

BOOK REVIEW

Gravely great

ANDY HEDGECOCK recommends an anthology resurrecting the reputations of Nottingham's deceased writers

Dawn of the Unread

Edited by James Walker, with Adrian Reynolds and Wayne Burrows (Spokesman Books, £14.99)

THIS graphic story anthology, inspired by anger at library closures, was originally part of an ambitious multimedia project exploring Nottingham's hidden cultural history.

Its aim, according to James Walker's introduction, is to inspire new readers and writers by challenging the prevailing notion, highlighted by the National Literacy Trust, that "books are boring."

The unifying premise is that Nottingham's dead writers, unread and slipping from the collective memory, escape the grave to tell their stories.

There are 16 tales by writer-artist pairs in an impressive range of styles and forms. Nicola Monaghan's unflinchingly gritty and touching tale of scriptwriter Alma Reville's ghostly intervention in contemporary rave culture is a masterclass in pared-down storytelling, with appropriately stark illustrations by Judit Ferencz.

At the other end of the stylistic spectrum, the offering from writer and graphic artist Brick (John Clark) is visually meticulous and crammed with information.

It discusses the impact on a young Brick of Slavomir Rawicz's *The Long Walk*, the story of an escape from a forced labour camp and a trek across Siberia, Mongolia and the Gobi Desert.

If one piece epitomises the spirit of

the collection it is Hunt Emerson and Kevin Jackson's DH Lawrence: *Zombie Hunter* (pictured), which uses classic comic-book tropes and styles to examine Lawrence's rage against industrialisation, social conformity and academic stasis.

It also acknowledges the fascistic undertone of some of his work.

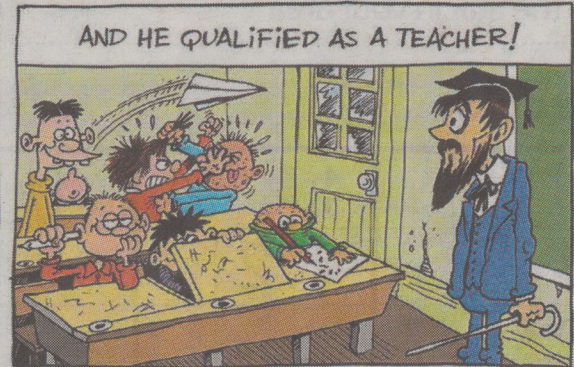
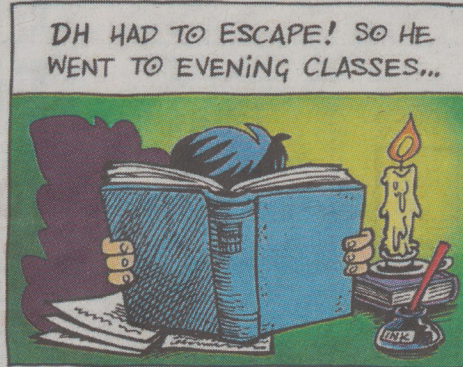
David Belbin and Ella Joyce's story of teacher and Booker Prize-winning novelist Stanley Middleton is intercut with asides on other writers with Nottingham connections — Graham Greene, JM Barrie and forgotten figures such as Dorothy Whipple and Cecil Roberts.

Other stories tackle local folk tales, a bare-knuckle boxer turned preacher, a remarkable and inspiring freed slave, a notorious murderer, literary innovators, social campaigners, Alan Sillitoe, Geoffrey Trease — the author of *Bows against the Barons* — and, inevitably, Brian Clough.

The collection is freighted with local references and a few in-jokes accessible only to those connected with Nottingham's counterculture.

There are, however, many allusions, subtle and flagrant, verbal and visual, that will entertain a wider audience.

This diverting and informative anthology is a reminder of Nottingham's richly rebellious cultural history and, in a city apprehensive about the future of its libraries and literacy of its young people, it's a timely antidote to pessimism about the decline of reading.



BUT HE WAS FILLED WITH HORROR AND RAGE! THE COMING OF THE MACHINE WAS DESTROYING HIS BELOVED COUNTRYSIDE...

