

Personalities in publishing: Gordon Graham

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Gordon Graham once described himself as 'a Transatlantic animal of a publisher': a goal to which he took a roundabout route, since the first nine years of his postwar career were as book salesman in India. But the subsequent segments of his fifty-year career in publishing — International Sales Manager for McGraw-Hill in New York; Managing Director of McGraw-Hill Europe; Chairman and Chief Executive of Butterworths; and now Editor of *LOGOS*, an international book journal — justify his self-description.^[1] People meeting him for the first time often assume he is American — unless they are American, when they assume that he is British.

A Scot, Graham came to publishing via legal training (at Glasgow University) and military service (World War II in Burma and India) — which together provided a fine, firm base for his later avocation to the accidental profession. By the end of the war he was a military Press Relations Officer '(euphemism for censor/propagandist)'^[2] in Delhi, and returned to India for nine years' combining freelance journalism with selling American textbooks to Indian Universities (all 48 of them). In 1955 he removed to New York as International Sales Manager for McGraw Hill; then in 1963 to Butterworths and to London, where he declined repeated offers from Robert Maxwell (a man who 'spread himself too thin').¹ He was concerned with the development of LEXIS, the computer-assisted legal-research service launched in 1973. As he puts it, 'Butterworths licensed the LEXIS system and wired the by no means willing English legal profession into Dayton, Ohio'.^[2]

Graham was a member of the Advisory Board of *Scholarly Publishing*, 1970-96. From 1985-87 he was President of the UK Publishers' Association (PA), after its only contested election; most PA office bearers had come from family houses or the old establishment. It was a time when the electronic onset was beginning to agitate the publishing scene seriously, and President Graham devoted much time to this new alarm. Other areas of concern were publishers' relations with librarians, and competition in the international markets.

Graham saw his retirement from publishing in 1990 rather as 'graduation', and claims since to be enjoying freedom in that state rather than leisure.^[1] The graduation was extended in 1993 to an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Stirling, presented by the Director of its Centre for Publishing Studies as 'marking this University's relationship to a great cultural industry by honouring a leading practitioner of his generation'.^[3]

In 1992, Graham wrote for the International Publishers Association a 24-page brochure, *What*

publishers do - from authors to readers, distributed in its tens of thousands (and in translation) to governments, corporations and academic libraries to explain the publisher's role.^[4] While seeing the purpose of all publishers as alike 'to be the catalysts between author and reader', he maintains 'there is no assembly line': the manifold publishing specialisms differ extremely. The publisher is compared to an orchestral conductor: 'like conducting, publishing is not only an aggregate of creative skills, judgment and knowledge, but also requires exceptional response to the creativity of those whose works are being performed' and sensitivity to the tastes and needs of the audience. The publishers' part is 'both reflecting and helping to shape human progress'.^[4]

Who better qualified to look back on so much experience of publishing and pronounce upon its state and prospects? Graham frequently does so: his journal articles and conference papers fill ten box files.^[2] He holds that there is no such animal as 'the book'; they are each individual, not generic.¹ He views the apparent electronic take-over most caustically. 'To communicate direct is not to communicate effectively',^[5] 'When the *aficianados* of the keyboard, the screen and satellite tire of their endless, unedited, uncontrolled, verbal interaction, I expect to be around to hear these electronic apostles say, "Well, thank goodness that's over". It was only, after all, the development of a new format'.^[6]

In 1990 he 'realized a dream of twenty years' and founded *LOGOS: The Professional Journal for the Book World*, 'addressed to all who are professionally involved with books ... concerned with relations not only between sectors of the book community, but also between national book communities';^[7] 'to focus on meanings, not news; on experiences interpreted as well as reported; on history more as illumination than reminiscence'.^[8] *LOGOS* is now in its eighth year of quarterly publication, read in 34 countries and seen as 'bridging between nations; between disciplines and professions; between private and public enterprise'.^[9] Graham has written to date 31 editorials, musing on the nature, scope and world of publishing. The latest eight form a series, 'The business we're in', in which he posits a matrix for the transfer of knowledge, with seven functions — those of author, editor, producer, publisher, distributor, storekeeper, reader — resulting in seven manifestations — message, text, format, publication, dissemination, access, understanding. Perspective, freedom, creativity and fulfilment are all parts of the process. An editorial has been devoted to the role in the matrix played by each participant. The publisher's is represented as the central of the seven functions, involving catalysis as resulting from his perspective,

decision from his freedom, coordination from his creativity, and publication as his final manifestation.^[10]

Other philosophical speculations in LOGOS have included Richard Abel's pondering 'The book publisher's cultural role', a taxonomic approach to measuring the value of books; a historical comparison of books' price against value; and 'Book publishing: profession or career? The ethical dividing line'. Philip Altbach wondered 'Why are there no profound and passionately argued theories of publishing? ... There has been no constituency for the analysis of publishing, either in its theory or in its practice. ... That the publishing enterprise is not a focus of research and analysis is both perplexing and worrying'.^[11]

Among other bookish 'retirement' activities, Graham has been since 1991 a director of the first Polish publishing house to be privatised after the collapse of communism, and is voluntarily assembling a 700-volume memorial library of the literature of the war in Burma from 1942 to 1945, a project he sees as a contribution to reconciliation between allied veterans and their Japanese former enemies.

The transatlantic creature maintains homes on both sides of the pond. In the landscaped grounds of his house in Marlow, Buckinghamshire, are a custom-built office for LOGOS, a rockery (built with Westmorland stone), bird sanctuary, pool with waterfalls, bridge and dam ('giving a hint of Scotland and Japan'), surrounded by magnificent trees. Here have been held editorial board meetings for LOGOS, a garden party to celebrate its seventh year of publication, and the wedding reception for Graham's daughter, with Scottish country dancing. He and his wife Betty, who was his business partner for forty years, also have a summer retreat in the Adirondack Mountains between New York and Montreal.

While today he continues to function in five of the seven roles he identifies as essential in the process of

knowledge transfer — author, editor, publisher, salesman, reader — and to consort closely with the other two — librarians and printers — he feels the greatest challenge of the electronic age is to the creativities of reading. In a recent editorial, concluding his series on the publishing matrix, he wrote: 'Readers underestimate their power and their responsibility. Our responsibility is to be selective and discriminating. We are doorkeepers of conscience and consciousness'.^[12]

References

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