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WHAT'S THE NATION REALLY READING? UK'S MOST POPULAR AUTHORS REVEALED

Public Lending Right Releases Latest Library Lending Figures

The UK's readers are more likely to be absorbed in the whodunnits of Agatha Christie, than in most books on the best-seller lists, it was revealed today.

Data released by Public Lending Right (PLR) shows just which authors – and which books – proved most popular in the nation's libraries between July 2000 and June 2001.

With lending figures for libraries' most read authors often outstripping sales of the popular authors in the shops, public libraries are the place to find out what people really like to read. Public libraries are unique in offering the backlist of authors who have fallen out of favour in the frontlist-dominated high street bookshops. For example, though thriller writer Ted Allbeury is no longer a bestseller in the shops, he is still hugely popular in libraries with over 300,000 loans to his name during 2000/1.

The well-known top lending names only receive a small percentage of PLR's £4.5 million total pay out for the year. 83% of the fund goes to 99% of registered authors. For these authors the annual PLR cheque often makes a significant contribution to their livelihoods, especially for those whose books are out of print.

Although the late Catherine Cookson remains Britain's Most Borrowed Author her reign is now under threat from JK Rowling whose lending figures are starting to climb. Catherine Cookson's "The Thursday Friend" and "The Blind Years" take first and second place as the nation's most borrowed titles, closely followed by "Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire" in third place.

Library issues of Ms Rowling's titles almost doubled in 2000/2001 to just under half a million loans. "Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire" is also the Most Borrowed Children's Fiction title of the year. In spite of this, JK Rowling is yet to appear in the list of the Top Twenty Most Borrowed Children's Authors, which this year is headed once again by RL Stine, author of the "Goosebumps" series.

The Most Borrowed Non-Fiction title was "Tis" by Frank McCourt, with AA Milne remaining the UK's Most Borrowed Classic author, ahead of "Lord of the Rings" author JRR Tolkien who climbed from fourth to second place this year.

Established in 1979, PLR is a legal right that remunerates authors for the loan of their work through the public library system. The Stockton-based PLR office uses sophisticated computer technology to track the annual loans data with the support of public libraries, and then distributes funds on a rate per loan in February each year. By helping to support authors, whatever their overall earnings, the PLR scheme also makes an active contribution to education, and to the creative industries in this country.

Ends/January 2002

Editors' Notes:

1. PLR was established by an Act of Parliament in 1979. It gives authors the legal right to receive remuneration from government for the public's use of their work through the public library system.
2. Increase in PLR funding. In 2000, Ministers at the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, PLR's sponsoring department, accepted the case for a 40% increase in funding. With effect from 1 April 2002 the Fund will be increased to £7 million, with a further increase to £7.2 million in April 2003.
3. In 2002 – relating to the period July 2000 – June 2001, PLR will distribute £4.5 million to 17,581 authors at a rate per loan of 2.67 pence.
4. Authors are eligible for payment if their loans total reaches a minimum of £5. There is a payment limit of £6000 for the top-lending authors.
5. Since its inception in 1979, PLR has distributed almost £71 million to authors.
6. Author Clare Francis was appointed to succeed Michael Holroyd as chair of the PLR Advisory Committee in August 2000. The appointment runs for three years.
7. The majority of authors depend to some extent on their annual PLR payment. 60% of authors surveyed by The Society of Authors earned less than £10,000 in 1999, with 75% earning less than half the national average wage (source, "Love Not Money" by Kate Pool, 2000).