



Andersen Press - Forty Years Young

Article Author:

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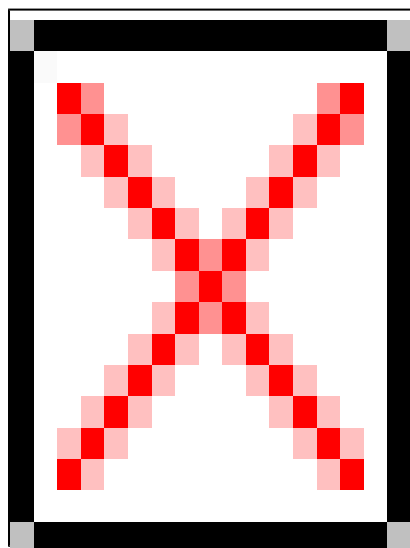
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Byline:

Venerable publisher **Klaus Flugge** interviewed by **Joy Court**

Joy Court celebrates with one of our most successful and innovative publishers.

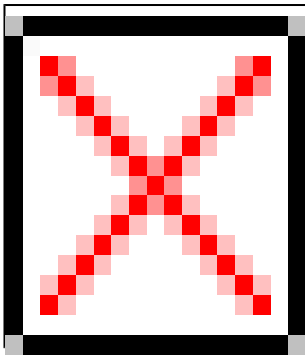
One of the most heartening things in the book world in recent years has been the flush of new independent publishers. Built upon passion and particular interests I am sure that, if pressed, all of their founders would have said they aspired to be another Andersen Press. Forty years of successful, award-winning publishing and still independent!



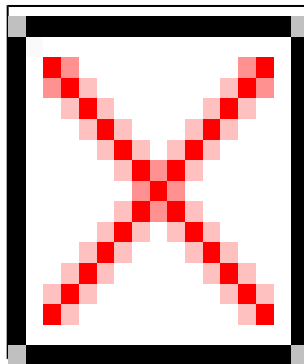
A success story that we are perhaps fortunate to have based here in the UK at all since Klaus Flugge, who launched the company, named in honour of Hans Christian Andersen, 'because it is easier to pronounce and spell than Flugge', was born in Hamburg in 1934. Despite a childhood understandably lacking in books 'except for maybe **Struwwelpeter**' a career in books was what he wanted. With accumulating 'only about six years' of schooling during the war, he considered himself very lucky to be accepted for a bookselling apprenticeship and attend Book Trade College in Leipzig. At 23, speaking only German and Russian, he emigrated to the US as a political refugee. Remarkably within two years he was taken on by Lew Schwartz, the owner of **Abelard Schulman** and just two years later in 1961 was sent to London to develop their UK list. Increasingly interested in children's books, a lifelong friendship began when David McKee published his first book for Abelard: **Two Can Toucan** (re-issued by Andersen and still in print!) When Lew Schwartz died and Abelard was sold to Blackie, instead of returning to Germany or America to launch his own company, Klaus stayed here and has 'never regretted' it.

One secret of his success initially was 'being clever enough' to realise the importance of sales and distribution and of the three companies interested in providing this support, he chose **Hutchinson**. With thirteen reps, agencies abroad, premises to rent and a small children's list they seemed the perfect match. They bought 20% of the shares in the new company, providing valuable capital. 'They felt I added something and they found my books saleable and attractive' says Klaus looking back. **Hutchinson** is now **Penguin Random House** of course, but the 'very happy relationship' still thrives.

Andersen published just four books in 1976, one of which was from a debut illustrator he discovered: that was Tony



Ross? **Goldilocks and the Three Bears** and it was voted one of the best books of the year by the **Federation of Children's Books Groups**, not a bad way to start! Now with nearly 2000 books in print, **Andersen** publishes the full range of fiction right through to novels for older teens. Most famously and fearlessly the Carnegie medal winning **Junk** which changed the face of teenage literature forever. This seems appropriate since it was Melvin Burgess who changed Andersen too and led Klaus to publish teenage fiction for the first time (following his son's enthusiastic feedback on **The Cry of the Wolf!**) They have always been renowned for quality younger fiction and, even if Klaus regrets he has had so far no blockbuster best-selling series, that might now be on the cards with the success of [The Bolds](#) [3] from the inspired pairing of David Roberts and Julian Clary. Alongside the initially controversial but now



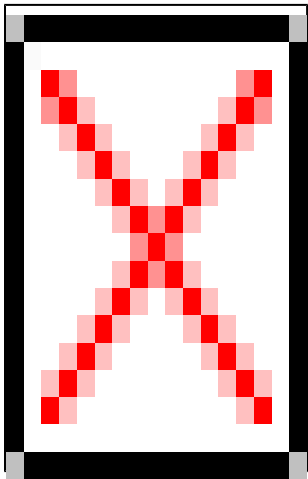
acknowledged classic picturebooks like **Not Now Bernard** and [Badger's Parting Gifts](#) [4], Andersen has also produced some of the most familiar and popular early year's characters: **Elmer** and **The Little Princess** are multimedia superstars! This mix of commercial success and award-winning enduring quality is exactly what those new companies would aspire to.

But, more importantly to its founder, Andersen is still small enough for Klaus to be involved in every aspect of a book's journey and to be able to nurture the kind of relationships with authors and illustrators that Andersen Press is renowned for. Having visited the office I have seen for myself, on the walls, the visible expression of the artists' affection for their publisher: the framed envelope art which was eventually published as **Letters to Klaus**, raising funds for **Save the Children**.

Klaus is a remarkable character indeed, interviewed by Pat Triggs for this journal when Andersen was just seven years old she even then described him as: 'one of (the) few people everyone likes to keep an eye on. Willing to take risks, outspoken, with a clear vision of what children's publishing should be'. He acknowledges that this vision may be 'giving children what he had missed'. Since then, in 1999, he became the first publisher to receive the **Eleanor Farjeon Award** for outstanding contribution to children's books and in 2010 he became the first and so far only publisher to be awarded Honorary Membership of the **Youth Libraries Group**.

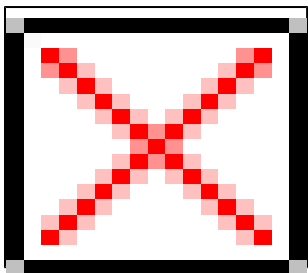
Another singular award: that of honorary citizenship of Bologna, points to a further key to the Andersen success story. He recognised very early on that selling international co-editions was crucial to profitable publishing and to that good relationship with authors. 'We may not pay the biggest advances in the world but we do a very good job in selling co-productions and keeping books in print'. He has attended every single **Bologna Children's Book Fair** and he received that honour at the 50th Anniversary in 2013! At first he was the lone voice of UK publishers but gradually where he led, they followed.

This international outlook means that from the very beginning he has boosted his list by seeking out the best books from



around the world. The list has always featured works in translation: by Janosch, Leo Leonni and Max Velthuijs, (resisting sales directors who claimed the latter would sell 50% more if published under the name Max Fieldhouse!) His American experience may have made him more willing to publish titles from there too. He 'could not believe' for example, that nobody in the UK had been interested in publishing Chris van Allsburg's **The Mysteries of Harris Burdick**. Similarly he snapped up **Caldecott** and **Newbery** winners like Rebecca Stead, who then went on to win the **Guardian Children's Fiction Prize** for Andersen with **Liar and Spy** in 2013. Another of his clever international acquisitions, **Way Home**, even won the coveted **Kate Greenaway Medal** in 1994. But it is still a sore point for him, with all his passion for illustrated books that he has not won the Greenaway with a book created in-house. This despite a roll call of artists published by **Andersen** reading like a textbook on illustration: David McKee, Tony Ross, Satoshi Kitamura, Michael Foreman, Susan Varley, Emma Chichester Clark, Sir Quentin Blake, Chris Riddell, Ruth Brown and David Lucas to name but a very few!

Although supposed to have taken a step back since his 80th birthday, it is this passion which still brings him in for five days a week and his ambition for the future is still to find that perfect, 'original and interesting' picturebook text and then find the artist who will 'create the magic'. Just like the time when Satoshi Kitamura, who at that point had not found a publisher in the UK interested in his quirky style, became angry at the lack of sales at his exhibition in Covent Garden, thereby reminding Klaus of a text from Hiawyn Oram sitting on his desk - the **Mother Goose Award-winning Angry Arthur** was born!



Perhaps the most celebrated and longstanding creative partnership that Klaus fostered and which we are all eternally grateful for, is that between Jeanne Willis and Tony Ross. Apparently Tony Ross is wont to claim that Jeanne is 'more creative than Shakespeare, who pinched many of his plots while Jeanne's are all original'. Klaus believes that she is our 'most important' and challenging picturebook author. **Chicken Clicking** a timely warning about internet safety, is leavened with her characteristic humour and does not frighten off those all-important gatekeepers - the teachers and librarians who Klaus credits for championing his books over the years. Indeed it is the closure of libraries around the world and the reduction in co-editions sold, that is his biggest worry for the future, particularly for his beloved hardback picturebook. But sales potential is not everything and he remains firmly committed to the notion that there are some books that 'just have to be published', indeed he intriguingly revealed he had turned down a bestselling picturebook because to him 'it was just not good enough for Andersen'.

There are many plans afoot to celebrate this 40th anniversary year. Watch out in particular for the launch of an **Elmer** related competition in aid of **National Libraries Day**. Having won so many and firmly believing in their value, Klaus is a big fan of book prizes. We both mourned the demise of **The Booktrust Early Years Award**, **The Mother Goose Award** and especially **The Kurt Maschler Award** which highlighted the work of exciting new illustrators. Having

launched the careers of many of today's most distinguished illustrators, in their fortieth anniversary year this publisher and his list will continue to excite and challenge creators to strive for and readers to seek out, the very best imaginative literature.

Formerly Learning Resources Manager at **Coventry Schools Library Service**, **Joy Court** is a consultant on reading and libraries, Chair of the **CILIP Carnegie & Kate Greenway Medals**, and reviews editor of the **School Librarian**.

Books mentioned

Struwwelpeter Heinrich Hoffman Dover Children's Books, 978-0486284699, £7.99

Two Can Toucan, David McKee, 978-1842700365, £5.99 pbk

Elmer, David McKee, 978-1842707319, £6.99 pbk

Not Now Bernard, David McKee, 978-1783442904, £6.99 pbk

Goldilocks and the Three Bears, Tony Ross, 978-0862648077

I Want my Potty, Tony Ross, 978-0862649654, £5.99 hbk

Junk, Melvin Burgess, 978-1783440627, £7.99 pbk,

Cry of the Wolf, Melvin Burgess, 978-1849393751, £6.99 pbk

The Bolds [3], Julian Clary and David Roberts, 978-1783443055, £6.99 pbk

Badger's Parting Gifts [4], Susan Varley, 978-1849395144, £6.99 pbk

Letters to Klaus, 978-1849397506

The Mysteries of Harris Burdick [5], Chris van Allsburg, 978-1849392792, £6.99 pbk

Liar and Spy [6], Rebecca Stead, 978-1849395427, £6.99

Way Home, Libby Hathorn and Gregory Rogers, 978-1842702321, £6.99 pbk

Angry Arthur [7], Hiawyn Oram and Satoshi Kitamura, 978-1842707746, £6.99 pbk

Chicken Clicking [8], Jeanne Willis and Tony Ross, 978-1783441617, £6.99 pbk

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