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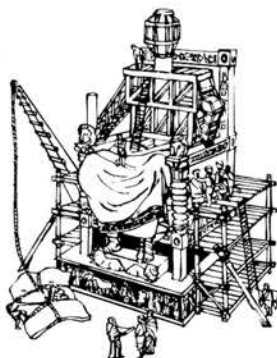
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Cover Story

The illustration on our cover is from **The Working Horse** by Geoffrey Patterson, published by André Deutsch, 0 233 97786 4, £4.95.

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EDITOR'S PAGE



Pat

We are putting the spotlight on Information Books in this issue of **Books for Keeps**. Not this time, though, on particular books or themes; instead we are raising larger and more general questions about who decides what is worth learning, where information books come from, how information is packaged and presented. With increasing discussion of the 'information-led curriculum,' of helping children to become active, self-directed learners, these become issues worth thinking about. A good way to start **Books for Keeps** 1986 we thought; so we started our own question trail (see page 4) and asked Marion Glastonbury what thoughts five years on the TES Junior Information Book Award panel had raised (see page 6).

A look back at 14 years of the TES Information Book Awards is instructive in itself. Three times the Junior panel has not been able to find a book of sufficient quality to make an award – the last time was in 1984. Natural History is the subject of the largest number of winning books in both Junior and Senior sections. Why? Is it because the subject lends itself so well to visual presentation – especially with the technical advances in close-up photography which make some of these books so staggeringly beautiful? Or is it a strong English nostalgia for our rural past which prompts publishers and consumers to favour this topic in preference to industry or technology – which appear only twice in the awards. The 1985 winner in the Junior section was **Kwa Zulu, South Africa** in the A & C Black Beans series: the story of a child living in a black township. The politics of the situation were indicated, a moral stance was implied but not spelled out. Should the book have taken a stronger line? So many topics of interest and concern in today's world have a moral and political dimension. History is no longer a 'safe' subject as we ask from whose point of view it should be told. When everything is so complex how can we present information so that it is understandable and accessible?

The challenges facing non-fiction editors are considerable, and they include matters of form as well as content. In the information field in schools, books are fast being joined by video and computer software. What does the book form do best? Are we getting the books we need? If you have thought about these or any other questions let us know.

Expert Enthusiasts

Picture Book Studio – a new name for an established imprint, Neugebauer Press (see page 20) is moving into non-fiction. First titles are in the favourite natural history area but they all do what good books in this area should: make you look at the world with new eyes and understanding. The very newest, **The Goose Family Book** does just that. It is what Konrad Lorenz in his introduction says all books that seek to teach children about the natural world should be: 'a thing of beauty that vividly brings home the beauty and harmony of nature and the natural system as a whole.' The story text, simple but richly informative, and the superb full colour photographs are by Sybille Kalas who is everything the writer of an information book should be: expert, enthusiastic and sensitive to her readers. Her delight in and feeling for the wild greylag geese whom she lives with and researches are clear in every image.

The book is the latest in a list with a considerable reputation for quality of design

and production. They are indeed beautiful books, as Michael Neugebauer clearly intends. Picture Book Studio is looking to establish itself more firmly in the UK market. As the list grows we wonder if it will move beyond its current strengths – exquisite reworkings, notably by Lisbeth Zwerger, of classic stories, folk and fairy tales. Beautiful illustrations are very desirable but we hope that Picture Book Studio editors will take their values into the difficult waters of new stories and contemporary themes.

Like Sybille Kalas, Geoffrey Patterson is the ideal guide to new ideas. His books bring the past alive and illuminate the present through a close and careful consideration of artefacts, tools and methods of working. **The Story of Hay** appeared in 1982 and immediately stood out as a delightfully fresh and original approach to social history – line drawings, full colour illustrations and text uniting in a most satisfying and absorbing whole. Subsequent titles have been outstanding examples of information books for the middle years and we are delighted to celebrate Geoffrey Patterson as one of the few individual and highly distinctive writer/artists working in the non-fiction field (see Authorgraph, page 10). Our cover illustration is taken from his most recent book, **The Working Horse**.

A Good Investment

Our How to . . . feature in this issue illustrates another way of bringing books and children together. **Scheherazade** was a direct result of Sue Stops' 'term off' to research ways of promoting books and reading in primary school. Her secondment reinforced her conviction that the quality of experience children have at book events and the opportunities teachers make for follow-up and building on that experience are crucial. Interesting to speculate what the results might be if all LEAs decided to invest in this sort of research. Sue is now back in her infant classroom but she is already working on **Eureka!** an event specially designed for infants to show how books and science experiences go hand in hand. Sue tells us that some publishers have expressed an interest. 'Providing books for infants is notoriously difficult. The tendency is to enormously under or over estimate what infants respond to and are capable of doing. We hope we can help by showing what can be done, how children work and what they need.' **Eureka!** is happening in May; we'll keep you informed.

By March you will have the second part (0-7) of the **Books for Keeps Guide to Books for a Multi-cultural Society**. We are putting the finishing touches to it now. It's bigger (more books, more articles, a special section on dual language books), better (updated information) and just as beautiful as the first one. As this **Books for Keeps** goes to press we shall be setting up the exhibition based on the Guides in Bookspace at the Festival Hall in London. We are working on ways of perhaps making it available for showing in other parts of the country. If your LEA or Library Service is interested, let us know. Meanwhile – keep well informed.

Where do Information Books come from?

Pat Triggs discovers the story behind the question.

Where do Information Books come from?

A daft question, you think? Just take a sample of non-fiction titles from library or classroom and look closely at the publishing information. You'll find out more than the date of publication; in those closely packed little blocks of text lurks a fascinating and often complicated story about the origin and creation of the book you have in your hand. A story which inevitably also involves all of us who buy books and offer them to children. Are you sitting comfortably? Then we'll begin.

We started by doing exactly what we suggested you might try. We took an armful of books published in the last year or so and tried to find out where they came from. Some, like the Hamish Hamilton **Building a . . .** series, had a cosy, predictable life story. Typeset in Oxford, printed in East Kilbride, published in Great Britain. You know where you are with a book like that. Then there was **All About Wheels** published by Dent in Great Britain (1985) – originally published in German by Otto Maier Verlag, Ravensburg in 1975. Printed in Italy. A book which had obviously been about a bit – and had two lives. And **Snail** in the A & C Black **Stopwatch** series, first published by Forlaget Apostrof, Copenhagen, Denmark (1985), which had apparently raced across the North Sea (having been filmed in St Helens and printed in Hong Kong) to be published here in the same year. Had Barrie Watts' **Butterfly and Caterpillar** in the same series, with the same St Helens/Hong Kong experience, gone in the opposite direction to make its debut in Denmark? Another story there we thought. And what about the very new **Passport** to series? That tells us it was 'first published' by Franklin Watts at three different addresses in Great Britain, the USA and Australia – with colour reproduction in Hong Kong and printing in Belgium.

An International Market

Why all this globe-trotting? As you might guess it's all to do with money – and that inevitably means, in the end, the price we have to pay for the books. Publishers will have their books produced – typesetting, colour picture processing, printing and binding – where they think they get the best value for money; and that may be in Italy, Belgium, Hong Kong, Colombia or Britain.

Another big cost in publishing is 'origination', creating the book in the first place: its text, illustrations, design, editing. So it can be beneficial for publishers to buy (and sell) the rights to publish each other's books especially if they are picture books or heavily illustrated non-fiction where all the expensive bit has been 'originated'. British hardback publishers of course don't buy from each other; they will buy from European, American or Australian companies. Frequently, as with **All About Wheels**, the text has to be translated but as that involves only the black part of the printing it is not so costly. This kind of buying and selling goes on all the time but especially at the International Children's Book Fair which takes place every year in Bologna. Publishers spend several crowded days looking at each other's wares and doing deals. This may be after the book has been published but increasingly a publisher will arrange to sell a book to other countries *before* it is printed, or even before it is written. These international co-editions mean more copies can be printed, which keeps costs down (more of that later). If a publisher is already an international company – like Franklin Watts, Hamlyn, Hodder & Stoughton, Viking Kestrel – then plans can be made for a book created in Britain to be published simultaneously by its other imprints in English-speaking America, Canada, Australia or South Africa.

The story was beginning to unwind and make itself clear. Then back with our armful of books we made another discovery – books with, it seemed, *two* publishers. Methuen's flap book, **Nature Hide & Seek: Oceans**, was created by Imago Publishing; **BMX Tricks Games Competitions**, published by

Collins Willow Books, was 'devised, designed and produced by Michael Balfour Ltd'; the Faber **How it is Made** series was 'conceived, designed and produced by Threshold Books'. We found Sceptre Books, Pamino Publications, BLA Publishing and, over and over again, Aladdin Books in association with Hamish Hamilton, Collins and Franklin Watts. Who were all these people?

We went on the trail of Aladdin Books and found Charles Nicholas, its Managing Director, who introduced us to the world of **The Packagers**.

Unwrapping the package

Packaging – as a publishing activity – started and rapidly mushroomed into a huge business in the late 1960s. Names associated with its beginnings include George Rainbird – remember all those huge glossy art books? – and Mitchell Beazley, creators of the million-selling **Hugh Johnson Wine Atlas**. Adult non-fiction titles became worldwide bestsellers; the coffee table book had arrived. Eventually packaging came to children's books and is still an important part of non-fiction publishing.

What is a packager? Let's start with a very over-simplified account. Packagers produce books: they think up, design, write, illustrate, print and bind books which they sell to publishers. A publisher buys X copies of a book at a price, publishes it at another price and tries to sell it. The publisher has no origination or production costs but is left with the cost of warehousing, marketing, selling and distribution AND the risk that the book may not sell!

In reality, of course, publishers and packagers are involved with each other long before the books are produced. The name 'packager' comes from the original design 'package' which the company takes to the publisher. This consists of a design, a visual layout – a mock-up of a couple of page spreads and a cover, a synopsis and perhaps a sample chapter. Currently this costs about £5,000 to develop and produce. If the package sells and the company gets assurance from publishers that they will take a certain number of copies, it will go ahead and produce the book. It's not enough for a British publisher to decide to take books; the packager needs international sales to make the project worthwhile.

A packaging company like Aladdin Books may have a particular relationship with a publisher which means that ideas for books which might fill a gap in the market can be discussed even before the 'package' stage. Franklin Watts produce about 140 books a year. 80 of these they will produce themselves with their own team of editors, designers, etc. About 60 they will take from packagers and Charles Nicholas at Aladdin Books can expect to get about 40 of these if he can come up with the right new ideas.

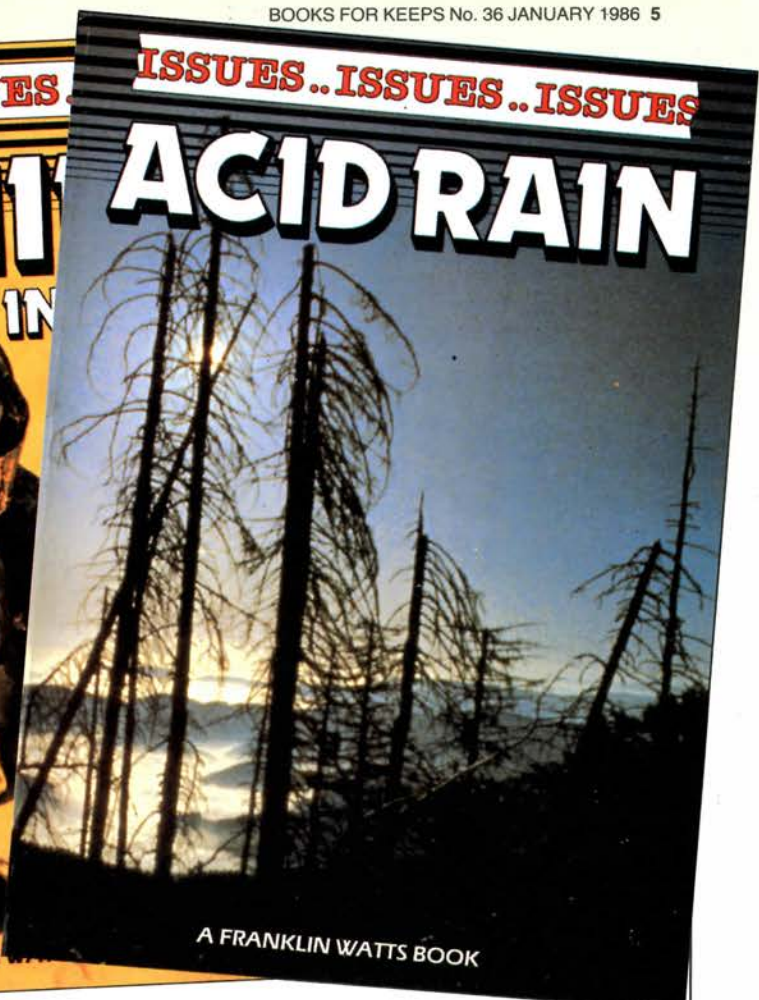
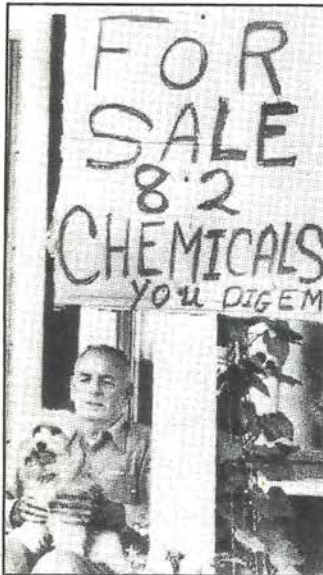
Why do publishers use packagers? Why not do the books themselves? Well, it means they can publish more books than their permanent staff could handle; they can make use of a small expert team for a particular kind of book; they can tap into another source of ideas for books, make use of another, perhaps expert, eye on the market. Some publishers like Macdonald and Wayland, who specialise in non-fiction publishing, don't use packagers. Others with a strong fiction list for example may buy in books to extend their non-fiction output.

Packaged books are *always* non-fiction; a book will be sold in the main on its visual appeal. The stars of the packaging business are the editorial designers, the people who decide what it will look like, how text and pictures will relate, how the information will be presented. Each Aladdin book usually has two designers and one editor (the wordsmith). Authors and illustrators are taken on freelance for each book or series. Authors are usually 'experts', but even they can get things wrong so extensive use is made of specialist consultants – individuals or organisations – to advise, comment and check as the book develops.

Charles Nicholas estimates that at the moment there are about six packaging companies who make a sizeable contribution to children's information books. Grisewood Dempsey, one of the giants, now has

Covers for the **Issues** series
(Franklin Watts).

Living on a chemical waste dump –
from **Pollution and the
Environment** (Macdonald
Debates series).



its own publishing house, Kingfisher. But for many of the boom years of the sixties and early seventies didn't last and in 1980 and 1981 a lot of companies went under. The unwary who euphorically went ahead and printed on promises of 10,000 sales were left stranded when recession hit and publishers could take only 3,000 copies. Those in the business today have learned to be more realistic.

To see ourselves . . .

From a publishing point of view, we are told, the British children's non-fiction market at the moment is very difficult, particularly in the area in which packagers often work, series publishing with an educational slant. The average 'life' of books has gone from three years to 18 months – competitive titles appear from other publishers and librarians particularly, publishers claim, are concerned about books being 'out-of-date' even in areas of 'traditional' knowledge. The institutional (schools and libraries) market with its frozen and savagely cut book funds is stagnant or even going backwards. (Very little children's non-fiction except for popular encyclopaedias, dictionaries, atlases and titles for Usborne and Ladybird is sold through bookshops.) So in the main reprints are out and print-runs have been cut back by 35/40% over the last five years.

This situation, says Charles Nicholas, leads to publishers of children's non-fiction – not particularly progressive at the best of times – playing safe with yet more books on steady, best-selling subjects: Dinosaurs, Space, Racing Cars, Nature and so on, all done in a similar format. Why is children's non-fiction so unadventurous? Because, say the publishers, institutional purchasers (that's teachers and librarians) are deeply and essentially conservative. We don't get exciting, risk-taking books because we wouldn't buy them if publishers produced them. What we like is the old familiar subjects handled in the old familiar way with the occasional addition of topics like Computers which we suddenly demand in great numbers. Chicken and egg? Do we get the publishing we deserve?

Packagers are affected by this conservatism, whether it originates with publishers or purchasers, because they have to sell their ideas. A big selling-point, in the early days and still, is the packagers' expertise in design. The book's visual appeal, its overall 'look', its integrated design are emphasised. But the book has to be about something and packagers know that publishers, however conservative, are on the look out for new ideas, eager to spot gaps in the market and to get ahead of their competitors.

Few publishers have attempted to deal with 'hot potato' subjects: issues and controversies which face us nationally and internationally and inevitably have social, economic and political dimensions. Notable exceptions have been Wayland's **People, Politics and Powers** series and Macdonald's new **Debates** series which this year has tackled Race, Women, Drugs and Law and Order. Both these series

(not packaged) are aimed at the 14+ reader. Franklin Watts new **Issues** series, packaged by Aladdin Books, takes topics like these to top juniors and lower secondary level. In deciding which subjects to choose for **Issues** Charles Nicholas had to think international; taking something of concern only in Britain or exploring it only from a British point of view would not sell enough copies. So **Acid Rain** and **Famine in Africa**, the first two titles (with **The Nuclear Arms Race**, **Terrorism**, **The Heroin Trail** and **The Palestinians** which will follow) were selected as subjects of current international concern and developed for an international audience. (The imagined reader is 12 in the UK, though the text has been checked on a bright 10-year-old, and 14 in the USA.) The idea is to bring information into full view and to present the form of the debate. Each book is meant to provide fuel for discussion in classrooms. 'It's not up to us to come to conclusions,' says Charles Nicholas.

What does all this mean for us?

Well, aside from questions about how conservative we are as purchasers, whether we really know what we want, how to communicate our needs to publishers, exactly what use we make of books in schools, there is the realisation that a significant proportion of the books on offer to us have been created for the international market. It's the price we have to pay for keeping down the price of full colour books with beautiful photographs, quality graphics and classy design. We, and the children, have become used to a high standard of production and design and, as we keep saying, books are competing with TV. Will children look at black and white pictures? They may have to if we are to have books which are specifically addressed to the British reader or on specifically British subjects at affordable prices. As we learn to put up with American spelling to keep down the cost of fiction must we learn to forgive the European Nature Book whose beautiful illustrations occasionally feature plant or bird not found in our hedgerows? Perhaps publishers will get better at co-editions, and on the plus side there's a lot to be said for children developing an international point of view.

Of course if we all had much more to spend on books we'd be buying more copies, print runs would go up, co-editions wouldn't be so vital and publishers could take more risks. As it is we are faced with the image of children all over the world reading the same book! Which raises some interesting questions (especially with publishing power being concentrated into fewer companies) about who decides what is worth knowing and how information is to be presented.

More and more it will be important to know where information books come from. ●

What do you know?

Marion Glastonbury has served for five years as a member of the Junior Panel for the TES Information Book Awards. Here she gives a personal view of non-fiction publishing for children in that time and in doing so raises interesting questions about what is being offered to children in the name of knowledge.

A few years ago, a county librarian challenged me to say what qualifications I had for judging children's information books. Casting about in vain for something in my past on which I might base a claim to expertise, I heard myself asserting that, of the works I'd seen, the best were so good and the worst so bad, nobody could help noticing the difference. Neither is it difficult for the 'non-expert' eye to spot flaws in the presentation of otherwise excellent material: an enlightening preface to wonderful shots of penguins from Oxford Scientific Films gets printed in unreadably dense paragraphs which disappear into the spine so that you have to wrench the covers apart. That's the sort of practicality your 'common reader' cares about.

On reflection, if I were facing a similar challenge today, I would make larger claims, on the democratic grounds that what passes for common knowledge is a matter for common concern. I might even argue for a continuous reappraisal by 'uninitiated outsiders' of what books tell the young: a grand free-for-all to scrutinize and discuss prevailing definitions of what is worth learning. Our adult experience serves to confirm or contradict the version of reality which we constructed in childhood. While adjusting our watches for Summer Time or for a transatlantic flight, we recall diagrams of the solar system. With luck, we visit places that were formerly just dots on a map. And, as we go about re-creating the printed pages of our childhood, it is legitimate to wonder about the blueprint that is on offer to succeeding generations. Are they being prepared for a changing planet? What, in the broadest sense, are for them the facts of life?

We inhabit a global village in which a transforming technology can make the exotic familiar and the familiar extraordinary. (It also furnishes proof, if proof were needed, that we are members one of another.) The effects are evident in both the content and form of children's information books. The **Computers in Action** series from A & C Black demonstrates the intricacy of the communication systems behind routine transactions: shopping in a supermarket and booking a holiday through a travel agent. Our perceptions of macrocosm and microcosm are extended by the triumphs of the camera, encompassing visions of the Earth from space and of babies within the womb. The family life of gorillas and the armature of the greatly magnified head-louse are, in close-up, equally accessible and equally strange (**Animals in the Wild** series, Belitha Methuen, and **Animals in Your Home**, A & C Black).

Nevertheless, awesome technical powers of visual reproduction impress us only if their deployment makes sense. Too many picture editors and designers mix images together in a spirit of 'Wotta lot I got!' Paintings and photographs overlap, nothing is to scale, and the gesture which intended colourful abundance leaves only a confusing jumble. By contrast, the impact of a single process

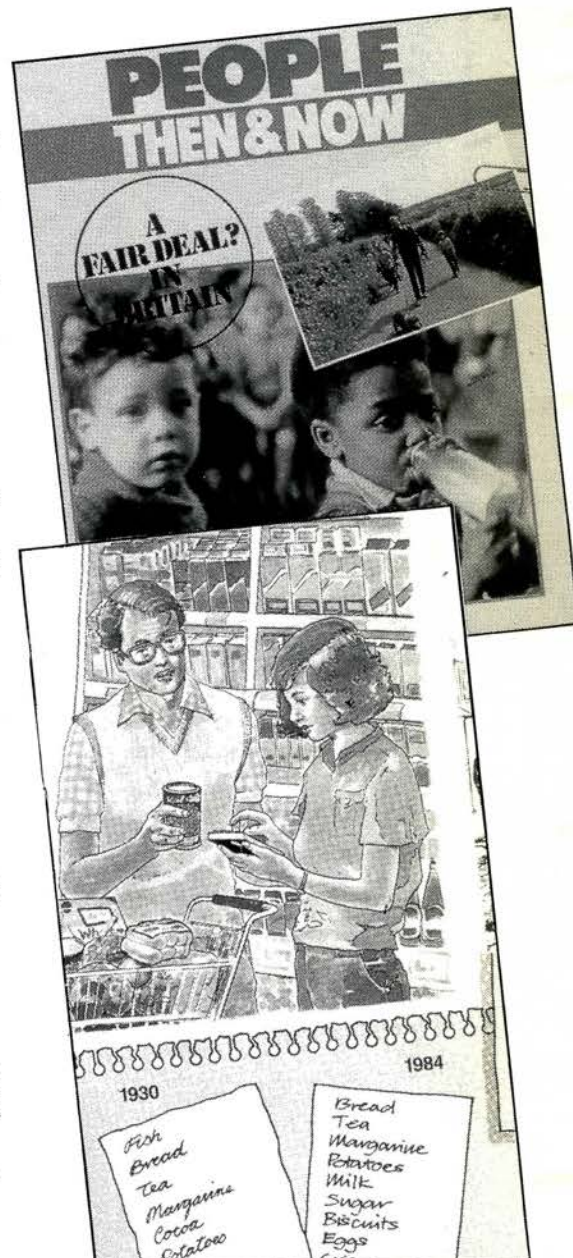
patiently and consistently documented is apparent in the inspired simplicity of the sequences in the **Stopwatch** series (A & C Black). Furthermore, in an age when the frantic fun-fantasies of many illustrators suggest that they would prefer to work in animation or advertising, there's a reminder that page-turning has its own dynamism in **Earthquakes and Volcanoes** by Imelda and Robert Updegraff, Methuen (recognised by the TES awards five years ago and still a model of its kind) where scenes of 'before' and 'after' are ingeniously dovetailed.

The forced jollity and deliberate chaos of which I complain are particularly rife in alphabets and counting books for the very young. The producer tends to envisage his audience as a bunch of riotous tots and, figuratively, raises his voice above theirs. Other topics deemed 'suitable' for infants are *The Seasons* and *The Weather*. Here too boredom regularly seeps from the page. When the team from Blackwell Raintree declare: 'Most people feel cheerful in spring' it sounds a knell through the nursery...

Writers who begin with a definition frequently imply that they are suppressing a yawn as they settle down to a day's graft at the typewriter. If you can't do better than 'Birds are animals with feathers', why bother? Sometimes, towards the end, invention peters out and patience is exhausted, so the narrative simply stops dead or the reader is urged to run away and do something else. Terry Jennings' injunction 'Write a poem called "Fire". Make some music to go with your poem' appears at least twice in **The Young Scientist Investigates** (Oxford). The result perhaps of a somewhat desperate pursuit of the approved 'integration'?

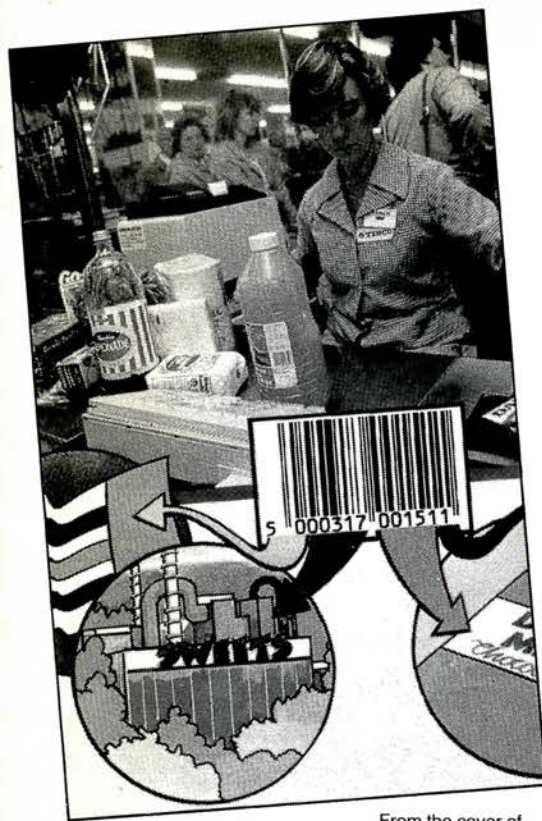
During the past five years, the output of publishers has reflected an awareness of the difficulties and dangers faced by children and of the influence, for good and ill, of the written word. Suggestions for DIY scientific experiments invariably carry safety warnings nowadays, and there is no shortage of stories dealing with physical and emotional problems: disability, hospitalization, divorce, bereavement. How the body works is a recurrent topic, and, at the cheaper end of the market, bodies look quite nasty in cross-section (though the function of hinge and ball joints is deftly expounded by Joy Richardson in **What Happens When You Run** (Hamish Hamilton)). Of late, squeamishness and euphemism have been cast aside; plain speaking about loos and poos is in vogue, so a certain scatological zest may attend the perusal of symptoms in **Mum, I feel Funny: a family guide to common ailments** by Ann McPherson and Aidan Macfarlane (Chatto & Windus) which won a TES Award in 1983.

It is possible to detect a growing recognition that the facts do not stand alone and 'speak for themselves', but are selected and arranged and accorded significance by human agency. Even the Mercator Projection which once afforded an



apparently rock-solid and unassailable foundation for our notions of geography turns out to be a distorting convention that conveniently enlarges Europe, placing us on top and centre-stage. Neither the motives nor the methods governing our investigation of the natural world are objective and impersonal. Witness the perennial fascination of dinosaurs and horses, and the choice of 'totem animals' by individuals between the ages of about seven and twelve, who scour the shops for items to add to their cherished otter/mouse/squirrel or polar bear collection.

Any branch of knowledge worthy of the name will at some level engage the



From the cover of **Supermarket Computer** (A & C Black).



From **Butterfly and Caterpillar** (A & C Black's *Stopwatch* series).

imagination and the emotions, and become associated with human purposes in a social context. Accordingly, children need practice in weighing evidence and evaluating argument. To simulate the process whereby the exercise of scientific logic is rewarded by the excitement of scientific discovery, a narrative of past events may be interspersed with archaeological observations from which the events have been plausibly deduced. This method has been successfully adopted by Beverly and Jenny Halstead in numerous tales of prehistory, and by Robin Place in **The Vikings: Fact and Fiction** (C.U.P.). Reasoning of a more subtle and sceptical kind will be required by readers of **Exploring Africa** (Longman) in which Ian Cameron eloquently describes the sacrifices of the Boer Voortrekkers in defence of their liberty to own slaves!

In a recent *Guardian* article (17 Dec 1985), Ted Nield deplored the prominence given to weapons systems in the **Hamlyn Modern World Encyclopaedia**. Should children take pride in the machinery of megadeath? Nurse the desire to make a career of it? Yet, in this ideological minefield, silence and suppression can be equally worrying. You could read **The Soldier** by Anne Stewart in Hamish Hamilton's *Cherrystones* series from cover to cover without realising that the smiling corporal was training recruits for anything more belligerent than polishing boots and touring foreign parts. What can and should be uttered 'devant les enfants'? Confess it: the grown ups have secrets so appalling that we haven't the heart to divulge them.

It is no accident that most of our words for the attainment of understanding are etymologically connected with physical possession, mastery and control. We 'seize on' or 'embrace' an idea; 'get to grips' with it. 'Concept' and 'perception' are cognate with 'capture'; 'comprehending' and 'apprehending' imply a firm grasp. By acts of intellectual prowess, the young appropriate their heritage. But suppose their prospects are such that, the more they find out, the more helpless and hopeless and vulnerable they feel? Mankind no longer boasts of 'conquering Nature'; that would be a Pyrrhic victory indeed. But educators must somehow break the news that we are bequeathing to posterity a poisoned globe: polluted seas, eroded soil, dying forests, stockpiled armaments. No wonder books of pseudo-astronomy foster spurious dreams of escaping from Planet Earth to some safer Spaceship.

Four years ago, considering the subject matter of over a hundred information books, I felt some surprise at particular gaps in the annual provision for readers of ten

and under: nothing on technology or engineering, no clues about social organization, no glimpses of how the world is run. (That was also the year in which we publicly demanded books on computing for juniors: a rash wish that was subsequently granted in folk-tale profusion: more than anyone can cope with, I suspect.) To interpret the present plight of the earth requires the study of complex economic and political institutions, the workings and influence of which are hard to demonstrate and still harder to dramatize. Nevertheless, some creditable attempts to tackle these topics have been produced recently for the upper end of this age-range and for secondary pupils.

People Then and Now, a new series from Macdonald, uses photographic and statistical data, comment and a set of fictional representatives to trace the origins of existing arrangements which are currently taken for granted or under threat. Anna Sproule's lively presentation of **A Fair Deal in Britain** juxtaposes free and private health care and education as contrasting alternatives, but stops short of analysing their interrelation and far-reaching effects.

Brian Haigh's companion volume **A New Community in Europe** assumes an understanding of market forces that would link the depiction of acres of crushed peaches with the caption stating that it is done to save farmers money. This is not self-explanatory. By the same token, Adam Hopkins' substantial and well-illustrated contribution on **Law and Order** to the *Debates* series defines 'bail' and 'solicitor' which are easy to define but offers no gloss at all on the Marxist paradigm of the apparatus of the State, which is confidently mentioned in the first chapter.

The most impressive of these new departures, *Issues* from Franklin Watts, will communicate something of value to readers of widely divergent ages. **Acid Rain** by John McCormick and **Famine in Africa** by Lloyd Timberlake are lucidly written. The diagrams of man-made change within eco-systems are models of clarity and they harmonize remarkably well with stunningly photographed landscapes. It may seem frivolous to dwell on the design features of these publications, but they do prompt a new reading of Keats' aphorism about truth and beauty. If the formulation of these tragic situations were not rendered searingly beautiful, we probably could not bear to contemplate them. I personally find plenty to disagree with in these books, but I feel certain that it is to these conflicts and controversies we must turn for a replenishment of what every schoolboy and every schoolgirl knows. ●

Details of books mentioned

Computers in Action series, Pamela Fiddy and Dick Fox-Davies, A & C Black, £3.95 each

Travel Agent's Computer, 0 7136 2653 4
Supermarket Computer, 0 7136 2652 6

Animals in the Wild series, Mary Hoffman, Belitha Methuen, £2.50 each

Zebra, 0 416 53340 X
Lion, 0 416 53330 2
Gorilla, 0 416 53310 8
Hippo, 0 416 53320 5

Animals in Your Home, Pat and Helen Clay, A & C Black, 0 7136 2590 2, £3.95

Stopwatch series, A & C Black

Chicken and Egg, Christine Back and Jens Olesen, 0 7136 2425 6, £3.50
Tadpole and Frog, Christine Back, 0 7136 2426 4, £3.50

Spider's Web, Christine Back, 0 7136 2428 0, £3.50

Broad Bean, Christine Back, 0 7136 2427 2, £3.50

Snail, Jens Olesen, 0 7136 2708 5, £3.95

Butterfly and Caterpillar, Barrie Watts, 0 7136 2709 3, £3.95

Earthquakes and Volcanoes, Imelda and Robert Updegraff, Methuen, 0 416 88120 3, £1.25 pbk

What Happens When You Run, Joy Richardson, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 11228 1, £2.95

Mum, I feel Funny: a family guide to common ailments, Ann McPherson and Aidan Macfarlane, Chatto & Windus, 0 7011 2631 0, £3.50

A Brontosaurus: the Life Story Unearthed, 0 00 104111 8

A Pterodactyl: the Story of a Flying Reptile, 0 00 104124 X

A Sea Serpent: the Story of a Nothosaur, 0 00 104123 1

Terrible Claw: the Story of a Carnivorous Dinosaur, 0 00 104112 6

Beverly and Jenny Halstead, Collins, £4.50 each

The Vikings: Fact and Fiction (Adventures of Young Vikings in Jorvik), Robin Place, C.U.P., 0 521 30855 0, £4.25 hbk; 0 521 31572 7, £2.25 pbk

People Then & Now series, Macdonald Educational, £5.95 each

A Fair Deal? . . . in Britain, Anna Sproule, 0 356 11227 6

A New Community . . . in Europe, Brian Haigh, 0 356 11226 8

Issues series, Franklin Watts, £5.25 each

Acid Rain, John McCormick, 0 86313 369 X

Famine in Africa, Lloyd Timberlake, 0 86313 370 3

HOW TO . . . Bring Children to Books

'Book fairs and book trains are definitely NOT the way to introduce books to children and encourage them to read'

says **Sue Stops**, who describes here an alternative book event designed to get children to see *why* reading is such a good way to spend their time.



Scheherazade – a way into stories – was designed specifically as an event for about only 100 children of any age from four to twelve. If the aim is – as ours was – to allow children to find out about stories and how they are made, to share enjoyment, to become enthusiastic about books and to *want* to read, it's no good hustling hundreds of them through a selling exhibition or crowding round a famous author where all they end up with is an autograph. Reasonably sized groups, a well-planned programme which lasted no more than 75 minutes, a focus on a small number of selected titles which the children could buy or not as they wished: that, we decided, was the way to do it and also to make the teachers who brought children to Scheherazade feel that their efforts had been worthwhile and that they had something to take away to build on.

When the children arrived there was a puppet show that lasted about 15 minutes. It was called 'The Night the Knight's Knees Knocked' and had been written by me and a group of secondary school children with characters and settings chosen by infants – a ghost, a castle, a knight, etc. I made the puppets and they were worked by six pupil volunteers from the school we were in. They picked up the idea quickly with only a short rehearsal beforehand and if there were a few mishaps no-one seemed to mind. The storyteller was in front and read the rhyming story. Through the puppet play we hoped to draw attention to the essential components of a story: a good idea, interesting characters, a time, a place and a narrative line with a beginning, a middle and an end.

After the puppet show twelve children and one teacher were chosen to dress up in costumes contained in large bags. The teacher was always given the monster costume – usually to much laughter. The rest included a ghost, a witch, a clown, Robin Hood, Supergran, Anansi, Cinderella, The Queen of Hearts, a pirate, a farmer, a dragon, a Red Indian. When we had a full line-up of characters, I introduced and we talked about particular books which represented each category – these included Pienkowski's **Haunted House**, Dupasquier's **Going West**, Dick King-Smith's **Saddlebottom**, **The Twits**, **Mother Goose Comes to Cable Street**. Robin Hood and Cinderella allowed us to bring in general categories like legends and fairy stories and refer to collections. The children contributed their own favourites for scary or funny stories. This usually lasted for about ten minutes.

The children were then free to wander around the exhibition from the

Schools Library Service, plug themselves into headsets to listen to tapes of Alan Ahlberg's **Please Mrs Butler** poems, play with all kinds of puppets or do giant floor jigsaws which we had made. They could also sign the visitors' book, add a joke or comment to our graffiti wall or buy a book from the bookshop stocked and manned by an enthusiastic local bookseller. Teachers could pick up book lists, read recent articles about books and reading which we had on display, and collect information about every organisation concerned with the promotion of children's reading.

About 15 minutes before the end we gathered the children together on the carpet for a storytime. Almost every story was told although we had two 'book stories': a short one, **The Hairy Monster**, and Adrian Henri's **The Punk Cat**, useful when we had groups of older children. We finished every session with **Some of Us** (Liljana Rylands, Dinosaur) which in one minute made the perfect finale. The whole event, by the way, was free.

For us, Scheherazade was a travelling book event. We went to six different venues in three weeks, taking generally four groups a day. In all we did 54 sessions, met 6,000 children and about 500 parents and teachers from 51 schools. We were financed partly by the LEA and partly by the local Festival for Children. I am an infant teacher and last term I was seconded for a term to investigate ways of promoting reading in the primary school in any way I chose. Scheherazade was part of the investigation. I've been encouraged by what happened. Bringing children to books and reading is essentially a subtle, complex and continuous process that involves a partnership between parents, teachers, librarians and bookshops. Book events can be a catalyst to get things going or move things along; if badly organised, they can be demotivating and even give out the wrong message – that it's all about *buying* and not about *reading*. We hope that Scheherazade gave children a chance (or another chance) to find the excitement, the pleasures of stories.

We could have taken it to double the number of schools. Equally any one school or group of schools with a few enthusiastic teachers or parents could do the same thing for themselves or each other with very little cost – most of our expenses were for a paid helper and transport costs. You don't need a lot of money or famous authors or competitions – just some people with enthusiasm for books and the time to think through how best to open the magic door to reading. ●

SOUND & VISION

Pob's Stories

Chosen by ANNE WOOD
Illustrated by JONATHAN HILLS



4

A CHANNEL FOUR BOOK

Look inside and find out about Fuzzball the bumblebee, Heave and Ho, the helpful tug boats, Minty and Hopsy, the two travelling children...

Pob's Book

Anne Wood, creator of *The Book Tower* and *Ragdolly Anna* for Yorkshire TV; the woman who rescued TV AM by introducing Roland Rat and then didn't have her contract renewed as Consultant Children's Editor because the company didn't think it needed a children's specialist, now has her own independent production company – Ragdoll Productions – and is busy trail-blazing on Channel 4 with *Pob's Programme*. (Ten new programmes this spring following on from the first highly successful series last autumn.)

At TV AM Anne's *Rub-a-Dub-Tub* had a huge following among the youngest viewers and they must be delighted to have found Pob popping up every Sunday afternoon at 2.00. Pop up is what Pob, a sort of pre-verbal surrogate baby, does; up and down and around creating amiable mayhem and communicating with sounds. But on each programme he enjoys a favourite story or poem.

It's no surprise to find that there are books linked with the series. Anne, who founded the Federation of Children's Book Groups and still edits *Books for Your Children*, the magazine for parents she launched in 1965, is convinced that television is crucial in bringing children to books and reading. *Pob's Playtime*, an activity book, was produced specifically to accompany the programme; *Pob's Stories*, containing stories from the series, is published this month (Fontana Lion, 0 00 672638 0, £1.50). All Pob's stories are specially commissioned from writers who include Philipa Pearce, Helen Cresswell, William Mayne, Marjorie Darke and Catherine Storr – to name only a few – and there are poems by Naomi Lewis.

A splendid collection for early listening – very few pictures – in play-group, nursery and reception class; just the right length and lots of variety in content, nicely judged to appeal to the experience and imaginings of the youngest.



Photo HTV/Goldcrest.

Robin of Sherwood lives – in his new (Jason Connery) incarnation. He will be back on our screens but no-one seems quite sure exactly when;

could be sooner... could be later. Whenever it is there is a new Puffin ready: **Robin of Sherwood: the Hooded Man.**

Back to the Future

The film is filling the cinemas. In case you hadn't noticed Corgi have two book versions based on the screenplay by Robert Zemeckis and Bob Gale. There is a novel by George Gipe and a large format 'STORY' illustrated with 50+ full colour stills from the film.

NEWS

Book Events Ahead

Storyfair 86

Exeter University,
August 27-30

A three day festival of storytelling conceived out of the belief that we all have stories to share. A mix of small groups and full gatherings will provide opportunities for everyone from the skilled and experienced to complete beginners to participate together. Geoff Fox and Brian Merrick for the Organising Committee promise stories in all forms – words, song, dance, music, puppets and clowning.

Details from: Sally Williams, Storyfair Secretary, School of Education, Exeter University, St Luke's College, Heavitree Road, Exeter EX1 2LU.

The Federation of Children's Book Groups' 18th Birthday Conference, April 4-6

The theme for the conference is *Now and Then*, and speakers include Nina Bawden, Shirley Hughes and Robert Leeson. The conference is being held at the College of St Hild and St Bede; you can be fully residential (Friday evening to Sunday tea) or attend individual events and lectures as a day visitor. Details from: Majorie Taylor, 3 Cotswold Road, Preston Grange, North Shields. Tel (0632) 595689.

Talking Together: April 1-4

The twenty-third annual NATE conference will be held at the University of York at the beginning of April. As usual the emphasis is on groups working together and this year there are seventeen 'commissions' to choose from. You could spend the twelve hours allocated for each commission investigating the

learning to write process, or considering what myths, legends and fairy tales have to offer in the classroom, or examining and discussing literature from different cultures, or reviewing media education, or exploring the possibilities of word processing in classrooms, or, or... The only problem is deciding which one to choose; there's so much on offer whatever age-range you are most interested in. And outside 'commission time' there are seminars, meetings, lectures, poetry readings and lots of exhibitions.

Details from: Michael Clark, 45 Church Street, Whittlesey, Peterborough, PE7 1DB.

Summer School on Children's Literature at Worcester College of Higher Education

This well-established course is offered annually to extend knowledge of recent fiction for children and provide opportunities to discuss the latest books and trends with

particular reference to schools and classrooms. Speakers this year include Aidan Chambers, Geoffrey Trease, Chris Kloet and Professor Barrie Wade.

Details from: Mary Croxson, Worcester College of HE, Henwick Grove, Worcester WR2 6AJ.

Hear to read

A new publication (and exhibition) from the NBL selects 100 of the best available audio cassettes of children's books. The guide is written by Rachel Redford and will be published on March 12. To launch the list the NBL is organising a seminar about talking books on publication day (2.00-5.30). Speakers will be Rachel Redford, Grace Hallworth, David Hounslow (Blackwell Bookshop), Michael Letchford (Decca) and Helen Nicoll (Cover to Cover). Tickets: £5 + VAT. For further information contact Chris Lee, Centre for Children's Books, NBL, Book House, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ. Tel 01-870 9055. ●

Authorgraph No. 36

Geoffrey Patterson

As with all the best illustrators, Geoffrey Patterson's work is instantly recognisable: bold, chunky drawings in which the sharpness of the detail, like his sparing use of colour, is never allowed to dominate the overall design. It's a very English talent. So is his choice of subject-matter – rural England viewed from the perspective of time. All seven of his books celebrate the countryside, past and present, from his first *The Oak* (1979) to his last *The Working Horse* (1985) which was runner-up for the Times Educational Supplement Information Book Award. Clearly he's an author/illustrator with farming in his bones . . . yes?

No!

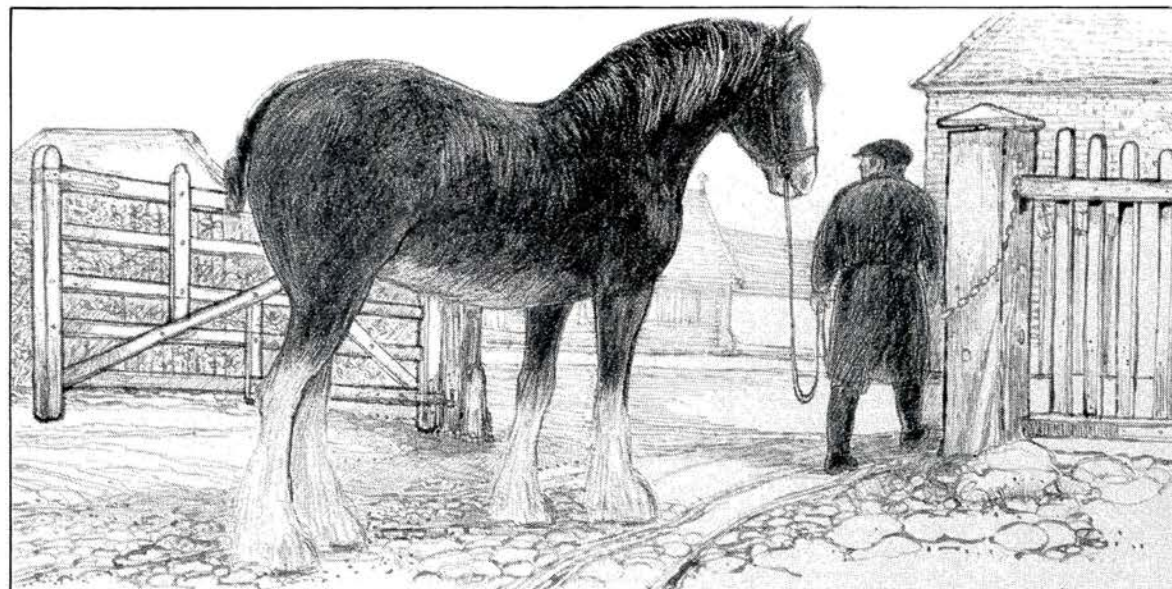
Astonishingly, he was born and brought up in Wimbledon and spent his early working life in London, mainly as a set-designer with BBC TV. It wasn't until 1976 that he 'became' the Geoffrey Patterson whose non-fiction picture-books for children are now seen to be in a class of their own. 'When I was working in the White City I looked out of my office and I couldn't see a tree. I'd spent ten years in this office and I thought "God, there's nothing green out of that window – all I can see is concrete." I decided my basic values needed to be looked at, like quietness when you go to bed and *space* – things that everyone should have but you don't get in London because there's always the drumming, the noise. So my wife Rosie and I moved out and got ourselves a cow – a jersey cow – and were into butter-making and cheese-making. We had sheep and pigs and we did that for about five years. I loved it.' This was a big change after all the advantages of television's 'fat money' which in his case included a smart flat in Putney overlooking the Thames. 'But I just knew it wasn't right so I packed it in. It was quite a shock to the system.'

What followed was freelance set-design, occasional work for the TV programme *Jackanory*, and teaching television and interior design – years of dressing from Oxfam and Sue Ryder shops while as much time, energy and money as he could spare went into restoring the four hundred-year-old, timber-framed Elizabethan farmhouse he'd bought in the village of Wingfield, Suffolk where he still lives. 'It's very rural – the same families have lived in this little village for generation after generation. I still feel like a foreigner in a sense. I love Suffolk people but you can never bridge the gap.'

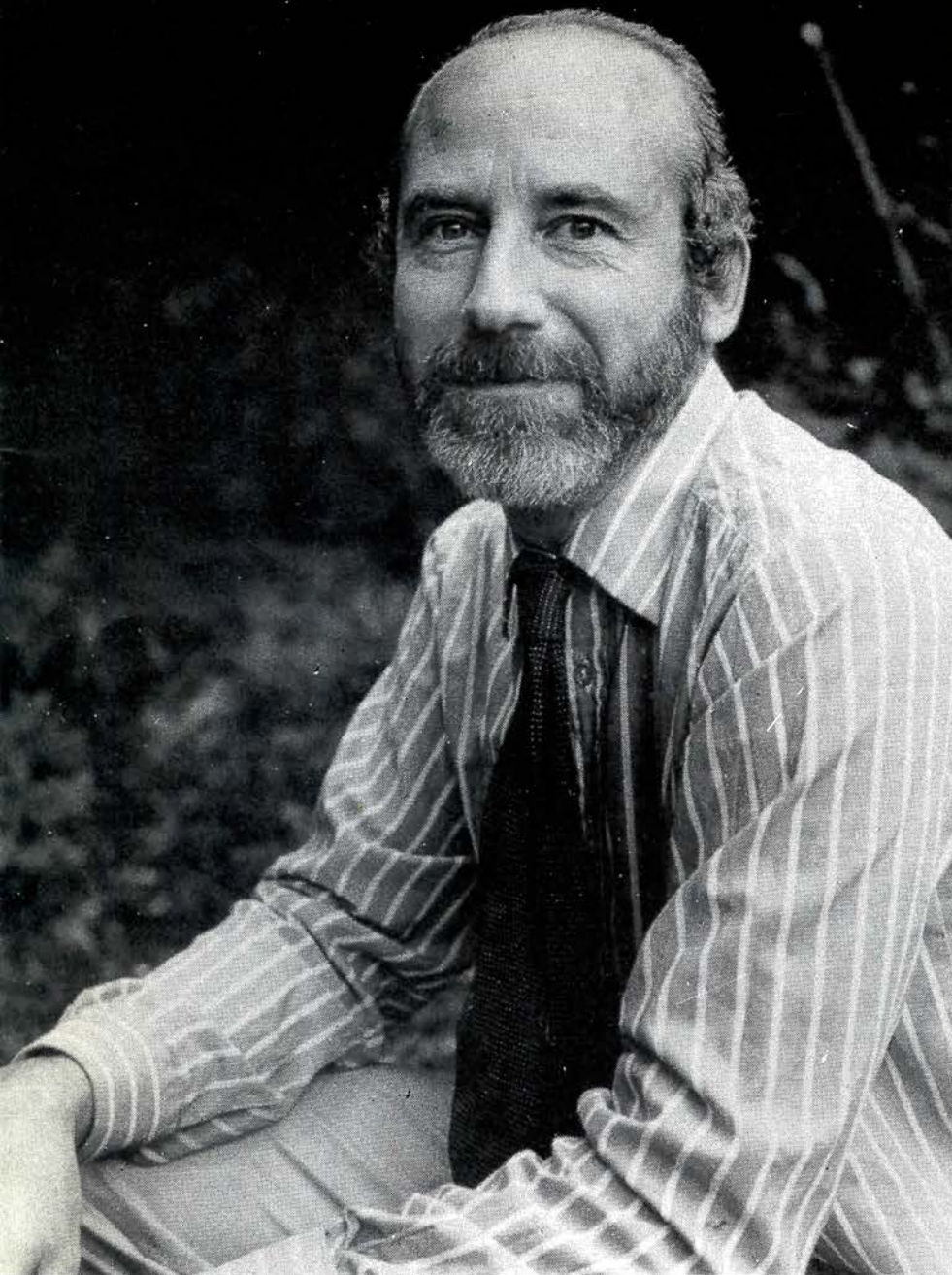
At the back of his mind, though, he always had a hankering to produce children's books – encouraged by the success of a former TV colleague, Graham Oakley, whose influence on his early attempts was, he claims, 'embarrassingly obvious'. Yet by the time he walked into the offices of André Deutsch with his first book *The Oak* he had already developed a style, an approach and subject-matter that was entirely his own. 'People were, and still are, cutting down trees willy-nilly – it crucified me to see the way farmers just chopped down mature trees when they wouldn't have dreamed of knocking down a Wren building or a piece of Jacobean architecture. I do feel passionately about trees – they're so beautiful and take so long to grow.' To his great good luck, Deutsch's Pam Royds recognised the quality of the book at once. It takes the reader from the fall of an acorn deep in the countryside at the time of the Spanish Armada to a special ceremony four hundred years later when the Oak, by now no more than a magnificent stump surrounded by a town, is supplanted by the mayor's official new sapling. Both the text and the illustrations for *The Oak* are deceptively simple – until the reader notices the skill with which the passage of time is conveyed, while simultaneously pinning down particular periods of history with an exact and witty eye for significant detail. No wonder Pam Royds was impressed and has been his much-valued editor ever since.

Next came *Chestnut Farm* (1980) which takes us through a complete farming year circa 1860. It was followed by *The Story of Hay* (1982) and *Dairy Farming* (1983) each further establishing what might be called the Patterson Perspective: rigorous research and meticulous drawing designed to arouse the curiosity and affection of young readers for processes, tools, machinery and people the author himself feels are fascinating, heart-warming and, all too often, on the brink of disappearing. 'I do a tremendous amount of research. The actual drawing takes relatively little time, but the amount of reading that has to go into the books is unbelievable. Take, for example, *All About Bread* (1984), it's such a massive subject which you've got to get into 32 pages so you've got to become almost an Authority before you can say "right I won't have that, but I will have that" . . . and it's always changing. You're always hearing people or talking to people – as well as consulting libraries and museums – because there are always these old boys around who remember all this and in twenty years' time they'll be gone. That generation is still there to draw on. I go down to the pub, to the boozier, because it's the meeting point of any village. Of course, you have to get to know them and it can take a long time but they'll tell you some lovely stories.'

It's these lovely stories which make a Patterson book so special – not because he quotes them but because they seem to permeate the text even at its most technical. When his words and pictures describe a horse-drawn mower or tedder or hayrake of the mid-nineteenth century, for example, the reader never loses the 'feel' of the thing, the sheer muck and muscle which was an integral part of the experience of actually operating it. 'Early farming is so romantic for people like me,' he says wryly, 'but for the farm-workers it was endless hard labour.' Not that he's averse to a bit of muck and muscle on his own account when his subject calls for them. With *The Working Horse* (1985) he called on his personal



A Clydesdale, from Geoffrey Patterson's *The Working Horse*.



Geoffrey Patterson.

he most admires, it's practitioners of *fiction* who tend to predominate – Arthur Rackham, Graham Oakley, Shirley Hughes, Tony Ross, Reg Cartwright. What links them is that they can all *draw* and this matters a great deal to Geoffrey Patterson. For him this is the most pleasurable aspect of the entire enterprise. 'I love it really – it's just like dreaming. You get your board set up, you get your pens or whatever, and you have your radio on and you just drift off into dream as you scratch away . . . one thing I do try to bear in mind though is that I must never illustrate what has been written about. I don't think you should say "this is an apple" then draw an apple. That's pointless. I think the two, text and pictures, should complement each other. I try to compose the pictures in such a way that a photograph wouldn't do it better – one thing you can do with illustrations is have a continuity, and capture action and draw in a period style. I like to think the pictures might appeal to the younger readers and the text to the older child.' Altogether, given his relish for the ever-expanding range of new materials available to artists, he describes the whole process as 'lovely'.

But it's also lonely. 'After you've listened to *Woman's Hour* for the tenth time, and the news, it becomes a bit like self-imprisonment which is why my teaching complements it perfectly.' As a part-time lecturer at Suffolk's well-known College of Art, he prepares students for the world he himself has rejected – the world of theatre and television design. The irony of this isn't lost on him. 'Yes, I do try to tell them that life is not about getting a job. I urge them seriously to do a bit of living – to learn some skills which will give them employment but to be very careful morally with what they get into.'

With a book on Wool nearing completion, what Geoffrey himself hopes to get into for his next project is a subject entirely new to him: the sea. 'I've been looking at photographs of Lowestoft and Yarmouth at the turn of the century . . . and they're beautiful those fishing boats. They'd be lovely to draw – along with the men and women who worked in that industry which has changed so much up to the present day.' It's a typical Patterson venture though not one, he readily concedes, that's likely to appeal to his own son, Oliver, aged 7 whose current consuming passion is for . . . computers. 'So I know what I'm up against! Anyone who does children's books has got to be slightly stupid about it to think they can. If you're going to be practical you wouldn't do it.' Maybe so, but it's an impracticality for which his readership – expanding steadily despite the astonishing absence so far of any paperback version of his books – can only give grateful thanks. ●

Photo by Sarah Burns.

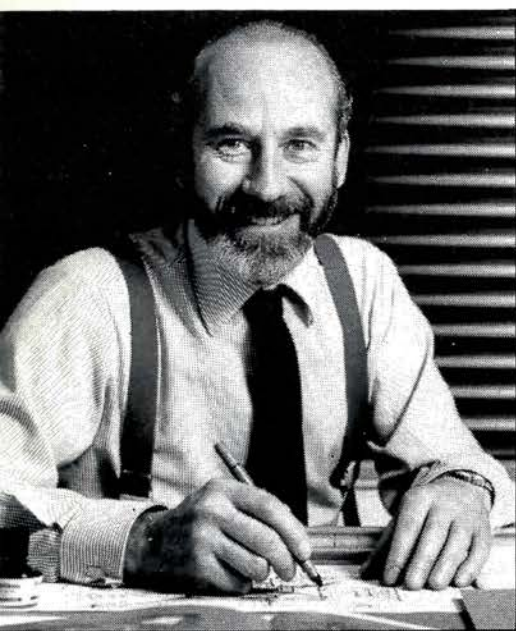


Photo by David Burns.

experience of horses as a youngster in Wimbledon and as the current owner of two of them, supplementing his knowledge with trips to stables like those at Haremere Hall in East Sussex. 'The writing and the research overlap because I'm stockpiling all the time – anything I see I'll write down so it's percolating away there. I think it's important to try and get it right. If you're presenting a bit of harness, for instance, you've got to draw it correctly not guess at it. I never guess. If I don't know what it looks like, I either get a picture of it or go and find it and look at it and touch it and

It's this crucial demand for documentary accuracy which for him distinguishes non-fiction from the fiction he's also produced. With the latter an author/illustrator can adopt a much more free-wheeling approach – as with his *A Pig's Tale* (1983) which combines rural detail with rural fantasy in the manner of Dick King-Smith. It's an attractive and potent combination which promises much for his forthcoming book *The Goose That Laid the Golden Egg*, due in 1986. He has hopes, too, of illustrating an original fairy-story by his own eleven-year-old daughter, Ruth. In fact, when he's asked about the illustrators

The Books

(published by André Deutsch)

The Oak

0 233 97111 4, o/p

Chestnut Farm

0 233 97208 0, o/p

The Story of Hay

0 233 97356 7, £4.95

Dairy Farming

0 233 97536 5, £4.95

All About Bread

0 233 97635 5, £4.95

The Working Horse

0 233 97786 4, £4.95

A Pig's Tale

0 233 97477 6, £5.50

The Goose That Laid the Golden Egg

0 233 97878 X, £4.95

REVIEWS

Nursery/Infant



I want to see the moon
Louis Baum, ill. Niki Daly, Magnet,
0 416 52290 4, £1.50

A small boy's insistence on seeing the moon before going to bed disrupts his normal bedtime routine. When dad finally complies with his wish and takes him outside 'there was nothing in the sky but big black clouds'. However, thanks to patience and a little help from the wind, Toby eventually gets his wish. Atmospherically illustrated in gentle water colours and told in a straightforward manner, this is an ideal bedtime book for sharing with the very young or for beginner readers to try for themselves. JB

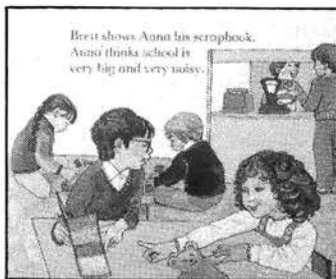


Owl at School
Helen Nicoll/Jan Pienkowski, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.496 6,
£1.50

Owl's lack of aerobatic ability causes Meg to send him off to school where he receives lessons in 'swooping and pouncing', night flying, hovering, diving and even swimming. All in all, school is a great success – Owl wins an event on sport's day and makes lots of new friends and Meg makes herself a new hat. Lots of fun for young (and not-so-young) readers and listeners: the trio has lost none of its magic. JB

Starting School
Althea, ill. Joanna Stubbs, Dinosaur,
0 85122 504 7, £1.25

A sensitive and realistic account of a little girl's first



day at a multi-ethnic infant school is accompanied by reassuring pictures of children going about their daily school routine. A useful little book for use at home and in school. JB

My School
0 552 52291 0

My Baby Brother Ned
0 552 52292 9

Sumiko, Picture Corgi,
£1.50 each

My School is a first person narrative wherein a little girl shares her first school experiences with the reader. The text is clearly laid out in large print – just the thing for learner readers – and the illustrations, though rather more cosy than those in **Starting School**, are packed with details of infant school life.

My Baby Brother Ned has the same little girl narrator, but slightly younger, telling us all about her new baby brother. She explains some basic facts about babies from her point of view, but to my mind the picture painted is just a little too rosy, with only the merest hint of sibling jealousy: 'People smile at Ned, but they don't always talk to me.' Children need reassurance that their feelings of resentment towards new baby brothers and sisters are not theirs alone. Nevertheless, a welcome book; and one written in conjunction with the National Childbirth Trust. JB

Come into my House
0 416 54450 9

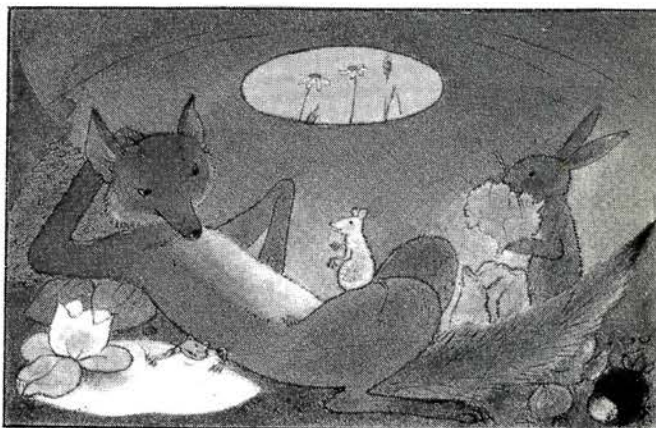
Tails for Sale
0 416 54470 3

There was a Little Pig
0 416 54470 3

Annie Butel, ill. Lucile Butel, Magnet, 99p each

Three splendid paperback originals from France which are ideal for learner readers. **Come into my House** has a cumulative text and tells how a

Reviews of paperback fiction are grouped for convenience under teaching range. Books and children being varied and adaptable, we suggest you look either side of your area. More detailed recommendation for use can be found within the reviews.



'Come in,' said the hare. 'You can live with us!' From **Come into my House**.

clay pot becomes the home of a mouse, a frog, a hare, a fox and a wolf before their domestic bliss is shattered by the bear who sits on the pot! The more scientific or literal minded readers may ask, 'How could all those animals fit into the pot?' but the story is great fun all the same.

Tails for Sale has a naturally repetitive text relating how the various animals purchased their characteristic tails at a fair and is essentially a neo 'pourquoi' tale.

The 'Little Pig' sports white gloves and carries a 'smart red umbrella' – just the thing for a rainy day. But even though he takes it on his walk, pig still manages to get wet.

The pictures in all three are delectable: gently humorous and executed in fresh colour wash. Well worth having in any primary classroom. Marvellous value too. JB

Peterkin's Wet Walk
0 552 52293 7

Peterkin Meets a Star
0 552 52294 5

Emilie Boon, Picture Corgi, £1.50 each

The fantasy play of young children is embodied in a delightful brief tale about a small boy and his friends, a rabbit and a hedgehog, who find a variety of uses for a toadstool one rainy day. The same trio also features in **Peterkin Meets a Star**, a more magical story wherein Peterkin captures a star but soon realises that the sky is where it belongs. Simply charming: warm, glowing pastel story-telling pictures and single line per double page spread accompanying narrative in each book. JB

Mouse Tales
Arnold Lobel, Young Puffin I Can Read,
0 14 03.1802 X, £1.75

This 'I Can Read' title has been a firm favourite ever since its first appearance in this country over a decade ago, and has now deservedly become a classic of its kind. In it, Papa Mouse tells seven delightfully dotty bedtime stories – one for each of his offspring – as they snuggle down together at bedtime. Perfect in all respects for apprentice readers: splendid stories, clearly and invitingly laid out and deliciously illustrated in pinkish tones. If by any chance you don't know this book, get a copy now; if you already have one, invest in several more. JB

The Shoemaker and the Elves
Retold and ill. Cynthia and William Birrer, Hippo, 0 590 70433 8,
£1.75

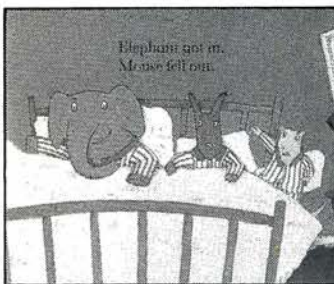
This traditional story was given an extra touch of wizardry by Cynthia Birrer in the hardback original through imaginative use of collage and stitchcraft in which the pictures were finely executed. Her skill which almost matched that of the elves was well served by the high quality of the design and printing. Unfortunately, this paperback version loses much of the original's magic. Instead of allowing the embroidered scenes to fill the page they have been reduced and printed within a yellow frame which results in a marked loss of definition and an altogether cruder appearance. The colours too compare unfavourably with the original. Those who have

not seen the hardback will very likely find this a worthwhile purchase but my over-riding feeling was of disappointment. JB

Fat Puss and Friends

Harriet Castor, ill. Colin West, Young Puffin, 0 14 03.1658 2, £1.25

Just the thing for new solo readers in this collection of five brief tales written by a 12 year old schoolgirl, featuring a rotund ginger tom and his feline pals. Humour is the essence of the stories in which Fat Puss finds an advantage to his shape; befriends a mouse; discovers he can swim; finds a swimming partner and celebrates Christmas, and it is highlighted by Colin West's zany line drawings on every page. Have a copy in every primary classroom. JB



Mouse, Rabbit and Elephant

Cliff Moon, ill. Jonathan Allen, Dinosaur, 0 85122 508 X, £1.25

Aimed clearly at beginner readers, this simple tale tells of three friends and their visit to the fair. Text and illustrations work together to create the whole story, helping children to learn one of the important reading lessons: that they must read the pictures as well as the words to fully appreciate a story. JB

Morning, Rabbit, Morning

Mary Caldwell, ill. Ann Schweninger, Magnet, 0 416 53190 3, £1.50

A celebration of life through the eyes of a young rabbit who almost leaps from the page thanks to Ann Schweninger's joyful illustrations. A celebration too of the joy of language through a sequence of words carefully chosen to



produce an almost poetic rhythm and which demands to be said or read aloud. JB

Witches

0 423 01590 7

Dragons

0 423 01600 8

Elephants

0 423 01610 5

Magnet, Rainbow Little Story Books, £1.50 each

Each of these books has three stories from the popular Thames TV series for three to seven-year-olds. As in most collections, they are mixed in terms of quality. The writers in the *Dragons* book have been more inspired than the others (Bridget Appleby's *Mr Dragon's Busy Day* is a little gem) but each of the collections has at least one compelling tale and I think the length of the individual tales (just right for a single reading session for the newly-independent) will be an attraction to infant teachers.



'He brought each one a glass of water,' from *Ten Sleepy Sheep* (Hippo).

I'll certainly return to the *Witches* collection in storyreading sessions.

The illustrations in the *Witches* and the *Elephants* collection are super: pictures are used to tell the tale. They are rather too 'cinematic' in the *Dragons* book. Overall, though, good value, especially if they provide continuity with stories known from home or classroom. Try one of the set in classroom or bookshop. CM

Alfie Gives a Hand

Shirley Hughes, Picture Lions, 0 00 662379 4, £1.50

Alfie's enthusiasm for Bernard's birthday party wanes rapidly when he realises that Mum and Annie Rose aren't invited and Bernard certainly proves anything but the model host. His behaviour almost ruins the party for everyone but a near disaster is averted thanks to Alfie's helping hand. This Alfie story will prove as popular as ever and deservedly so. Shirley Hughes' acute observation of the party incidents rings all too true. JB

Ten Sleepy Sheep

Holly Keller, Hippo, 0 590 70422 2, £1.50

When Lewis cannot sleep his Grandpa suggests he counts sheep, so he does. Soon his bedroom is full of balloon-

toting, streamer-throwing, biscuit-eating sheep having a party. Fortunately Lewis manages to quieten things down, putting them through his normal bedtime routine with the desired results for all concerned. A novel cure for insomnia and one which will provoke chuckles from young readers and listeners. JB

The Great Zoo Break

Neil Hollander, ill. Susanna Gretz, Hodder & Stoughton, 0 340 38963 X, £2.50

A wholly unbelievable story which not even Susanna Gretz's illustrative talents can lift out of its mediocrity: Hippo, Giraffe, Monkey and Crocodile go over the wall and then try to book a passage home to Africa but for that they need money. So they proceed to entertain in the town to earn their fares before departing by jumbo. Children's stories often require a willing suspension of disbelief but I was unable to play the game with this one. JB

There's a Train Going by My Window

Wendy Kesselman, ill. Tony Chen, Hodder & Stoughton, 0 340 38755 6, £2.50

A round-the-world train journey, told through pictures which are both fantastic and lifelike and verses which evoke the rhythm of the old steam locomotive, which takes a small girl on her dream trip to visit the wild-life of the five continents. The device of using and modifying the sound of the train in the second line of each stanza offers a model for young would-be rhymers to extend the story for themselves. Try sharing it with your children and see what they make of it. A high quality paperback reproduction. JB

Frog Hopping

Sylvia Fairley, Dinosaur, 0 85122 514 4, £1.25

More froggy fun, this time in the form of aquatic capers when the baby frogs visit Auntie Flo. A follow-up to *Frogs on the Moon* with the formula much as before: bright jolly pictures and an easy-to-read text with bubble talk. JB

Infant/Junior

Hairy MacLary

Lynley Dodd, Picture Puffin, 0 14 050.531 8, £1.50

This book, from a New Zealand writer-artist, could well become a classic in the mould of *Rosie's Walk*. Once again, it shows us how pictures

and text combine to tell stories and to teach reading. The young learn more about sound, stress, intonation and the patterning of language than in shelves full of reading schemes when Hairy MacLary from Donaldson's Dairy goes off for a walk with:

Bottomley Potts
covered in spots,

Hercules Morse
as big as a horse
and the other members of the doggie community. The climax is witty, surprising and, most tellingly, serves to 'tune' the young's reading. This will become a classroom favourite. CM



Gorilla

Anthony Browne, Magnet, 0 416 52460 5, £1.50

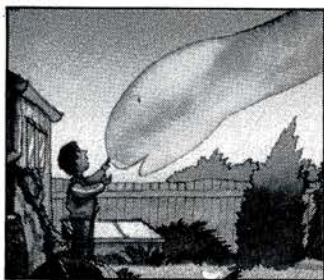
We'll go on (as we should) discussing the depiction of deep and complex feelings in books for the young. Alongside this, we need to look closely at the art and craft of a writer-artist who never dodges the opportunity to link reading with feeling.

Here, Hannah feels neglected by her father, so imagines herself a gorilla who takes her to the zoo. That's the story I read. But the young (and I've read this with sixes up to twelves) will need the time and space to tell their own, and to look at the ways in which Browne makes it mean. Through light and dark, shadows, perspective, framing of pictures, cinematic and televisual techniques which they often 'read' better than we do.

Like all his books, a rich, multi-faceted reading experience. CM

The Brontosaurus Birthday Cake

Robert McCrum, ill. Michael Foreman, Magnet, 0 416 54110 0, £1.75



This writer capitalises children's high regard for pterodactyls and brontosaurus. Bobby has a birthday cake in the shape of a dinosaur: when he wishes it real, it becomes so. The author is served well by the gifted artist who tells the untold bits – about the mystery of it all, and the anxious, sometimes pompous, adults.

In the last double page spread, the artist's imagination combines with the author's intention to invite a reflective reading. CM

Goliath and the Burglar

Terrance Dicks, ill. Valerie Littlewood, Knight, 0 340 37239 7, £1.25

Witty, well-told (if predictable) tale about Goliath, the little runt, who grows up to be an enormous, and day-saving, burglar-catcher dog.

Mr Dicks' writing will ease novice readers in and they'll enjoy the climax, though I'd have liked more feeling and character to match the action. Lively pictures and cover. CM

Anna, Grandpa, and the Big Storm

Carla Stevens, ill. Margot Tomes, Young Puffin, 0 14 03.1705 8, 95p

It's rare to find relationships between the young and the old so well depicted as in this one: a story about a little girl and her grandfather, stranded in the great blizzard which besieged New York in 1888.



Sixes to nines will enjoy the sense of history, unobtrusively brought in. There is some super dialogue and the characters Anna meets on the railway train will stay with the young long after the book is finished. The meanings within this book (the bonds between the young and the old; the elderly are people with feelings, too) are not pushed on the reader, but they won't be missed. CM

The Joyous Adventures of Snakey Boo

Donald Bisset, Magnet, 0 416 47880 8, £1.50

This author's sense of fun and wordplay usually appeals to six to nines. His storytelling voice is strong in this one about the Captain of a ship and its eccentric crew. Poems, rhymes, puzzles and jokes all play their part in telling the tales; the episodes, which can be enjoyed independently, are just the right length for readaloud sessions. Witty cover and pictures are the author's own. CM

Merry-Go-Round: Stories for seven year olds

Selected by Pamela Oldfield, ill. Linda Birch, Knight, 0 340 34844 5, £1.25

A delightful and imaginative collection of thirteen stories (and poems) for children around seven. The collection shows a gifted storyteller's concern for balance, so that it is good to have an involving story from Catherine Storr; poems from Max Fatchen and Kit Wright; *The Travelling*

Musicians from the Grimms, de la Mare's *The Ride-by-Nights*, and an Alison Uttley.

What distinguishes this collection is the personal, engaging nature of the introductions to the pieces chosen. These include fascinating biographical touches which teach the young that there are living people who write.

I'll use this a lot, not least to encourage the young to make their own similar personal collections. CM

The Grizzly Revenge

Ruth Brown, Beaver, 0 09 942300 6, £1.95

A thoroughly unpleasant lord and lady spend their time tormenting their servants and decimating the wild-life both within and without their castle grounds. It is no surprise then that their jubilee gifts to one another – a crocodile-skin handbag and a bear fur cape – should exact such bloody revenge and transform their chanel house home into an animal sanctuary.

Ruth Brown excels in creating a melodramatic atmosphere in her pictures. Here the medieval horrors are powerfully evoked and suitably spine-chilling for this 'grizzly' tale told in rhyming couplets which reads aloud very well. Strong stuff – not for the faint hearted. JB

Aunt Nina and her Nephews and Nieces

Franz Brandenburg, ill. Alik, Piccolo, 0 330 28714 1, £1.50

Aunt Nina is the kind of eccentric relation every child should have at least one of. On her cat's birthday, she invites her three nieces and three nephews over and, in a clever device which plays with the reader's expectations, gives them treats much better than the predicted zoos, toyshops, theatres.

The telling of the tale is in the pictures: abundant, lively, overflowing with the joy of a day without the grown-ups (Aunt Nina is a child at heart). See the picture in the toy room to understand how the children who'll enjoy this (probably fives to eights) link reading with play and games. A winner. CM

The Magic Pasta Pot

Tomie de Paola, Beaver, 0 09 941950 5, £1.95

A classic tale, along the lines of *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* about a little Italian boy who sets Strega Nona's magic into motion but doesn't know how to stop it, is given new life here by this gifted artist's integral pictures and text.

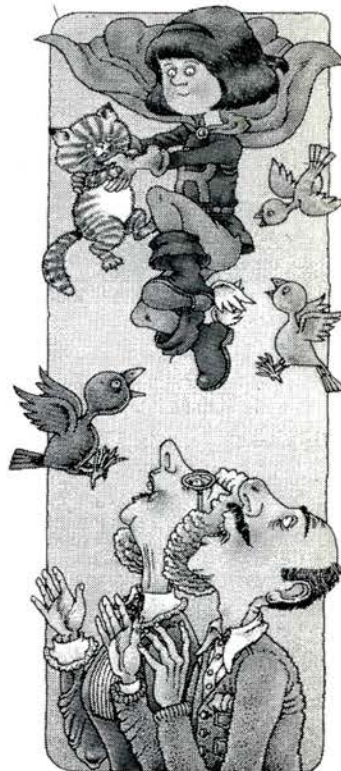
Deep pastel colours and the clever use of perspective catch well the bustling village community and, as in all good picture books, the pictures do

their work in helping along the pace of the tale. A valuable addition to classroom picture book collections – and one that's not just for the infants! CM

Rita the Rescuer

Hilda Offen, Magnet, 0 416 54740 0, £1.50

Spirited story about a little girl who's the youngest in the family. Not to be outdone, she gets herself a rescuer's suit.



Her exploits then include flying through the air, fixing the neighbour's car and scoring the winning goal. I like the author's verve and sense of fun – and young feminists won't miss the pastiche of the *Superman* style ('Is it a flash of greased lightning? No, it was Rita the Rescuer!'). Imaginative balancing of pictures and text: up to eevens will like this one. CM

Hairy and Slug

Margaret Joy, ill. Rowena Alken, Puffin, 0 14 03.1770 8, £1.25

Smashing group of stories for sixes to nines about Slug, the characterful little family car and Hairy, the lethargic dog, who always wants to get home in time for *Coronation Street*.

The banter between the car and the dog, and the family's children and their parents is witty. This author has a way of catching the quirky details (the car's first trip to a car wash) and exploiting the imaginative potential, without ever making the fun merely fey. My seven-year-old co-readers liked best the episode when Grandma gets bandaged up to help with the first aid badge – and went on to find the same writer's *Allotment Lane School* stories, also in Puffin. CM



Hairy

Junior/Middle



The Tale of Greyfriar's Bobby
Lavinia Derwent, ill.
Martin J. Cottam,
Puffin, 0 14 03.1181 5,
£1.50

A specially written re-telling of the tale of the Skye Terrier so devoted to his master that he watched over his grave for many years after his death. The setting and seasons of the tale are cleverly evoked: the Pentland Hills and the shady Edinburgh streets give the young a real sense of place. The ruggedness of the farming life and the warmth at the centre of the tale never gives way to sentimentality. Seven to evelens will want to find out more about the real events.

CM

Ghostly Companions
Vivien Alcock, Fontana
Lions, 0 00 672535 X,
£1.50

Excellent, unpretentious, but very readable story collection which should interest top juniors. 'Sea Bride' is a strong opener, with its tale of a budding young antique dealer in search of a bargain. With the purchase of a ship's figurehead 'for a snip', he thinks he's done very well. However, the owners' strangeness and their eagerness to accept such a low price puzzles him. Is there some mystery attached to the history of his prize? The trouble it causes certainly justifies his original fears, and the figurehead is eventually consigned to a watery grave, with some relief. Ten stories altogether, and all well enough written to recommend the book's addition to any school library's short story section.

BB

Three Gifts from the Green Dragon and other stories from Chinese Literature
Catherine Lim, Target,
0 426 20196 5, £1.35

A delightfully compact little book with lively and amusing illustrations for a collection of Chinese folk tales. The world wide themes of good versus evil, good fortune for the mocked and seemingly foolish and reward for the industrious are here: the wise Judge Ngai outwits three evil exploiters of the poor; Yue Guo proves to his lazy brother that persistence can turn a measly copper coin into a wealthy reward; the simple-minded Gong-Gong makes honest use of gifts from the dragon and eventually punishes those who mock him; Han Zi shames his father for his selfish treatment of grandfather.

All the stories are simply told

and might be enjoyed by young readers of eight or so. As a read aloud collection it has a use across a far wider age range, for teaching purposes or simply sheer enjoyment.

CL

Zesty
Sam McBratney,
Magnet, 0 416 52480 X,
£1.50

Five more school stories in this second collection about the life, times and schooldays of Jimmy Zest and gang. Lots of kiddiespeak here, with Gowso Knuckles, Legweak and Shorty illustrating the author's observation of children's obsession with nicknames for their mates. The stories are undemanding and not tremendously original, but they are quite fun to read aloud, and will be enjoyed in class sessions I'm sure. The best one is the first in the book, with a novel insurance scheme worked out by Jimmy to cover loss or theft of rulers, pens and sweets.

BB

The Cat King's Daughter and other stories

Ed. Fiona Waters,
Magnet, 0 416 52130 4,
£1.50

A book for fairy tale lovers of feminist tendencies for all the stories in this book require an enterprising female to save the day. At the same time each story has a traditional flavour with all the elements of problems to be solved and selfishness to be overcome. A cat who disappears, all except for the tip of his tail, is rescued from a fairy ring; a king is tricked into allowing a princess to marry the man of her choice; another princess discovers the real life outside the pamperings of the palace.

Some well recognised authors, nine satisfying tales, some quite demanding reading for younger children, but an excellent choice for the reading aloud shelf.

CL

The Witch Child
Imogen Chichester,
Puffin, 0 14 03.1585 3,
£1.50

Necromancy lives in the forest with her parents, a wizard and a witch. All day long she must learn spells and make potions in the long training to become a witch, herself.

This is not the life that Necromancy wishes for. All she wants is to live as other children in a cosy cottage, close to the town and to be able to go to school. Her determination to make this possible results firstly in kidnap, but eventually in having her dreams come true.

There are some nicely developed characters, especially the parents, Zachary and Abigail Gumblethrust, and the story flows with ease. There are also some laughs, particularly when Necromancy first arrives at school. Spelling is not, for her, the task that any ordinary child might expect. Very enjoyable, perfect reading aloud for the seven plus group and acceptable for all primary/middle children.

CL



Cat Walk
Mary Stolz, Fontana
Lion, 0 00 672483 3, £1.75

I was prepared to be very scathing about this book, particularly when, apparently with the author's approval, the barn cat found itself within a few pages, domesticated and dressed in doll's clothes. Fortunately it escapes from this predicament and after a series of owners and multiple adventures settles down in an animal sanctuary.

It is a very readable book. Those who don't love animals are surely dealt with and the author touches on the dignity of animals in the wild. A gentle adventure story and a satisfactory read for animal lovers in primary school.

CL

Tightrope to Terror
Robert Kellett, Magnet,
0 416 71740 4, £1.50

A shortish story written in a tight, tense style which keeps the reader alert from beginning to end. Two pairs of young people are coming to the end of their separate mountain holidays when they meet. There is conflict between them from the first, conflict that is only resolved when their lives are at stake as they hang from the damaged cable car high over the Italian Alps. Capable nine-year-olds were excited about this highly dramatic story. It proved just as exciting to children at the top end of the middle school range. A great success. Copies for the bookshop and the library.

CL

The Queen's Nose
Dick King-Smith,
Puffin, 0 14 03.1838 0,
£1.50

Mr and Mrs Parker are a rather stolid pair with two daughters. Melody, the elder, obliges her parents by never making excessive noise or mess and by appearing constantly willing.

On the other hand, Harmony is in perpetual discord with the rest of her family, a lover of comfortable old clothes, outdoor activities and, worst of all, animals. Dick King-Smith has often given his animal characters human traits. In **The Queen's Nose** he gently reverses this trick and allows Harmony to attribute animal traits to those humans she knows. Thus her father is a sea lion, her mother a pouter pigeon and her sister a Siamese cat. When Uncle Ginger arrives he is immediately recognised as a silver-tipped grizzly bear. It is Uncle Ginger, however, who recognises Harmony's loneliness and in his parting gift gives her, to solve, the problem of the Queen's nose.

Dick King-Smith has produced another perfect story, full of his quiet humour, his ability to reward the down-trodden without being in the least patronising. Again his ending is satisfying, possibly predictable but at the same time thought-provoking. If, like me, you have pupils demanding more Dick King-Smith then you will be delighted to offer them this one.

CL

Mists and Magic
Ed. Dorothy Edwards,
ill. Jill Bennett, Fontana
Young Lions,
0 00 672357 8, £1.75

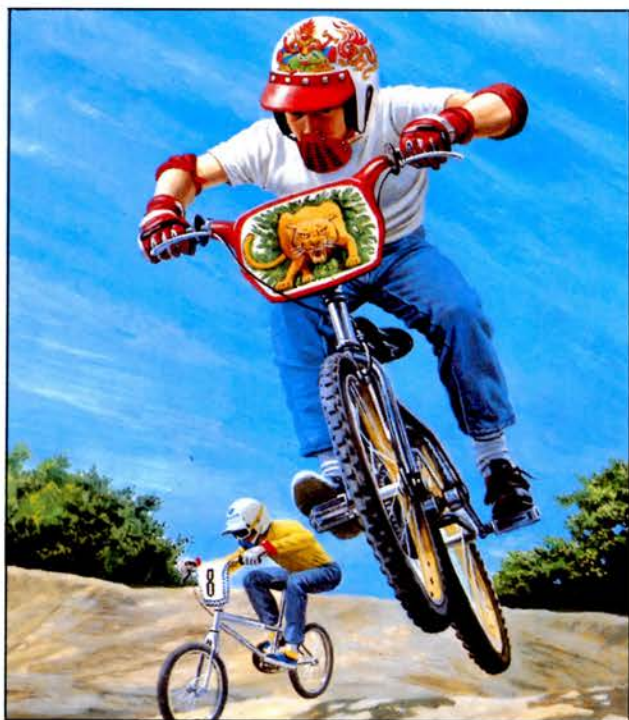
An imaginative story by the sadly-missed editor introduces this splendid collection of stories, folk tales, poems and legends, reminding us once more of how the supernatural lends itself so well to imaginative writing for children.



I've drawn so many riches from this that my problem is not to make this review into a list. But let me whet your appetite: there are some welcome familiar pieces (Noyes' **The Moon is Up**; Keats' **La Belle Dame**). There are several first-hand accounts of supernatural sightings (I enjoyed Cellini's piece; the eights/nines I read it to were spellbound by John Aubrey). There are short stories from such as Marjorie Darke and Margaret Joy and much, much more... A super resource.

CM

Middle/Secondary

Detail of cover of *BMX Star Rider* (Beaver).

BMX Star Rider

Caroline Graham,
Beaver, 0 09 943420 2,
£1.25

If this book has done nothing else it has let me in on some of the secrets of the language of BMX, a language that so many of the children I teach speak. Actually it is a very intense book, quickly read with a theme of bullying and theft to back up the excitements of the track. It should be approachable for most children of nine and over and offers a possibility, not for the reader with difficulties, but for the one who just never wants to read. CL

The Werewolf Mask

Kenneth Ireland,
Knight, 0 340 35340 6,
£1.50

Eight more spine-chillers to add to the shelves. The mask of the title story is Peter's purchase with his birthday money but nobody seems very impressed by it – not until he wears it to collect charity envelopes and goes to Mr Luke Anthrope. Then it's a case of it takes one to recognise one! Simon, accepting a 50p dare to stay in a graveyard tomb for an hour, has a similar bloodsucking experience with Miss Hipcriss in *The Empty Tomb* and Trevor's experiences aren't too healthy either when he plays with superstitions on Hallowe'en in *The Creek on the Stairs*.

Good surprise endings and creepy middles! Of doubtless appeal to lower secondary monsters. DB

Peril at Sea

Roderic Jeffries, Beaver,
0 09 941210 1, £1.25

Bob Barrant's quiet sea cruise on the S.S. Seconia for his health turns out anything but tranquil when the vessel is hijacked by a seven-man San Vincente terrorist group. Our sickly hero finds himself a willing under-cover go-between and even gets to plant the fire bomb that creates the final blast to the whole affair.

It's a very masculine yarn, frantic with action and pulsating with peril, a cut above the ubiquitous adventure serial and useful for keeping 10-13 year-old males plugged in to print. DB

Beyond World's End

0 583 30758 2

The Genie and Her Bottle

0 583 30705 1
Nina Beachcroft,
Granada, £1.50 each

Children who read *Beyond World's End* were positively excited by it: 'a very serious story but mystifying and exciting.' Set in today's world of a twelve-year-old boy, fostered by his grandmother and threatened by her possible re-marriage, and in a world beyond any time and place where another young child has been imprisoned by the Kraken, the story brings both worlds crashing together. Chris, with Jane, who in the real world is hardly his friend, overcome their testy relationship to seek out a legendary sword and confront the power of the Kraken. In

doing so they realise a little of how happiness emerges from pain, and temper their own needs and frustrations. A story full of tensions, fears and frustrations but eventual resolutions. (10 +)

The Genie and Her Bottle is a much less satisfying story. Unlike the very real characters of *Beyond World's End* those of this second book are decidedly plastic. Parents are obsessed with gin and tonic, tennis parties, holidays in the Bahamas; there is an absent minded Swedish au pair and the two children Alex and Rob appear to live lives utterly independent of those around them. Floating ephemerally amongst them all is a very bad-tempered genie released from her bottle by the children. Perhaps her bickering and selfishness is a metaphorical expression of the family's unhappiness! If there is any such intention then when she is finally stuffed back into her bottle there is no resolution to the children's real plight. A bad-tempered story which leaves the reader decidedly dissatisfied. CL

Cry Vampire

Terrance Dicks, Hippo,
0 590 70405 2, £1.25

A cliché-ridden piece if ever there was – witches called old Meg, a dark abandoned mansion, number 13, The Avenue, and even a brass knocker 'formed in the shape of a demonically scowling face'. Simon and Sally get tangled up with a trio of vampires aiming to set up a new territory for themselves in a small country town. Unfortunately for the poor suckers the crusading duo spot the difference in life-style and . . . Bloodthirsty youngsters will read it for want of anything better. DB

Jacky Nobody

Anne de Roo, Magnet,
0 416 53630 1, £1.50

Set in New Zealand's Bay of Islands in the 1840s, the story centres on the Maori rebellion of that period. Jacky, an orphan brought up by missionaries, witnesses Chief Heke's warriors dance their haka, or war dance, in defiance of the British. With his friend Noah, he chronicles, in this well told story, how Heke destroys the flagstaff flying the British flag, and the inevitable arrival of the Red Coats to suppress the uprising. Events do not quite work out with this predictability, and Jacky is last seen surveying the smoking settlement, shells falling from the offshore British gunboat. An incomplete conclusion which hints at a sequel to continue this interesting and unusual story. BB

Children of the Vikings

Jonathan Rumbold,
Granada, 0 583 30729 9,
£1.50

This is history Pinewood Studios style. The adventure's the thing; if it happens to be against a crudely barbaric Viking backdrop, well that lends an excuse for a bit of swaggering, sword-wielding action.

Two captured Angles, Elf and Olaf, end up as slaves in Iceland where they manage to upset their master Sigurd by riding off on his sacred horse, Freyfaxi. It's a good job Kari, the master's newly Christianised son, is handy to help them and when the volcano erupts (cue spectacular sound and visual effects) they can conveniently rescue their overlord and be forgiven and live happily ever after.

A sprightly adventure yarn for lower secondary, upper juniors. DB

You Two

Jean Ure, Beaver,
0 09 938310 1, £1.50

I'm not sure that the reader should look too closely at the very stereotyped pictures that the author presents concerning the teachers, parents and the children of private and comprehensive state education. That aside this is a very honest and satisfying story about Elizabeth who eventually finds her level in a large comprehensive school after the security of a small private establishment. Her genuine excitement in a new friend and her parents' reservations are very naturally drawn. The depth of Elizabeth's loneliness and the tremendous efforts that her friend Paddy makes to cover up for her shabby family are certainly feelings that children will recognise. Girl readers, in particular, will identify with the ups and downs of school friendships, and find this an absorbing read. For top middle school children. CL

Last Seen on Hooper's Lane

Janet Allais Stegeman,
Hippo, 0 590 70435 4,
£1.50

Another example of packaging that's likely to deter the older audience who would most enjoy the contents. This is a tense, pacy cops/robbers/hostage yarn centred around a deserted house about which Kerry Blake harbours romantic notions, and where two drugs couriers, vicious Ax and uncertain young Carl hole up whilst the former plots

revenge on an erstwhile associate. Kerry ends up in the wrong place at the right time and before you can say 'Mad Ax' she and her widowed mother are embroiled in a traumatic few days.

The diverse strands of narrative, the well-drawn build-up of tensions, and the changing relationship between captor and captive lead to a credibly unusual ending. Well worth promoting. DB

The Messenger

0 00 692399 2

Ballad of Favour

0 00 692400 X

Monica Dickens,
Armada, £1.50 each

Two books in what promises to be an extended series and no doubt a very popular one. In real life thirteen-year-old Rose is clumsy and a hopeless rider who loves horses for their beauty and grace. Hearing music, she is enticed to the lake beyond the town and there meets the Great Grey horse. In both books the horse leads her, in a series of time or place slips, to intervene in a difficult and tragic situation and eventually to save a life. There are some amusing character sketches: Rose's dour father, the garrulous mother of friend, Ben. The attraction however is in the constant expectation of the return of the mysterious horse and the next escape into someone else's world. One twelve-year-old reader claimed to be gripped after only a few pages. Quick, exciting reads for the 11+ group. CL

Nick & Co in a Fix

Bob Croson, Lion,
0 85648 953 0, £1.50

Lovely, tongue-in-cheek, 'football' story about the readable and understandable 'doings' of a group of young teenagers. Lots of flaws if one wanted to 'nitpick', but it's good fun and it's not pretentious – a good read. 'What do you think about it, Mr Clough, will he be as sick as a parrot or over the moon?' Some amazingly archaic names for the 'gang' with Whizzer, Sparky and Lump, being particular show stoppers, and a range of 'master plans' for every occasion – all guaranteed to go wrong. BB

Witches

0 00 662574 6

Vampires

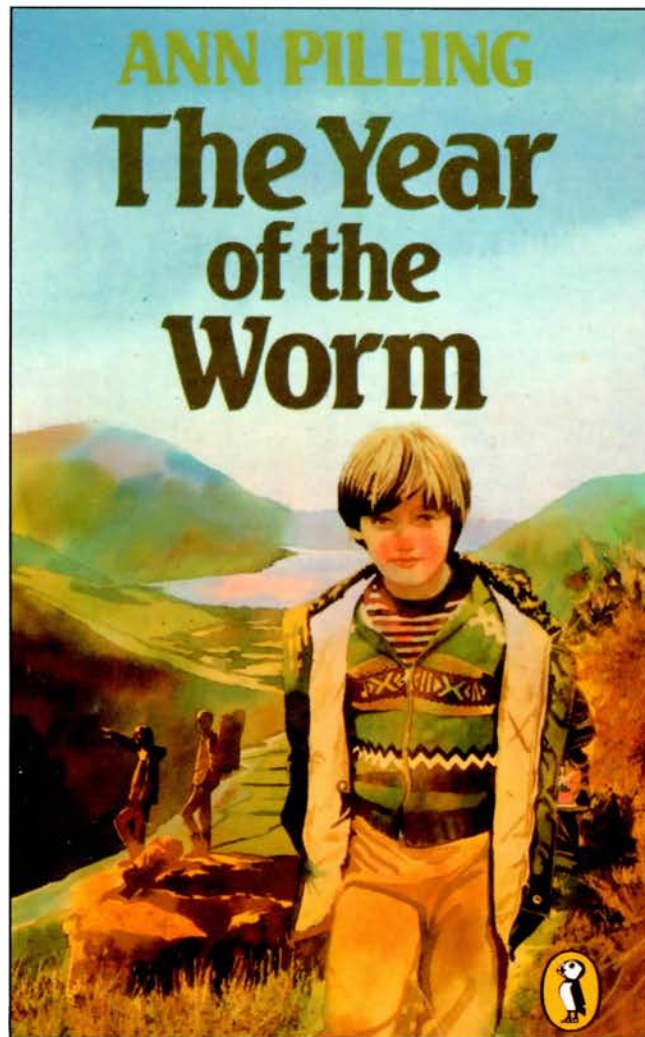
0 00 662575 4

Spooks

0 00 662576 2

Colin Hawkins, Fontana
Lions, £1.95 each

Three of the best from the anarchically inventive mind of Colin Hawkins, which should not be missed. Visual and verbal humour waterfalls in deluges of jokes, cartoons, puns, and every device of



comic torture is utilised to pack the pages. Already much loved by junior age (and early secondary) children in the Granada edition, these will be devoured by a new audience, I'm sure. All packed with irreverent humour to comprise a superb trilogy of fun that can't be strongly enough recommended. BB

Dacey's Song

Cynthia Voigt, Lions,
0 00 672566 X, £1.75

This Newbery Medal winner, sequel to *Homecoming*, has all the virtues that informed adults look for in children's books. It is indeed a very well-written, moving, sensitive read – just the sort of book that greatly rewards the most experienced reader, which is, of course, the very reason why it will be missed by far too many young people.

Dacey and her two brothers and a sister are learning to live with their eccentric grandmother and to settle, after a summer of trauma (*Homecoming*), into a more secure existence both physically and mentally. In Gram's words, to learn when to let go, when to reach out and when to hold on. Dacey's understanding of these phrases, only gradually acquired, becomes her song, painfully and arduously learned. DB

The Year of the Worm

Ann Pilling, Puffin,
0 14 03.1821 6, £1.50

An identification novel for lots of youngsters surely, who will recognise themselves in the pathetic Worm. Peter Wrigley – or Worm, for cruelty – is small, thin, weak and, naturally, unpopular. Bullied by anyone who can get a fist to land on him, he leads a thoroughly miserable school life. Like all such fictional schoolboys, he dreams of the daring deed that will set him up for life, completely reverse his image, change his personality, make him into a local hero. In a well-written novel, he finds, after several hiccups en route, just such an opportunity on a youth hostelling holiday in the Lake District. A tale of the Worm turned. BB

Witch Week

Diana Wynne Jones,
Magnet, 0 416 52870 8,
£1.75

Mr Crossley does not fancy the note left in the pile of Geography books – 'Someone in this class is a witch.' Nor do other members of the staff at Larwood House or is it Portway Oaks Comprehensive School? Is Mr Chrestomanci an enchanter, an inquisitor or just a school governor? Is Nan a witch? Or Brian? Or Charles? Is everyone a witch?

Who does Miss Hodge love?
Who is the Headteacher?

Diana Wynne Jones is a very funny writer. Her plots are often very complicated. This one is no exception. The story races with wild abandon from one crisis to the next and leaves a breathless reader at the end. For bright, older middle school readers, still ready to slip into a world of magic but logical enough to unravel the plot as they go along. CL

Messages

Marjorie Darke, Puffin,
0 14 03.1749 X, £1.50

Yet another collection of shivery tales, just what's needed to brighten up the dark winter evenings. There is everything the horror fan could possibly want. Sometimes separately, sometimes all mixed together like some gruesome mélange. You can have changelings, Christmas spirits (non-terrestrial, and certainly non-alcoholic), restless skeletons, broomsticks and vanishing acts. Change the order and conjure with the cast, you've seen it all before, in one guise or another. Still, there's always a new audience ready to be agog or to feel the old icicles up the spine, so this should satisfy in full measure. BB

The House in Angel Lane

Enid Gibson, Granada,
0 583 30843 0, £1.50

Paul has a fear of the sea after a sailing incident with his father. His efforts to overcome this fear amount to failure until he needs desperately to save his brother and sister, lured by a restless spirit to endanger their lives near the treacherous waters off Key Holm. Adelaide Wharton's tortured ghost serves another purpose though, and combined with Paul's new-found bravery an ancient mystery of another boy who lacked courage in 1914-18 is solved.

Rather a slow read, which might have been cut by 50 pages or so. It might find readership amongst mystery/ghost story addicts in the early secondary years. DB

Exiles of ColSec

Douglas Hill, Puffin,
0 14 03.1767 8, £1.25

First paperback volume of the ColSec trilogy; the other two will surely follow hotfoot after it. Douglas Hill is acknowledged as one of our finest writers in this genre, and the sustained excitement throughout the three book story justifies that reputation. ColSec is a mnemonic for Colonisation Section of the organisation that runs and rules the Earth. Lots of space hijacking, roaming teenage gangs, plot and counter plot, and the fast action typical of the author's style. An uncomplicated read which shouldn't disappoint addicts. BB

Older Readers



Detail of cover of Centre Line.

Waiting for the Sky to Fall

Jacqueline Wilson,
Fontana Lion,
0 00 672438 8, £1.75

Centre Line

Joyce Sweeney, Fontana
Lion, 0 00 672413 2,
£1.95

I'd advise reading both of these long novels in advance of offering them to older pupils. There might be some criticism of the subject matter from the odd parent.

Katherine in Jacqueline Wilson's significant novel is rated as gifted at school and home, notably by her very domineering, callously pushy father who has vested in his elder daughter all the life chances he feels he missed. The true price is paid largely by his obese wife and the younger, immature sister Nicola, and by Katherine herself as she awaits the O-level results that she knows will enrage him to greater excesses. Fortunately, Richard, her first boyfriend, surreptitiously enters her life at this time, and until the fateful letter arrives, life has a sweetness that school and home have never yet provided.

There is some very sharp observation of people and their differences, their prejudices and their strengths, and the novel moves through events credibly and swiftly.

Centre Line begins with a more physically violent, drunken father, whose thrashing of Chris decides Shawn to suggest that he and the other four Cunnigans run away there and then. The brothers' 'Easy-Rider' adventures, their sexual triumphs, their struggle for survival both practically and in their relationships with each other and their experiments with booze and drugs, take up the rest of this eventful novel, right up to the end of the road in a Florida courtroom.

The strength of the characterization is impressive and despite the fights, the ready-made lies and deceit, the sex, it's the caring one for another, even for the badly malevolent Rick, that leaves the greatest impression, plus, more importantly, the honesty and truth with which these boys show their finer emotions, which could be a salutary example for other young males. DB

The Changeover

Margaret Mahy,
Magnet, 0 416 52270 X,
£1.75

Margaret Mahy's Carnegie winner combines the supernatural with young love.

So much about it stretches belief when analysed coldly, and yet it's a spell-binding read.

After the evil Carmody Braque has tricked the soul from her young brother Jacko, the latter becomes a husk of himself. To reverse his deterioration Laura must trust a silver-eyed boy, Sorenson Carlisle, and accept his family's help to effect the change-over that will defeat her enemy. The mixture of unexplained powers and forces with developing relationships and family trauma is deftly and humorously handled and well worth a read for young adults. It's amazing to find it suggested for 8+ readers in the catalogue! DB

I Will Call it Georgie's Blues

Suzanne Newton,
Hippo, 0 590 70352 8,
£1.95

'... It's a bitch being a preacher's kid. A person always has to do the right thing for somebody else's reasons.' Lives made up of pretences and the pressures they cause sour the relationships between preacher Sloan and his family until virtual breaking point is reached; there's no space for pretending and falsity when the dreadful reality of Georgie's disappearance hits the Sloans like a tidal wave in full spate – both destructive and cleansing.

This is a very good read where the tensions are so keenly and movingly observed that one cannot fail to become utterly absorbed. I only hope the tacky cover doesn't put off too many older readers or teachers with teenage children of their own. Three of my staff have read it in a week! DB

The Haunting of Chas McGill and other stories

Robert Westall, Puffin
Plus, 0 14 03.1699 X,
£1.75

Not all eight are as superb as the title story but it's still a feast. There's a shape-changing cat in love with a man. There's a ghost that isn't allowed to be and a story of bikers. These two very different stories, interestingly, use the same setting. A short story and a short life for Martin in future England, 'a land of equal opportunity; to be unemployed' where qualities like ingenuity and initiative are bad news. Sally inherits a house on condition that she lives alone; but the house has an inhabitant. A young man facing unemployment in 1982 timeslips fifty years back to

glimpse real hardship. The Agony Aunt letter about the Dracula Tour is funny; try using the voice of Thelma in the Likely Lads. The Chas McGill story is funny, beautiful and moving. It lingers with you – though the experience Chas has is wiped from his memory, in fact the story cancels itself out. Don't miss it. TD

Poona Company

Farrukh Dhondy,
Fontana Lions,
0 00 672429 9, £1.75

At 12, the young Farrukh begins to explore his neighbourhood, The Sarbatwalla Chowk. Each of the nine episodes stands on its own as a rich and funny chunk of Poona life. The book also reads as a continuum, through adolescence and first job to Dhondy's scholarship to England. Characters of the Chowk cafés and businesses, fellow schoolboys and students, backyard inventors, Parsee, Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh are made vivid; gossip, rivalries, intrigues, losses, love affairs, ambitions – all the complexities of a community – are lovingly created in a collection to treasure and revisit. TD

Suffer Dogs

Frank Willmott,
Fontana Lion,
0 00 672355 1, £1.50

You know it's going to be gritty by the third 'Piss off', (p12). Eric's mum can't support six kids. So we get the lot: new city, alkies, resentful/criminal cousins, new school, strange kids with their own problems. There's family violence, good and bad teachers, unpleasantness about wogs and pooftahs. Also cricket, being raped, fights and pregnancy. Eric ends with a promising cricket future, and ambition to work in a crèche. Issues, tough times and naughty words for your Fourth Years? Goodbye. (That's 'Strine' in case you hadn't identified the Aussie origin of all this.) TD

Walk Through Cold Fire

Cin Forshay-Lunsford,
Target, 0 426 20211 2,
£1.80

Narrator, said to be crazy, describes her 16-year-old summer of high romance, high drama, hyperbole. Familiar problems – straight A student, wealthy father, he hates her, she hates stepmother – finds true self with beautiful,

charismatic street rebels. Desiree is one of 'the uncommon people' who 'can never accept anything, not even themselves', 'all feeling and poetry on the inside, all fire. And on the outside, icy toughness'. The minute she sees Billy's cosmic, dream-drenched eyes she wants to ask if he reads Thoreau or takes long walks at night. But the nights are a touch busy with passion, rock, violence, cars, cops and death and Billy couldn't read too hot. That's ok but I can't stomach the cute brunette and strawberry blonde who chirps.

Prize-winning first book by 19-year-old, said to be autobiographical. Not Susan Hinton. No need to buy it. TD

Silver's Revenge

Robert Leeson, Fontana
Lion, 0 00 672466, £1.75

This sequel to **Treasure Island** must have been fun to write. It has the flavour and adventure of the original, historical interest to be absorbed in passing or teased out, and a young teller called Tom, who is victim-hero like Jim Hawkins. Master Jim, Squire, Doctor, Ben Gunn, Cap'n Flint and most of the rest are there, grown older. Silver now operates as Mr Argent. The cast now includes Bristol Rioters and black servants.

The voyage back to Treasure Island almost turns into one of Leeson's Cimaroon stories, but ends with a sea-stained letter from Tom – year, lat. and long. indecipherable. Whose revenge? Whose book? TD

Cloudy Bright

John Rowe Townsend,
Puffin Plus,
0 14 03.1627 2, £1.75

A Joe-Blunt Yorkshire youth, Sam Horsfall spots Jenny Midhurst's expensive camera and knows at once what he must do – charm Jenny into letting him use it and, he hopes, win a photography competition, which would secure a job once he's left the Poly.

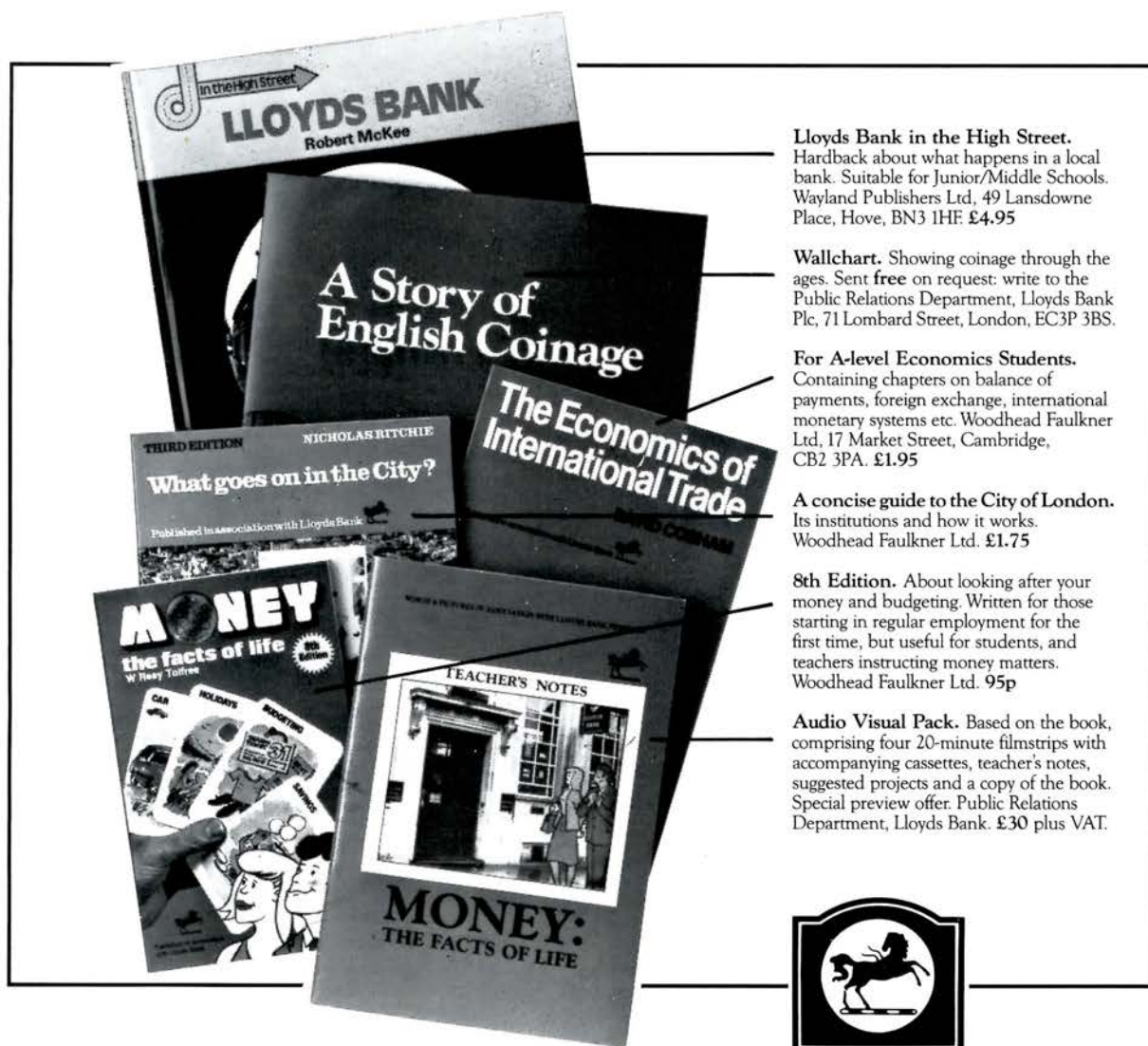
Realist meets dreamer; North meets South; Sam and Jenny begin a friendship which becomes more than mere expediency and blossoms into respect and affection.

There's a convenience about this story which irks; a lack of excitement which jars. Yet it's competently put together as we would expect from this author. It should find some readership amongst mid-late secondary. DB

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Picture Book Studio



From *The Goose Family Book* (Neugebauer).

Klaus Flugge (Andersen Press) once said to us at **BfK** that he thought Janosch was a difficult writer/illustrator to sell in Britain because he had a foreign name. Neugebauer Press presents an equally daunting collection of vowels and consonants for the linguistically insular British (say it Noy-ga-bower). Ask the average British book-buyer to name some publishers of picture books and Neugebauer probably won't be high on the list. To complicate and perhaps confuse the situation, Neugebauer books have since 1980 been promoted and distributed in this country by A & C Black; and they are also sometimes referred to by their name in the United States – Picture Book Studio.

From January 1986 Neugebauer, in an effort to establish themselves more firmly in the UK market, are getting to grips with their image-identity problem by re-naming themselves Picture Book Studio. All Neugebauer books – hardback and the new paperback editions – will carry the new name. (Those in the know who have learned how to say – and spell! – Neugebauer, please note.) They will also be promoted and distributed by a separate organisation – Ragged Bears.

So who is Picture Book Studio? It's an Austrian children's publishing company, based in Salzburg and owned and run by an extraordinarily energetic, globe-trotting young man, Michael Neugebauer. In 1964, when Michael was fourteen, his art-school teacher father set up a one-man-band publishing company; he was eventually joined by Michael who was training to be a graphic designer. In 1974 Neugebauer senior finally sold his little company to a huge German educational publisher. Michael stayed with it but found himself out of tune with large-scale bureaucracy and in 1979 broke away to reform Neugebauer as a new company with a new list, new titles. Within two years they had become very successful in Germany and Switzerland and by the early 1980s were beginning to penetrate and succeed in the all-important US market under the name of Picture Book Studio. Today with some 20 titles being produced each year they are amongst the biggest picture book publishers in Germany and a growing force in the US.

What is the source, in publishing terms, of this success? The basis of it all is probably superb book design and quality production. They are quite simply very beautiful books. But from his father and his experience of the German publishing juggernaut, Michael Neugebauer also learned of the paramount importance of good text. Good book design, he says, comes to nought if the words don't match.

Also central to the Neugebauer philosophy is the crucial role of picture books as a 'unique link between the visual, sensory world of the pre-reading child and the more structured world of words and symbols, of beginnings, middles and ends'. The role they play in language development, of story experience, of imagination, and the intimate sharing that they enable between adult and child.

'Values', 'standards', 'merit', 'taste', 'best', 'inferior', 'beautiful', 'mediocre', are words which occur often when Michael Neugebauer talks about books – more often than international co-editions and the 20,000 print runs for the 20 or so new titles each year which will sell in Europe, Australia, Japan, South Africa and the United States. Sales in some cases seem to be as much to adults as to children. That's fine; 'Good picture books should be enjoyed by all kinds of people, of all ages.' But it's the children and their intellectual, emotional and aesthetic development who are of central concern: 'Their minds are clear and clean and true. We never underestimate them. They deserve the very best design, the very best writing. I am certain that good taste can be taught – it is not inherited. The sooner our children see and enjoy good art, good writing, the more they will benefit, now and later, from the satisfaction of knowing what and how to appreciate.'

At the moment the Picture Book Studio artists include Ivan Gantschev, Marta Koči, Hanne Türk (creator of the wordless Max books) and most notably Lisbeth Zwerger. First of the new paperback editions include three Zwerger-illustrated Grimm stories, and the wordless nature books *In My Garden* (0 88708 007 3), *In the Woods* (0 88708 008 1) and *In the Pond* (0 88708 009 X) by Ermanno Cristini and Luigi Puricelli (£2.95 each pbk). These cleverly designed and beautifully illustrated books invite a close look at different environments – a new aspect is revealed at each turn of the page. Identification keys appear at the end of each book. They are well worth searching out for primary classrooms.

Encouraging the same understanding of the beauty and harmony of nature and our human place in that system in an interesting new departure for Neugebauer is *The Goose Family Book* (0 88708 019 7, £5.95 hbk) published this spring. By Sybille Kalas – who has studied and lived with wild geese – it is illustrated with full colour photographs and observes the whole cycle of a pair of geese rearing their young. Look out for it and the three star Picture Book Studio logo on the spine of more beautiful new books this year. ●

For further information, write or phone: **Ragged Bears**, Ragged Appleshaw, Andover, Hampshire SP11 9HX, tel. 0264 772269.