



## A word from the President

### Kia ora koutou dear members

What a year of shifting sands we've been in! Many changes have been happening at the National Library and sadly one of the results has meant that we have been a little challenged with venue space. We were very lucky to be able to hold our last event at Rutherford House, at Victoria University. But it does mean that we are not able to hold our usual Christmas event.

So, I'm setting you all a challenge – On our [Facebook page](#) tell us about your favourite children's Christmas story – when you first read it, when you last read it and why you like it so much. We can all revisit favourite nostalgic stories or, perhaps, new delights, and share them with our members.

For the New Year we are hoping to have a delayed celebration to start 2026.

But time to think about what's on your Christmas list of books for this year – I'm thinking of checking out the newly illustrated version of *The fierce little woman and the wicked pirate* by Joy Cowley. It's got a new lease of life with Miho Satake illustrating it. And I'm also keen to explore *The last journey* by Stacey Gregg, but that may be because it involves cats and says fans of Michael Morpurgo will love it. Two ticks from me!

In the meantime, until we meet next year, Meri Kirihimete Merry Christmas! I hope you all get a chance to rest, celebrate and spend time with your loved ones over the festive season.

Warm regards

**Corrina Gordon,**  
FDNWC President



## From the Research Librarian

Applications have closed for this year's FDNW research grant, and we will be announcing a recipient before the end of the year.

Keen readers will note the absence of "From the Display Cabinet" from this newsletter. The conservation staff, who expertly arrange the mounts and captions in the cabinet, have moved to the new Archives building (Te Rua) and their new conservation lab is still being set up.

In August I organised an open display in the General Reading Room to mark 150 years since the death of Hans Christian Andersen. On show was a selection of books by winners of the Hans Christian Andersen Award which is given every other year by IBBY (The International Board on Books for Young People). A lifetime achievement award, it is presented to an author and an illustrator whose body of work has made an important, lasting contribution to children's literature.



A few of the NCC books displayed to showcase winners of the Hans Christian Andersen Award.  
Photographer: Chantalle Smith.

**Mary Skarott,**  
Research Librarian, Children's Literature

# Celebrating the Champion: Maurice Gee's Contribution to Children's Literature

## FDNWC Event, 23 September 2025

The panel waiting to speak at our event in honour of Maurice Gee in the year of his death was greeted by a smiling audience, although the smiles were no doubt partly due to the plush atmosphere of the top floor of Rutherford House, and the food and drinks arranged by your committee.

Kathryn Walls introduced the speakers by offering a summary of Gee's books for children, concluding with his latter-day "Salt" trilogy, which revisits the fantasy genre of the famous "O" trilogy. Interestingly however, these novels are futuristic, complementing the historical perspective of the "O" books while extending Gee's scope by treating global issues, and departing from his habitual New Zealand settings.



Panel members: (left to right) Kate de Goldi, Vivien Van Rij, Claire Maby, Tatjana Schaefer, Anna Jackson and Kathryn Walls (Chair)  
Photographer: Corrina Gordon.

First to speak was Anna Jackson, and the "magic glasses" motif in *The World Around the Corner*, a motif which resonated with Anna thanks to the fact that she had just begun to wear glasses herself. The audience responded with warm applause, as they did after every contribution. Tatjana Schaefer focused on the religious (or irreligious?) implications of the "O" books, which reflect Gee's (anti-C.S. Lewis?) humanism. Claire Maby followed on with a discussion of *The Priests of Ferris* in which, in his treatment of "baddies" in particular, Gee (eschewing the notion that the young must not be discouraged) exposes his young readers to the sometimes awful truth. Harry Ricketts was to follow with praise of Gee's many skills (in characterization, subtlety etc.) as demonstrated in his first realist novel, *The Fire-Raiser*. However, due to Harry's unfortunate illness and the failure of our digital connection, we must look forward to hearing his elaboration on another occasion. Vivien Van Rij recalled her fascinating exploration of Newington Road in Henderson, Gee's childhood home, which is replicated in *Orchard Street*. The final speaker was Kate de Goldi who focused on the darker themes of, for example, *Hostel Girl*.

Some audience members bravely joined in the final vigorous interchange. The evening closed with a gracious address by our President, Corrina Gordon, and the presentation of beautiful gifts to the speakers who will treasure them as mementos of a fulfilling occasion co-hosted with the Institute of Modern Letters, represented at the event by the Head of the Institute, Damien Wilkins.

**Kathryn Walls, (Emerita Professor, School of Arts and Media, Victoria University of Wellington; FDNWC committee member)**

## The National Library's 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday Open Home

The National Library was established 60 years ago, in 1965. As part of a series of celebratory events, an open home was held on 18 October 2025, and FDNWC members were among those invited along. Activities on offer included He Tohu guided tours, behind the scenes tours, collection viewings, a kids' corner and, of course, there was also a large birthday cake.

### Behind the Scenes at the National Library

As part of the National Library's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations, I was leading some of the Back of House Tours. In my day job at the National Library, I am the Collections Registrar. This means that part of my role is the management and logistics of the collection storage. I often spend a lot of my day in the repositories. So, I get to know the make-up of the collections well.

Prior to the day, the advertising blurb for the Back of House Tours described it as:

*Take a special guided tour of our collection repositories and learn more about how we preserve the cultural heritage of Aotearoa New Zealand.*

*Don't miss out on this very rare opportunity to take a peek behind the scenes and see some exciting taonga in our collection stores.*

The Library needed to take bookings for the tours as there were limited numbers. This is because there are not a lot of spaces we can easily have groups in the repositories. Plus, the logistics of getting people between floors. We were excited to see that all three planned tours were fully booked well before the day! Luckily, we were able to squeeze in two further tours on the day for those people on the waitlist. This meant that approximately 100 people were able to experience the tour.

The tours were led by myself and my colleagues, Vesna Živković (Specialist Conservator – Preventive Conservation) and Mark Strange (Specialist Conservator – Photographs). We had assistance from other staff members (and an ex-staff member) to help with guiding people around; Ronan Speden and Taylor Devonport



(Collections Assistants); Anna Henry (Manager ATL collections); and Joan McCracken (in her capacity as a previous ATL staff member).

In the 45-minute-long tour, we had four stops where we would discuss the mitigations in place to protect the various collections, as well as show some interesting collection items.



One of the many storage areas in the library.  
Photographer: Chantalle Smith

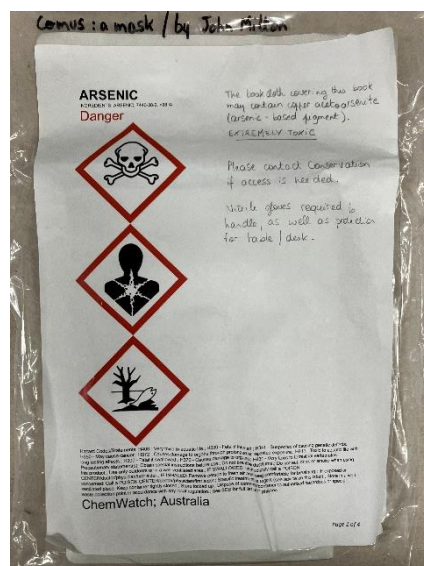
In the basement we were able to talk about the specific elements of the building that help with the preservation of collection items. This included the environmental controls in place, which help with slowing down the deterioration of items such as newspapers and photograph film negatives. When you walk into our repositories, the temperature is a lot cooler, and the air is drier too. We had a copy of the first newspaper published in New Zealand on display. The *New Zealand Gazette*, was published in Wellington on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April 1840. This newspaper has been digitised and is available on Papers Past:

<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/new-zealand-gazette-and-wellington-spectator/1840/04/18>

We then had to warn people as we headed into the two-degree room. This is where our photograph film negatives are stored. In here, one of the examples we showed was colour transparencies taken by Gladys Goodall. Gladys Goodall was a spectacular photographer, who, from 1960 to 1980 had an exclusive contract with Whitcombe & Tombs (today known as Whitcoulls) to provide colour photographs for postcards and calendars. An example of her work can be found here: <https://natlib.govt.nz/records/23030362>

Next, people were taken up to level two, where we showed a glimpse into the Rare Book Collection with a display in the Heaphy Room. Here we were able to showcase books that have been identified as potentially containing toxic materials, as part of the Poison Book Project that our Conservators have been investigating. This project is a global initiative, you can read more on the University of Delaware's website:

<https://sites.udel.edu/poisonbookproject/> The project began in the Library when the Curator noticed the emerald green binding on an edition of Milton's *Comus*. This led our Books and Paper Conservator to examine and analyse around 2000 books from the collection. From the items surveyed, 329 items were identified as potentially containing toxic materials. We now have these books bagged up with advice on the outside about how to handle them safely, as shown in the photo below.



Handling instructions for books identified as part of the Poison Book Project. Photographer: Chantalle Smith.

Finally, we walked through our large format store. As the name suggests, this is where some of our largest collection items are stored. Maps, posters, sketches, flags, and paintings make up some of these collections. Here we had quite a few items on display for people to view. The hand-coloured Whites Aviation prints were a hit. Showcasing beautiful scenery from around New Zealand, the prints were originally black and white, but staff from Whites Aviation hand coloured each one. If you are interested in learning more about these, I highly recommend reading Peter Alsop's book *Whites*, published by Potton & Burton in 2016. We also showed a poster advertising Air New Zealand flights to Antarctica in November 1979. We introduced the group to the poster and waited to see if anyone understood the significance of it. Many did, realising it is an advertisement for the flight that crashed into Mount Erebus. Lastly, we had a few framed portraits on display. There was a favourite in the library, which is an interesting portrait of former Prime Minister, Walter Nash. Do have a look at it here:

<https://natlib.govt.nz/records/23034253> Along with a portrait painted by Gottfried Lindauer, next to one that was believed to be painted by him, but was proved to be a forgery after the discovery that there were modern pigments, titanium dioxide, used.

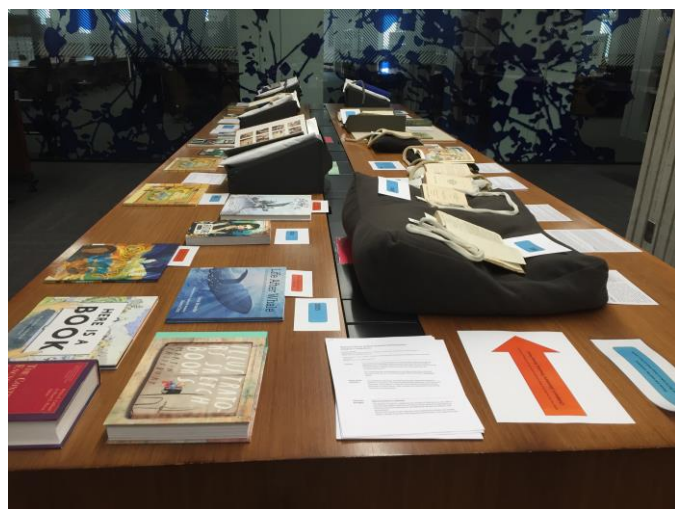
The tours were thoroughly loved by both the participants and those of us who were leading them.

**Chantalle Smith, Collections Registrar and FDNWC committee member**

## Up Close with the Collections

In the Katherine Mansfield Reading Room, and Te Kupenga, there were displays of taonga from the library collections — including books, comics, manuscripts, photographs, and more.

I chose to showcase the collections by setting up a timeline-based display, with date labels and some explanatory text, running from 1801 to the present day. Using a selection of 30 books from the Dorothy Neal White Collection and the National Children's Collection I attempted to chart milestones in the development of children's literature and the history of the National Library and Alexander Turnbull Library. Needless to say, I could not include all the books that came to mind, and some favourites had to miss out.



The entire timeline table in the Katherine Mansfield Reading Room.  
Photographer: Mary Skarott



Part of the timeline. In the foreground (open) is Margaret Wise Brown's *The runaway bunny*, which was remembered fondly by some of our visitors.

Photographer: Mary Skarott



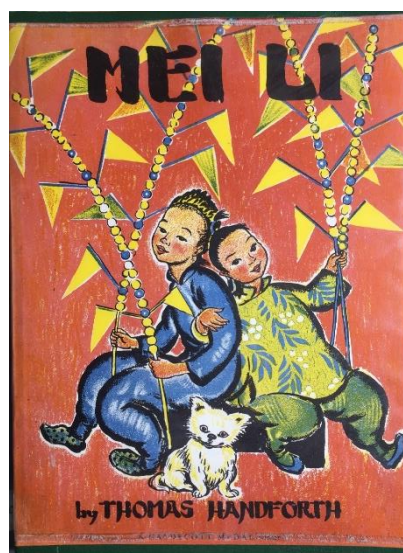
Also in the Katherine Mansfield Room, Sam Orchard's display included a selection of material relating to *Avis Acres*, including original artwork, book drafts, and published work. (Sam is the Curator, Cartoons, Comics, Illustrated books and Children's literature)  
Photographer: Chantalle Smith

Below is a closer look at two of the books that were displayed as part of the timeline: *Mei Li*, by Thomas Handforth, and *The wheel on the school*, by Meindert DeJong.

Mary Skarott,  
Research Librarian, Children's Literature

## From the Dorothy Neal White Collection

*Mei Li* / by Thomas Handforth.  
Garden City, New York : Doubleday & Co., c1938.  
Caldecott Medal, 1939

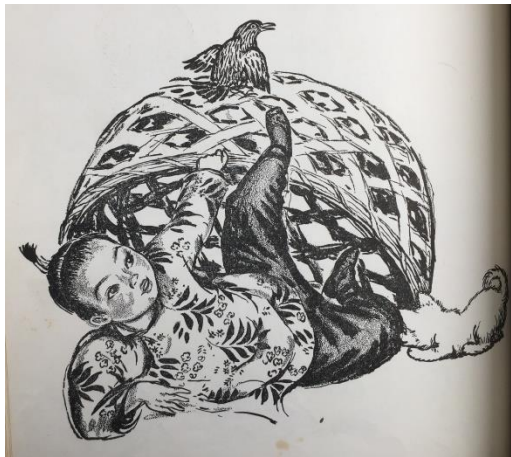


Cover illustration from later reprint:  
*Mei Li* / by Thomas Handforth.  
Kingswood, England: World's Work, 1961.

American born Thomas Handforth was an artist, etcher and lithographer with a love of travel. He lived and worked in places as diverse as Paris, India, North Africa, Mexico and China. It was in China that he worked on his picture book, *Mei Li*.



Handforth's travels to Asia were funded by a Guggenheim Scholarship that he received in 1931, and he originally planned a short stay in China. He ended up living there for six years, renting a house in Beijing. It was here that he began working in lithography, creating printing plates by drawing directly onto stone slabs using a greasy crayon. The illustrations in *Mei Li* were made using this technique, and the example below shows how beautifully the method captures both crisp line and delicate textural shading. You can also see how Handforth has incorporated the character of traditional Chinese inkbrush art in his work.



Detail from: *Mei Li* / by Thomas Handforth.  
Garden City, New York : Doubleday & Co., c1938.

The characters in *Mei Li* were inspired by Handforth's neighbours in the Beijing courtyard where he lived, and who he spent many hours drawing. They included sword dancers, stiltwalkers, jugglers and archers, and he wove them into his story about young Mei Li's determination to attend the New Year Fair.

In his Caldecott Medal acceptance paper, Handforth talks about the genesis of the book: "I wanted to bring all these friends of mine together in a picture book for children, but could not decide who should play the leading role. Then I met Mei Li. She assumed such importance, which she rightly deserved, as the leading lady, that she crowded many of my other friends out of the story. She was that kind of girl."

Mei Li's strength of character is very apparent in the final story. Girls are not usually allowed to attend the fair, but that doesn't stop Mei Li, who is full of bright ideas. She travels to the fair with her brother (having given him a special marble in exchange for taking her with him). A very exciting day ensues, and she still gets home in time to greet the Kitchen God, in keeping with Chinese New Year tradition.

The Library holds the original 1938 edition in the Dorothy Neal White Collection, and a later 1961 reprint in the National Children's Collection.

#### References and further reading:

Thomas Handforth, *China and the real Mei Li* / Kathleen T. Horning.

<https://www.hbook.com/story/thomas-handforth-china-and-the-real-mei-li>

*Mei Li and the making of a picture book* / Kathleen T. Horning.

<https://www.hbook.com/story/mei-li-and-the-making-of-a-picture-book>

*Caldecott Medal books: 1938-1957, with the artists' acceptance papers & related material chiefly from the Horn Book Magazine* / edited by Bertha Mahony Miller and Elinor Whitney Field.  
Boston: Horn Book Inc., 1957.

Mary Skarott,  
Research Librarian, Children's Literature

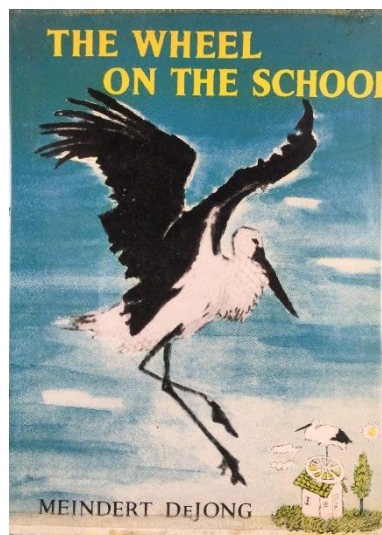
## From the National Children's Collection

*The wheel on the school* / by Meindert DeJong ; pictures by Maurice Sendak.

London: Lutterworth, 1956.

(First published: New York: Harper, 1954)

**Newbery Medal, 1955**



*The wheel on the school* / by Meindert DeJong.  
London: Lutterworth, 1956.

Cover illustration by Maurice Sendak

Meindert de Jong was born in the Netherlands in 1906, and emigrated with his family to the United States in 1914. He worked at a number of jobs before his first children's book (*The big goose and the little white duck*) was published in 1938. He returned to writing after serving in World War II and produced a noteworthy body of work over the next several decades. As well as his 1955 Newbery Medal, he received four Newbery Honor Awards, the 1969 National Book Award for *The journey from Peppermint Street*, and the prestigious Hans Christian Andersen Medal, in 1962, which was awarded for his body of work in children's literature.

This is one of 7 books by DeJong which were illustrated by Maurice Sendak. The full list, all of which are held in the NCC, is: *The wheel on the school*; *Shadrach*; *The house of sixty fathers*; *Along came a dog*; *The little cow and the turtle*; *Hurry home, Candy*; *The singing hill*.

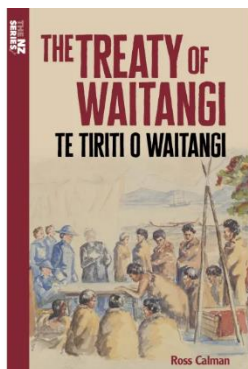
In *The wheel on the school* DeJong draws on his family origins, setting the story in a small Dutch fishing village called Shora. At the local school there are only six children, and Lina is the only girl. One day she starts to wonder why storks never come to Shora. A discussion in class leads to the beginning of a dream to bring storks back to the village.

The children find out that storks like trees, and after a terrible storm many years ago there are no trees in the village. But it is already spring, and if they want to attract storks this year they need a quicker solution. Storks also like to nest on flat wagon wheels, placed on roofs, so finding a wheel for the schoolhouse roof becomes their goal.

This is a charming and very readable story, centred on the six children. DeJong astutely takes us into the mind of each child by writing chapters from their individual points of view. This stylistic choice brings the children's very different personalities, their thoughts and emotions, close to the reader. We are drawn into the excitement, and dramatic conclusion, of the quest to bring storks back to Shora.

**Mary Skarott,**  
Research Librarian, Children's Literature

## Book Review



*The Treaty of Waitangi: Te Tiriti o Waitangi*  
Ross Calman  
Published: Auckland, NZ:  
Oratia Books, 2025

It's easy to see why  
Calman's latest book on Te  
Tiriti o Waitangi won the

Margaret Mahy Book of the Year, as well as the Elsie Locke Award for Non-Fiction, at this year's New Zealand Book Awards for Children and Young Adults. It is such an informative book, written in an easy-to-understand manner, with interesting images that supplement the text perfectly.

The book is broken into 10 chapters that each look at a different aspect of Te Tiriti and its impact on Aotearoa's history. It begins with looking at how both Māori and Pākehā arrived in New Zealand. It explores the events occurring in the country prior to and on the days of the signing. As all books on Te Tiriti do, it gives an understanding of the differences in the texts. It relays events that occurred after the signing that led to the breaking of the understood agreement. It covers the creation of the Waitangi Tribunal and Treaty Settlements. It showcases how Te Tiriti is viewed within Aotearoa, and its impact of New Zealander's lives. It then concludes with looking towards the future. Through all these chapters, it does not shy away from the hard truths that have come from understanding our history.

Although each chapter covers one of the topics above, it has subheadings to easily locate information within those chapters and it allows the reader to choose the exact sections they wish to read. I also enjoy how it features information captured in boxes separate to the main text, which provides further details on key documents, people or ideas. These boxes help provide a bit more context to the information that is being shared, without breaking the flow of the story.

What I find great about this book being published is that, although the history of the signing of Te Tiriti and events surrounding Māori and Pākehā has been written about extensively, this book also covers events that have occurred in recent history. Examples include the defacing of the exhibition panels at Te Papa and the introduction of the Treaty Principles Bill. It adds to the written history of Te Tiriti and will be a great text for future historians to read to understand the views of historians on Te Tiriti in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Calman is of Ngāti Toa, Ngāti Raukawa-ki-te-tonga and Ngāi Tahu descent. He has written many important texts on Māori language and history. Including a graphic novel on Te Tiriti that he collaborated with Mark Derby and Toby Morris. This was published in 2018 by the Ministry of Education. I also highly recommend reading this book, if you have not already. I enjoy the way the book is presented in that you read it one way in English, then flip the book back to front and upside down to read it in Te Reo.

Calman also was awarded the Prime Minister's Award for Literacy for non-fiction in 2025.

**Chantalle Smith,**  
FDNWC committee member

## New Zealand Book Awards for Children and Young Adults

The New Zealand Book Awards for Children and Young Adults were announced in August. As noted in Chantalle's article above, Ross Calman's book *The Treaty of Waitangi: Te Tiriti o Waitangi* was the recipient of two awards.

You can see the full list of this year's winners on the New Zealand Book Awards Trust website here:  
<https://www.nzbookawards.nz/new-zealand-book-awards-for-children-and-young-adults/2025-awards/winners/>

## Obituaries

### Nancy Hill

Longstanding FDNWC member Nancy Hill died recently, and we send our condolences to her family. A tribute to Nancy will be included in our next newsletter.



## Judy Taylor, 1932-2025.

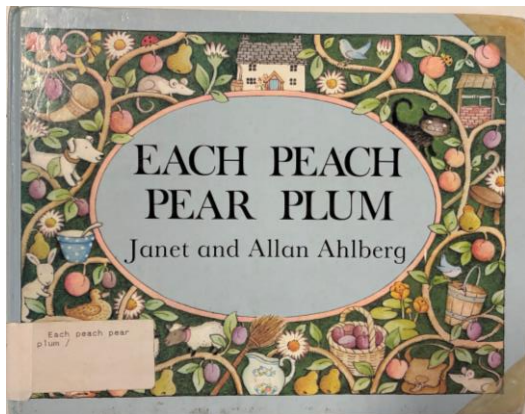
Writer and publisher Judy Taylor died in October. She is especially well known for her 1986 biography of Beatrix Potter (*Beatrix Potter: artist, storyteller, and countrywoman*), and she also had a long friendship with Maurice Sendak. Her full obituary is available on the Guardian site:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2025/oct/07/judy-taylor-obituary>

## Allan Ahlberg, 1938-2025

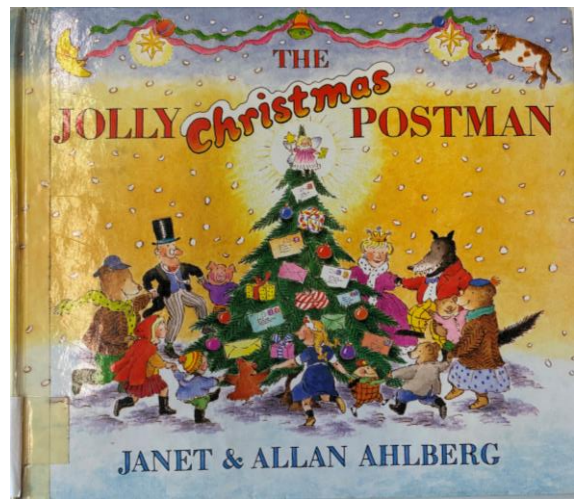
Loved children's author, Allan Ahlberg, died in July 2025. He is known for his colourful characters and well written rhymes. For most of his career, he worked with his wife, Janet, who illustrated his stories. After she died in 1994, he continued to write, working with other well-known illustrators, such as Raymond Briggs and Bruce Ingman. Most recently he teamed up with his daughter, Jessica, to publish books.

Born in 1938, he was adopted by a family living in Oldbury. After school, and doing his national service, he worked as a postman, plumber's mate and gravedigger. While working as a gravedigger it was suggested he should become a teacher. Hesitant at first, he visited a few schools. He ended up loving teaching. It was while at teacher training school that he met his wife, Janet. After ten years of teaching, Janet asked him to write a children's book for her to illustrate, which resulted in *Here Are the Brick Street Boys* being published in 1975.



*Each peach pear plum* / Janet and Allan Ahlberg. Harmondsworth, England: Kestrel Books, 1978.

The couple would go on to write and illustrate many loved children's books. 37 books in total, including *Each Peach Pear Plum* (1978), the rhyming "I-Spy" type book, which was the first of their books that would win the Kate Greenaway medal (now known as the Carnegie Medal for Illustration). *Peepo* (1981), an adorable book looking at the world through the eyes of a baby. *Funnybones* (1980) tells the story of a skeleton family wanting to scare people, but when they are unable to find anyone, they scare each other! And my favourite of his books, the *Jolly Postman* series, which looks at the letters that are delivered by a postman. The first of these books was published in 1986. The enjoyment from these books is the ability to pull each letter out of its envelope to read, and each letter is clearly crafted to represent the character perfectly.



*The jolly*

*Christmas postman* / Janet & Allan Ahlberg. London: Heinemann, 1991.

Ahlberg continued to produce books after his wife's death. This also led him to a new editor at Walker Books, Vanessa Clarke, who he married. As of 2017 he had written more than 150 books.

**Allan Ahlberg obituary by Chantalle Smith, FDNWC committee member**

## Online Reading and Viewing

### Joy Cowley's papers in the Alexander Turnbull Library

Some of Joy Cowley's papers have recently been added to the Alexander Turnbull Library collection. You can read about the acquisition in Dr Lindsay Bilodeau's blog: <https://natlib.govt.nz/blog/posts/literary-papers-joy-cowley>

The blog also mentions this recent RNZ documentary about Joy Cowley's life and work, which is well worth a look:

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/video/joy-full-and-fearless?cid=newsletter>

### Avis Acres: Illustrator, storyteller, comic pioneer

Recent library intern Gwenne Brégeon, explores the life and legacy of artist and author Avis Acres:

<https://natlib.govt.nz/blog/posts/avis-acres-illustrator-storyteller-comic-pioneer>

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