



Reading Matters: Five Centuries of Discovering Books

Margaret Willes

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It is easy to forget in our own day of cheap paperbacks and mega-bookstores that, until very recently, books were luxury items. Those who could not afford to buy had to borrow, share, obtain secondhand, inherit, or listen to others reading. This book examines how people acquired and read books from the sixteenth century to the present, focusing on the personal relationships between readers and the volumes they owned. Margaret Willes considers a selection of private and public libraries across the period—most of which have survived—showing the diversity of book owners and borrowers, from country-house aristocrats to modest farmers, from Regency ladies of leisure to working men and women.

Exploring the collections of avid readers such as Samuel Pepys, Thomas Jefferson, Sir John Soane, Thomas Bewick, and Denis and Edna Healey, Margaret Willes also investigates the means by which books were sold, lending fascinating insights into the ways booksellers and publishers marketed their wares. For those who are interested in books and reading, and especially those who treasure books, this book and its bounty of illustrations will inform, entertain, and inspire.

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