



Terry Pratchett's debut turns 50

No author has more ardent fans than the comic fantasy genius, Terry Pratchett, and during November they got to celebrate a significant anniversary: exactly fifty years since the publication of his debut novel, *The Carpet People*. Pratchett left school at 17 for a career in journalism and three years later in 1968, a chance meeting with Trinity graduate Colin Smythe changed his life. Smythe had started his own publishing company which specialised in Irish books but in 1971 he published *The Carpet People*, which tells the story of a tribe of people known as the Munrungs, as they travel across a world known as the Carpet. The landscape of the Carpet is covered in a forest of hairs in place of trees, and large grains of dust.

Pratchett's collaboration with Smythe developed over the years, with Smythe publishing *The Dark Side of the Sun* (1976) and *Strata* (1981) before they both hit the jackpot with the debut novel of the Discworld series. Smythe published the first five Discworld books, *The Colour of Magic* (1983), *The Light Fantastic* (1986), *Equal Rites* (1987), *Mort* (1987) and *Sourcery* (1988), the last two in association with Gollancz. The huge success of the series enabled Pratchett to leave journalism in 1987 to focus on writing and Smythe began acting as his agent, brokering lucrative deals with Corgi and Random House.

By the end of the millennium, Pratchett was the recipient of multiple awards and one of the world's best loved fantasy authors. He was awarded an honorary doctorate by Trinity in 2008 and two years later was invited to undertake an adjunct lectureship at the college. After being diagnosed

with posterior cortical atrophy, a rare form of Alzheimer's disease, in 2007, Pratchett became a strong advocate for the de-stigmatisation of brain conditions and research into brain health. He worked tirelessly up until his death in March 2015; his final Discworld novel was published five months later.

Smythe's generous donations of books, translations and other materials to Trinity Library initiated Trinity's world-leading collection of Pratchett works. Since 2018, the Pratchett Project has brought together researchers from all disciplines whose work touches on any aspect of Pratchett's life and work. Trinity is helping to honour Pratchett's legacy by supporting and promoting cutting-edge research on Alzheimer's disease and related conditions, including the appointment of a doctoral researcher who is discovering new technologies to aid earlier detection of Alzheimer's disease.

Trinity is now raising funds to digitise the entire Pratchett collection, which is currently more than 3,000 items. This will build on Pratchett's interest in technology and help us answer questions such as whether there are signs of changing brain health in his writing over the course of his career, as well as more light-hearted questions about developments in the characters and topography of the Discworld.

At the golden anniversary of Pratchett's first publication by a Trinity graduate, we take a moment to remember and take inspiration from a remarkable life and an imagination that has delighted millions.