisely the opposite effect to the one she was intending? Give other examples of where this happens in the novel.
- ☞ Elizabeth is the one islander we do not meet through her own letters and yet in some ways she is the most vibrant character. How does Shaffer achieve this effect?
- ☞ How successfully does Shaffer weave the history of the period into her writing? Were you surprised by anything you learned?
- ☞ Discuss the section entitled 'Detection Notes of Miss Isola Pribby'. How did a change of vantage point at this stage in the novel affect the story being told?
- ☞ Books and reading are obviously very important in the novel. What other motifs does Shaffer use and how successful are they?
- ☞ What did you think of the title of the book? Having read the book can you now imagine it being called anything else?

## Further reading

*Jersey Under the Jackboot* by Charles Maugham (the book that inspired Mary Ann Shaffer originally)

*Essays of Elia* by Charles Lamb (the book that first inspired Dawsey to write to Juliet)

*The Diary of a Provincial Lady* by E.M. Delafield

*Mapp and Lucia* by E.F. Benson

*Land Girls* by Angela Huth

*84 Charing Cross Road* by Helene Hanff

*Diary of an Ordinary Woman* by Margaret Forster

*Can any Mother Help Me?* by Jenna Bailey

*I Capture The Castle* by Dodie Smith

*The Island* by Victoria Hislop

## Resources

Guernsey Occupation Society - <http://www.occupied.guernsey.net/>

BBC Guernsey - [www.bbc.co.uk/guernsey/history/occupation](http://www.bbc.co.uk/guernsey/history/occupation)

**Reading Group Notes courtesy of Bloomsbury (<http://www.bloomsbury.com/ReadingGroups/>)**