

# case study

## Reading Partners activity profile:

### Kazuo Ishiguro author event

**Reading Partners is a consortium transforming the way publishers and libraries work together, creating successful and exciting events and activities for readers. It is led by The Reading Agency, the independent charity working to inspire more people to read more.**

“Thank you so much Reading Partners. It was amazing: over 400 people came. I sat in the perfect white venue with a sea of readers and an internationally famous author and wanted to pinch myself.” Heather McNally, reader development officer, Kent Libraries and Archives.

In autumn 2009 publishers Faber & Faber began laying plans for a special library-based event to celebrate the paperback launch of *Nocturnes*. This was the latest novel by Booker Prize-winning author Kazuo Ishiguro OBE, whose best-selling novels have been translated into 40 languages to international acclaim, with his novel *The Remains of the Day* adapted into an award-winning film starring Anthony Hopkins and Emma Thompson.

“Faber does a lot of work with Reading Partners, so we already knew how useful they are in liaising between publishers and libraries,” explains Rebecca Pearson, Faber & Faber press officer. For example, Faber and Reading Partners had recently worked together on a library tour for some of Faber’s crime authors, and to identify and contact libraries based in areas with strong Asian communities, in order to use them as venues for events for a visiting Indian novelist.

The paperback launch of *Nocturnes* was scheduled for March 2010: for such a high-profile author Faber needed a large-capacity venue. They also needed detailed assurances that the library they worked with could fill it, could use good existing local reading group links to do so and also had previous experience of holding high-profile events. Reading Partners used its email alert system to invite bids from UK library services.

“I find the Reading Partners ‘bidding scheme’ particularly useful,” continues Rebecca Pearson. “We can specify what sort of event we are looking for, with any geographic restrictions. Then we can very efficiently receive pitches from library services, and take advice from Reading Partners, who know library venues and library teams better than publishers do, giving us a firm basis on which to make decisions”.

Five pitches were received and discussed with the author. In late October, Kent Libraries got the go-ahead for an event featuring Kazuo Ishiguro in conversation. Like Faber & Faber, they had also worked closely with Reading Partners, using the free marketing materials it makes

available to public libraries and hosting several successful events for authors including Jacqueline Wilson, PC and Kristin Cast, Katherine Whitehorn and Katie Fforde.

“The whole reader development team had been determined to win this pitch,” recalls Heather McNally. “We felt it would be great for Kazuo Ishiguro to return to the city of Canterbury where he had studied, to inspire future writers and readers.”

Detailed pre-planning had won the day for the Kent Libraries team. They had teamed up with Canterbury Christ Church University to provide a suitable venue: Augustine House. Augustine House is the home of the university’s flagship new library and conference venue, and also houses a main hall and a large cafe where audience refreshments could be provided. The event was positioned as part of the university’s ongoing free public lecture series, lending it added muscle in terms of marketing networks and pre-event publicity activity, and the local Waterstones were also brought in to sell books for signing by the author after the event.

Tickets were made available from 1 February from three venues, the university library, Canterbury public library and the local Waterstones. 90% of them had been snapped up within two weeks.

“We had a joint poster campaign with the university and we put event details on our website, but our most successful marketing was done via our email distribution list to local reading groups – we have contact details for over 50 of them at district level and beyond – and via Canterbury Christ Church University’s established email lists for their public lecture series and other events,” explains Daren Kearl, community development librarian. “This was very ‘targetted’ marketing activity. Meanwhile, together we’d drawn up a comprehensive project plan, which covered not just marketing but ticket handling, guest invitations, staffing, hospitality and an on-the-day running order. We were able to revisit this regularly with our partners to ensure things were on track.”

Vast experience of running public events and huge marketing networks were not all that Canterbury Christ Church University’s team brought to the table. Amongst many other contributions, they secured advance media coverage with their press releases, provided a ticketing advice line, and drew up a detailed itinerary for the event, to ensure smooth running to time.

On the night, many attendees enjoyed the added attraction of being able to visit the university’s new library for the first time. Professor Jan Druker, Canterbury Christ Church University’s senior pro-vice chancellor then introduced the event to the capacity audience. It began with a 40 minute discussion between Kazuo Ishiguro and author Andrew McGuinness, who is both a member of the Canterbury Laureate scheme to nurture new local writing talent and associate lecturer in creative writing at the university.

Next came a question and answer session with the audience, for which roving microphones were used, and which Andrew McGuinness facilitated.

“In an age when so much communication is done remotely, direct contact between authors and the public is essential,” he says. “It can inspire people, not only to read more but maybe to write things themselves.”

The evening ended with a book sales and signing session. The university had made tables and space available to Kent Libraries and to the local Waterstones for this, and for general advertising.

Robert Beattie, an insurance underwriter who lives in London and works in Windsor had never been to any sort of author event before. But he decided to make use of high-speed London-Canterbury rail links to attend this one at the invitation of his sister, who lives in Broadstairs and belongs to a Kent-based reading group who were all going along.

“I’d read three of Kazuo’s books, including *The Remains of the Day* which is a modern classic. Having been to this event I’ll definitely read more now,” he enthuses. “It was fascinating to hear him talk, especially about the audiences for his books. For example, he explained that as his books are now being published all around the world, when he writes he very consciously avoids localised ‘in jokes’ and goes instead for universal themes.”

“I think it’s great that the general public are given the opportunity to meet authors and pose their own questions at free events like this,” agrees local library reading group member Geraldine Knights. “The venue was excellent and there was a diverse mix of people in the audience at this event – people of all ages and backgrounds – so it had obviously been made widely accessible. I think it’s very easy to put someone on a pedestal just because their work has appeared in print, so it’s great to be allowed to see them in a different light – for budding authors it must give them a huge incentive to get published.”

“I think that public libraries should shout loudly about doing events like this – it will help raise their profile and secure their future,” continues Robert Beattie. “Overall community life would be poorer without public libraries, and I think free, universal access to reading is really important.”

Universally agreed to have been very successful, the event has opened up helpful future opportunities. For example, Faber & Faber are already talking to the Kent Libraries and Archives team about possible author events linked to their autumn publishing schedule, and community development librarian Daren Kearsley was invited to participate in the launch of Canterbury City Council’s cultural policy.

“Events like this increase public libraries’ profile not just in the community but with other organisations who then wish to work in partnership with us,” he says.

“We look forward to working in partnership again with Kent Libraries and with publishers,” says Isobelle Leggett, corporate communications officer for Canterbury Christ Church University. “Our combined expertise, plus the availability of Augustine House – a great venue for large events – can only strengthen our ability to attract more authors to Canterbury.”

“We would definitely be happy to organise other author events with public libraries, and this event has certainly demonstrated how effective they can be,” concludes Faber & Faber’s Rebecca Pearson.

**Reading Partners involves the whole UK public library network, nine major adult publishers and seven independent publishers. A children's version of the scheme was set up in May 2008 involving 12 children's publishers, The Publishers Association and the main children's library bodies. For more information, please contact Sandeep Mahal on 0871 223 2041 or [sandeep.mahal@readingagency.org.uk](mailto:sandeep.mahal@readingagency.org.uk)**

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