



### Clare Morpurgo's speech:

To catch this moment in the history of Penguin Books, I am going to read words written by three generations of Allen Lane: a daughter, a grandson, and a great granddaughter.

Allen Lane joined his uncle's publishing company, The Bodley Head, on April 23rd 1919, traditionally Shakespeare's birthday. On April 23rd 1969, 55 years later, he wrote to all the employees of Penguin Books, the company he had founded and run for 35 years, to announce his resignation as Managing Director. He died a year later.

There could be no better place than Exeter St Davids station to reflect how Penguin Books books emerged in a dark time. What is so striking, from our perspective, about people like Allen Lane who made it happen, is how firm was his belief in the future, his trust in the power of literary imagination, in spite of everything. Authoritarianism threatens Europe again as it did then. We have darkness enough of our own. But the installation of the book vending machine at Exeter St Davids is a sign that the belief in the future, and trust in human reason, which inspired Allen Lane, is still alive.

In an interview in 1963, James Baldwin said: "You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, who had ever been alive."

If we have any doubt in these uncertain times—when we are being encouraged to open our minds, understand new perspectives, widen our horizons—then reading is the most direct way we can achieve empathy with our fellow people. And it follows that travel by train is the most democratic and ecological means of travel. Books and trains, travel and reading are inextricably entwined...Happy reading! Happy travels! Pick up a Penguin!

