

What do you look for in an author of general histories? An encyclopaedic knowledge of a broad range of subjects is a given; a sense of humour helps too; the ability to see connections between subjects and present them in a coherent, concise and entertaining manner is a real bonus. Step forward then Bill Bryson who, throughout his writing career, has developed those skills and lays them out at great length in "At Home: A Short History of Private Life".

Most of the history book group liked the book, though some felt that it would have benefitted from an editor taking a blue pencil to some of the many facts within. Others felt that Bryson skimmed over modern sensibilities about matters such as slavery, and that the private lives described were mostly of the wealthy.