



# Publishing for the long-term: something to celebrate

Article Author:

[Laura Fraine](#) [1]

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Byline:

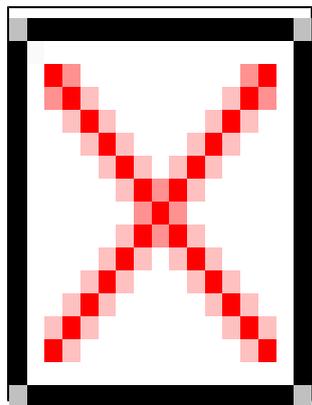
**Laura Fraine** finds out what publishers have to celebrate

The publishing industry is in a period of rapid change. 2013 has already seen the merger of Random House and Penguin into a new super company with 10,000 employees and projected sales of £2.6bn; the systematic closure of libraries and the shutting up shop of much-loved booksellers; online book sales hitting 30 percent; and the continuing rise of the e-book sales.

This year also sees significant anniversaries for some of children's publishing's real success stories. We step back from the melée to find out how it has worked for them.

## USBORNE BOOKS AT 40

Peter Usborne, founder and managing director



There has been an enormous improvement in the standards of books for children since the mid-seventies, when we began publishing. My general impression in those days was of a class divide: the very good, prizewinning, hyper-artistic, sometimes almost incomprehensible (which way up does this picture go?); and the frankly awful mass-market books produced, often, mainly by people trying to use up spare print capacity - very cheap colouring, dot to dot, activity books. There was almost nothing in the middle, and that is where we tried to pitch our books which we have always considered 'quali-pop' - very high quality combined with very high popularity. It was a successful formula, now used by plenty of publishers.

There have been three big changes which have affected our business: more people go to university these days, more people travel and more images, both still and moving, are instantly available on the internet. All of these have unquestionably raised standards and expectations. 'Art' and appearance generally is becoming ever more important in children's books. The old mass market rubbish has virtually disappeared. There is a daily endeavour at Usborne to make our books better and better. Last year's books must not be better than this year's.

The huge spread of our books to practically every country in the world (we've been translated into 103 languages) is obvious evidence of the tremendous globalization of culture and taste that is going on. In the last few years we have

seen striking evidence that tastes in China, for instance, are converging with tastes in the West, and at a startling rate. There is virtually no difference any longer between East and West as regard books that sell really well. And last but not least, there is an enormous new worldwide market for children's books in English ? and not just in English-speaking countries. Everybody's children are now learning English, and parents everywhere are anxious to put some entertaining icing on their children's English-at-school cake.?

## PICCADILLY PRESS AT 30

Brenda Gardner, founder and managing director

?We started out in 1983 just publishing the hardback editions and selling the paperback on to the ?paperback? houses. We would print 4000 hardcover copies, and feel that was being really cautious. The market was buoyant and you could pretty much count on selling every picture book to America.

?I don't think my aims as a publisher ? to bring great authors and illustrators to a readership who will be enchanted, carried away, and come away from the book gaining something ? have changed. However, I am no longer certain that a good book will always succeed. There are so many out there that haven't, and it is getting harder and harder.

?Looking back, a certain doggedness has to have played a part in our success. Part of the key to Piccadilly's longevity might have even been the lack of money. You can't afford to be complacent or arrogant when every penny counts. Thank goodness Piccadilly has found a good home and some stability with Templar/Bonnier ? a larger group that can support us and effectively market and sell our titles.

?A high point for us was discovering superstars Louise Rennison and Cathy Hopkins. It is sad that we don't have their future titles but it is great to know that they have had continued success. We do have a secret bestseller, though, in **How to talk so kids will listen and listen so kids will talk**. It is one of the most heartening books ever: parents are constantly thanking us for publishing it, claiming that it has saved their lives!

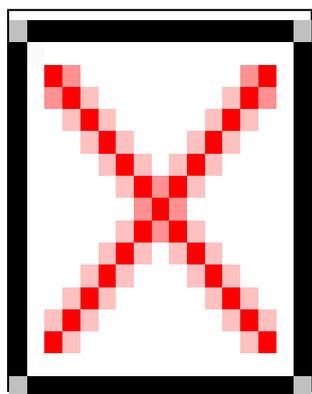
?While the trade has changed, I don't think tastes have. Things are tweaked, like language, priorities, maybe even manners, but I am constantly surprised by the fact that teens, for example, have exactly the same concerns and dreams that my generation had when we were teenagers.

?We remain very committed to teen fiction, including futuristic and contemporary romance. We have a strong list of 7+ fiction which will appeal sometimes more to boys than girls (we are a lot less pink than we used to be), and we are building up a wonderful picture book list ? increasing on our usual four to five titles a year. We are also looking at the past to bring back some of Piccadilly's successes for a new generation.

?So the future, while challenging, looks exciting for Piccadilly. It now all seems on much more solid footing than it did a couple of years ago.?

## BAREFOOT BOOKS AT 20

Tessa Strickland, co-founder and editor-in-chief



?The two decades since we started Barefoot Books have been ones of unprecedented cultural change. In 1993, we had no emails, no Facebook, no Twitter, no Amazon. Now we are caught up in a revolution the implications of which are next to impossible to grasp.

?The chain model ? buy books in bulk, discount them in 3-for-2 promotions ? didn't work for us, so we pulled out of Borders in 2005 ? thank goodness! We also stopped direct supply to Amazon earlier this year, wanting to sell our books at a price that reflects the creative effort and the financial cost of creating them and wanting too to do what we can to support other independent businesses.

?This doesn't mean that we are Luddites: the arrival of the internet presented us with a tremendous opportunity, giving us a shop window of a kind that was hard to find through third parties on the high street in a chain-dominated world. We aim to combine the power of social media with a grass-roots business model. At the heart of this are our Barefoot Studios in Oxford and in Concord, Massachusetts. Here, we bring our books to life with a seven-days-a-week programme of activities for children and their families.

?Today's parents are under enormous pressure. The boom in the property market, the expectation that young mothers should rush back to work, the failure of government to appreciate the fundamental importance of play in small children's development, the omnipresence of the screen in daily life, have all conspired to make it incredibly difficult for parents to navigate the early childhood years.

?I am concerned that the swing to screen-based learning and to formalising early years education are damaging to the well-being of today's small children. For me, these changes mean that being a publisher today is about more than simply disseminating art, music and story: it's also about trying to communicate the vital place of imagination and memory in children's lives. I believe that most parents want the best for their children, and that this includes a desire to help their children learn to listen, to enjoy stories and later, to read. For me, stories are at the heart of human relationships.

?My goals now are threefold: to bring the best possible care to the stories we create for children; to show how stories can build bridges ? child to child, child to adult, culture to culture; and to encourage those with children in their care to prioritise creative play and storytelling.?

## **BARRINGTON STOKE AT 15**

Jane Walker, sales and marketing director

?When we launched 15 years ago there was no real bookshop presence of books specifically for the struggling reader, and especially not the dyslexic one. From the beginning and mainly because of our authors (our first list included a title by Michael Morpurgo), we were welcomed by the shops as a trade list rather than an exclusively educational one. Bookshops are now much more switched onto the issues around dyslexia and reluctance and no longer see it as something that affects families who do not buy or have an interest in books.

?We started by publishing books for children of 8+, who had emerged through the reading schemes and were clearly not managing. At the time, schools and parents were not starting to worry about a child until at least aged eight, but mainly nine or ten. We have seen that change, with parents started to get concerned and/or spotting difficulties in children as young as five or six. Schools, too, are much more on the ball and putting interventions in place much earlier.

?Back then it was also thought that dyslexia was mainly a boys' condition but we now know that is untrue and it does not affect either gender more than the other, it was just that boys were more likely to get tested. We publish for younger children now (our **Little Gems** range is for five to eight-year-olds) and we publish more books for girls. We continue to publish the big authors though ? that hasn't changed!

?The trade itself has changed hugely with **Ottakars, Hammicks, Dillons, James Thin** and **John Menzies** all now either gone or part of another company, and only a fraction of the library suppliers are still trading today. On the plus side there

are a great number of wonderful new children's independents, and children's books themselves are much more high profile both in the media and in the trade.

What we do at **Barrington Stoke** is not the most commercial of business models – that is, publishing books for children and adults who do not want to read! But we have stayed small, stayed flexible and stayed true to our 'brand' and that has kept us going through the tough times. As have the authors and the booksellers who have been immensely loyal and supportive.

We would like to wish **Usborne Books**, **Piccadilly Press**, **Barefoot Books** and **Barrington Stoke** the happiest of anniversaries. We hope you will celebrate independent publishing and join in with their anniversary celebrations. Take part in Usborne Day at your local library on 5 October. Buy Piccadilly Press's collection of short stories, **We're Having a Party**, with contributions by Anne Fine and Hilary McKay. Between September and December, enjoy Barefoot Books' buy a book, give a book campaign – get a second copy free of charge to give to a friend. And enjoy 15 books by 15 star authors in a celebratory year for **Barrington Stoke**. See publishers' websites for full anniversary campaigns.

Laura Fraine is a journalist based in the North East.

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