

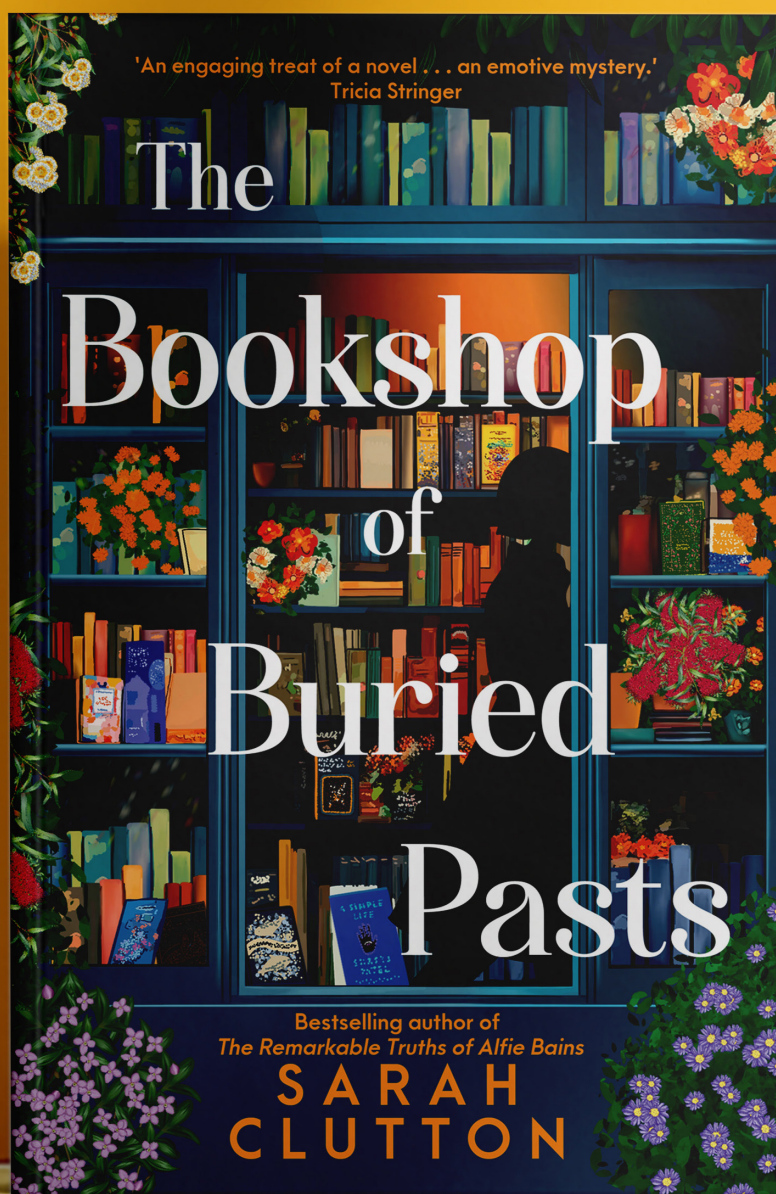


ALLEN & UNWIN

AUSTRALIAN. INDEPENDENT. FOR READERS.

BOOK CLUB GUIDE

# *THE BOOKSHOP OF BURIED PASTS*



# ABOUT

## *THE BOOKSHOP OF BURIED PASTS*

Phyllida Banks disappears from her quiet village, leaving her granddaughter Lottie with a cryptic clue: 'Find Francis.' As Lottie investigates, she uncovers a hidden fortune and a trail leading to England, where another eerily similar bookshop awaits. Piece by piece, she unravels a decades-old mystery tied to her grandmother and a past that others have desperately tried to keep buried.

## MEET SARAH CLUTTON

Sarah Clutton is an Australian author who has worked across a wide range of roles, from law and research to writing and community work. She lives in a historic Book Town and is actively involved in refugee advocacy, alongside her freelance writing. Her novel *The Bookshop of Buried Pasts* reflects her love of village life in the Southern Highlands and celebrates the people who bring book communities to life.



Credit: Shelly Willingham, Highlands Photography, 2024

Dear Reader

About six years ago, a charmingly persistent protagonist took up residence in my head. Phyllida Banks was an elderly woman grappling with mortality and the secrets she would leave behind as she pondered the last chapter of her life. A character like this rarely appears for me, so I was eventually forced to take notice. I pictured her very clearly, peering through a window, amused by the chaos she was about to create. She was curious and mischievous and well-read. She was interested in the mystical but equally interested in people and community and the health-giving properties of plants.

Around that time, I'd been lucky to meet an antiquarian bookdealer who told me some stories about his long working life in the book world. It seemed the perfect profession for fiction because it can take you into any number of unexpected, dusty corners of the world. What better place, I thought, than a beautiful old bookshop to explore a mystery that spans half a century? The enigmatic Phyllida Banks, it turned out, was the perfect antiquarian bookdealer. But this is also the story of her granddaughter, Lottie, and what it takes to live inside a family culture where past grief, turmoil and betrayal have been buried in the name of survival.

As author Sophie Green writes, this *'is a story of how the bonds of love transcend time and circumstance, and how the past and the present are forever intertwined'*. I hope you enjoy getting to know these characters and spending time in the New South Wales Southern Highlands village I created for Phyllida, very much like the one I live in (although the inhabitants of her village are nothing like my neighbours!). The mystery Phyllida leaves Lottie will take you across the world, to another village and another bookshop, with eerie similarities to Phyllida's own. I hope this story offers you as much satisfaction in the reading as it offered me in the writing. And *welcome to The Bookshop of Buried Pasts*.

# CONVERSATION STARTERS

1. Phyllida is a complex character. She believes in ancient signs and spirits, yet she is traditionally educated and, in many ways, the perfect English gentlewoman. What aspects of her character did you find most interesting?
2. What did you think about Phyllida's decision to leave Francis in England?
3. The gentle, unhurried character of Roddy brings balance to Lottie's approach to life. What about his character did you find most surprising?
4. Teenagers are excellent at holding up mirrors to adults. What do you think was the role of Sienna in the story? What did she add to Lottie's and Roddy's journeys?
5. Did you like the ending of the story?
6. A woman's decision not to have children brings a certain level of societal interest and pressure. What did you think about Lottie's choices in general?
7. Miriam seemed not to have moved on after David's death. Do you believe it is possible in life to have one true soulmate? Do you believe that's what Miriam and David were?
8. Which aspect of the bookshops did you enjoy most?
9. Did you enjoy getting to know Francis? What did you think of him?
10. What do you think of the idea of having a wedding inside a bookshop?
11. Which characters, if any, did you change your opinion about during the book?
12. Supporting characters like Mary in Australia and Mrs Wilson in England can be critical behind the scenes, yet play a minor role in a book. Which minor characters would you have liked to learn more about?
13. What did you like and dislike about this story?