

Foreword

Café Culture and *The Wednesday*

When the Wednesday group started meeting in the first half of the 2000s, a new phenomenon was emerging. It was the rise of the café culture and the introduction of café spaces into major bookshops. It was Borders which inaugurated this trend in Oxford, followed by many others. The spread of the Internet and the availability of Wifi in most cafés made these venues attractive for students both to do their work and to socialise.

The older culture had been the pubs. It is interesting that the *Inklings* met at the Eagle and Child on St. Giles, Oxford. Aaron Ridley in *Nietzsche on Art* thanked a pub owner and staff in Southampton where he wrote the book. But gradually the cafés won over the students and intellectual groups looking for an environment better suited to their discussion. In our last meeting place at Albion-Beatnik Bookstore, which had a café also, two other groups met regularly there: one discussed philosophy, the other poetry.

The idea of coffee houses came from the Middle East in the seventeenth century and spread throughout Europe. It has been claimed that a student from Crete at Balliol College was the first person in England to brew coffee in 1637 and that the first coffee house in England was opened in Oxford by a Lebanese in 1650.

The coffee house was not only a place for relaxation and socialisation but also for discussing ideas and politics, and their existence was paralleled by the secret societies. Charles II saw that these coffee houses could be dangerous to his rule and so he ordered their closure on the 29th of December 1675. But the ban was short-lived and coffee houses were allowed to re-open a month later. The vice-chancellor of Oxford university banned two publications from being circulated in coffee houses frequented by the students in 1711 and 1720.

The Club of Thirteen, known also as Wednesday Society, was a radical intellectual club in London founded by David Williams in the 1770s. Its members included Benjamin Franklin, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Josiah Wedgwood, Robert Owen, William Hodgson, and Thomas Day. It met at Old Slaughter's Coffee House on St Martin's Lane.

The Wednesday magazine was born in the café of Albion-Beatnik and carried on in the Opera Café after the closure of the former. We were lucky to be welcomed by both proprietors and to have our own space every Wednesday, with our sign *The Wednesday Philosophers' Cave* at the door and inside the basement room of Opera Café.

I very much appreciate this trend of welcoming students and intellectuals to cafés and bookshops to generate debate and to enrich cultural life around Oxford and nationally.

The Editor