

Book club February 2026

'Road to the Dales' by Gervase Phinn

Present: Maureen, Sandra, Sue, Marina, Diane, Tina, Belinda, Rosemary, Jan, Philippa

Maureen introduced this months book and told us about her experience of meeting Gervase Phinn at a Monmouthshire County Council meeting as part of a Governor training programme. The experience was one of joy with tears of laughter listening to him.

The author didn't really need an introduction because the book is an autobiography and explores his childhood and working life.

The book isn't as amusing as his other works. Other works like 'A Wayne in a Manger' and 'The Virgin Mary has Nits' are laugh out loud reads!

Maureen gave us a couple of examples: an extract of Twinkle Twinkle Little Star and Richard and the cookery class.

'Road to the Dales' is about life in the 50's. It is definitely not a novel! Many of the group have read other books by Gervase and would recommend reading some of his other works. Generally we were disappointed by this one! Some didn't even get to the end.

It did evoke memories for the group members about our own childhood experiences. Some of his experiences definitely resounded.

The book was described by some as a self indulgent egocentric book. A view of a life that was idyllic and maybe the looking back was with rose tinted glasses! His parents were ahead of their time in many ways and were very supportive of their children and gave them as many opportunities as possible. Gervase was an eleven plus failure but he achieved well academically through hard work and dedication and some wonderful if also eccentric teachers.

His childhood was one of freedom's with opportunities to explore, have adventures and learn from mistakes.

We had discussions about the role of inspectors then and now. How it used to be about valuing education and is now about constant checking and not trusting teachers. It has become a negative experience and the reason many teachers leave the profession. Also discussed the parental attitudes towards staff and school; we have the second generation of pupils who do not respect teachers, and attitudes in different countries towards education.

Time was spent reminiscing; standing for the National Anthem, Watch with Mother, The Wooden Tops, Andy Pandy, Robin Hood and William Tell, collecting stamps and exchanging for goods, Plastic Rose from Daz packets, plastic toys in cereal boxes, scratchy toilet paper!

Final comments:

Boring! Struggled to read. Didn't rate it.

A bit disappointing compared to some of his other works which I have enjoyed.

Brought back childhood memories. A bit holier than thou. Struggled to finish.

It rambled. No thread. It made me smile a couple of times but I didn't finish it.

Enjoyed.

Disappointed. Pleased to hear there are better books written by him so may try another one. I was expecting more about The Dales.

Not what I was expecting. Disappointing.

The writing is good but the structure wasn't.

Enjoyed it more towards the end.

Have loved some of his other books. Not so much this one.

Scores: 2, 7, 6, 6, 3, 8, 5, 4, 6, 5. **Overall score:** 5