

Profile: Keith R. Courtney

Keith Courtney, was born in Bebington, Cheshire and attended Calday Grange Grammar School for boys. Although some family remain in the area Keith moved South in the early 60's after leaving school at sixteen and joining the Rank flour milling company in 1958 because they offered him more money than Barclays and Midland banks who were both anxious to recruit his services. His work with Rank took him frequently to Liverpool dockside where he was involved in customs clearance on flour shipments with a munificent £6 per week as his reward. At any rate, this was much better than school which he couldn't wait to leave.

In 1962 he moved South to Winchester as Asst. Company Secretary to Warren & Sons, printers and stationers. Warrens had been acquired by Taylor and Francis in 1959 and were largely engaged in printing scientific journals as well as looking after the print needs of Winchester College. During the period 62-67 Keith learned the ins and outs of the printing trade but was becoming increasingly interested in the wider world of publishing. He was mightily pleased, therefore, to be appointed Company Secretary of Wykeham Publications, a newly formed subsidiary of Taylor and Francis in 1967. WP was set up with the purpose of persuading top research scientists, in liaison with experienced school teachers, to write books on specialist scientific topics which would be comprehensible to pupils and others interested in science. This highly commendable idea produced a string of fine publications which were distributed and marketed by Chapman and Hall. However the market was really too small to sustain the project and the Wykeham series did not generate sufficient profits. The inspiration behind the series was Sir Nevill Mott, FRS, who knew all the top scientists and Keith recalled with admiration the man's persuasiveness and farsighted approach in bringing modern science to young people.

In 1976 Taylor & Francis decided to sell their Winchester operation and centralize in Basingstoke while maintaining a London editorial office. At this point Keith joined the main publisher's office of Taylor & Francis as Sales Manager for both books



and journals. He had been keen to end his involvement with the printing side of the operation and now embarked on a full career in publishing, something he had anticipated with relish since first visiting the Frankfurt Book Fair in 1967. As he put it, at that point he became completely bitten with the publishing bug. Frankfurt was such a seminal event in his life he has returned every year since and to the present eagerly looks forward to the next visit.

He was appointed to the main board of Taylor & Francis in 1988 as Sales and Marketing Director and has seen the 20 journals and 10 books per year when he joined the company increase to 150 journals and 300 books, most of the growth having occurred in recent times. It was with deep satisfaction that Keith spoke of the continuing independent status of the company, a condition he hopes can be preserved.

Nowadays, 85% of T & F's business is in exports. Exclusive agencies have been set up in Australia, New Zealand, India and Japan and sub-agents operate in other major territories. Keith supervises these overseas operations at the cost of extensive travelling and has made many friends among business colleagues overseas. He is responsible for all agent appointments and is responsible for "hiring and firing" as business needs dictate. Taylor and Francis also have an editorial office in New York, a marketing and distribution office in Philadelphia and a typesetting production unit in Washington. His first trip to the USA in 1979, selling distribution rights, taught him much about sales methods which were some years ahead of practices back home. He learned fast about self-mailing, use of credit cards and 800 phone numbers. His visits to librarians, bookshops and

wholesalers proved invaluable and took him into the agency agreements sector which is at the core of successful selling overseas. At this point one became aware of Keith's undiminished enthusiasm for marketing and his ability to adopt and adapt new ideas.

He looks forward to the future with optimism and keen anticipation. He sees that Europe will continue to develop as a major market but does not anticipate any decline in the importance of the USA. He sees great potential in the Far East, with Singapore providing an excellent base for developments in China, Taiwan and South Korea. He has made several trips to China and was a member of the publishers' delegation there in 1981. He has dined in the Great Hall of the People, visited the Great Wall and seen the terracotta army in Xian province. He regularly attends the Beijing Bookfair and his travels have taken him to Japan and the major cities of Eastern Europe.

Keith is an active supporter of UKSG and NASIG. He sees great value in the bringing together of varied interests and is a strong advocate of the exchange of information and ideas among publishers, librarians and agents. He feels that librarians need to understand the commercial need for profit and investment but at the same time is sympathetic to their current financial difficulties. He believes we need to be totally open and fair in dealing with each other. He firmly asserts we are all one industry and cannot afford to withhold crucial information from each other.

One outcome has been his willingness to serve on the Executive Board of NASIG - he will complete his three years' service shortly - and has attended all their conferences, including the Inaugural conference at Bryn Mawr in Philadelphia. He has greatly enjoyed this close contact with American librarians and has regularly added to his trans-Atlantic experience by attending ALA, SLA and MLA conferences.

Needless to say, all this has kept him away from home and far more than he has liked. His daughter and two sons, aged 15, 18 and 20 at the moment are

showing no sign of interest in publishing but Keith seems philosophical about their way of life and accepts that young people seem less interested in a long-term dedication to a single career than their parents.

Keith's lean frame betrays his interest in a wide range of sporting activity. Business prevents his wide involvement these days but he played local soccer as an adult and took up golf at the age of 12. He has found the latter very useful in terms of cementing business contacts and has enjoyed playing in the USA and Japan. His soccer interests nowadays extend to a season ticket with the erratic but entertaining Southampton F.C. His reading is largely restricted to paperbacks hastily grabbed at airports and finds a good novel the best possible antidote to the boredom of extensive travel. He loves the New Forest and has a 1/3 acre to garden, a size of plot which proves to be troublesome when he returns from long trips. His wife first spotted him at amateur dramatics when he was playing Sir Lancelot (with a Liverpool accent) and hasn't been able to keep her eyes off him ever since. Keith's final dreadful secret was admitting to be something of a closet musician. Although he cannot read music he has taught himself guitar, piano and ukelele and greatly enjoys performing until someone else walks into the room.

My first interview with a publisher proved to be both enjoyable and stimulating. It was good to be warmed by real enthusiasm for the job and loyalty to a high quality independent publisher. Keith proved to have a happy blend of pragmatism and subtlety in his approach to life and work. He was extremely modest in discussing his own contribution to the success of Taylor and Francis but spoke fervently of the need for publishers, above all, to maintain quality and provide good service. He was enthusiastic in discussing the future and stressed his total involvement in and commitment to the world of publishing. A good man to have in your team, I concluded. □

John Cowley