



BfK Briefing ? May 1993

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Children's Books of the Year 1993

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Alas, Julia Eccleshare's last year as selector, introducer and writer-up - and in each capacity she's never been on better form. Generous, sharp-eyed and deft, her annotations are as incisive as ever. So is her Introduction which takes the DFE and You-Know-Who roundly to task for misdemeanours all too familiar to **BfK** readers. 'Trumpets must be blown for children's books as never before if high standards are to be maintained,' she writes... and few have blown them more effectively than Julia.

Congratulations to her, to Andersen Press (who sponsor the publication) and to the Children's Book Foundation on another excellent edition. Next year, Madeleine Lindley takes over with a panel of 12 readers in support. They have a hard act to follow.

Copies, price £4.99, available from the Children's Book Foundation, 45 East Hill, London SW18 2QZ, or `phone 081 870 9055.

Catalog Llyfrau Plaant A Phobl Ifainc

...or The Catalogue of Welsh Books for Children is now available in a version updated from the 1991 original. 2,400 titles, arranged alphabetically within simple categories and with detailed indexes, have been compiled by William and Glenys Howells - both for leisure reading and educational needs. English annotations have been added to help non-Welsh-speaking parents.

'Un ysblennydd ac yn cynnwys llyfrau gyda'r gorau a gynhyrchir mewn unrhyw wlad' says **BfK** (with a little help from Gwerfyl Pierce Jones, Director of the Welsh Books Council).

For further information, contact Menna Lloyd Williams, Children's Book Dept, Welsh Books Council, Castell Brychan, Aberystwyth, Dyfed SY23 2JB.

MARGARET MAHY HONOURED

The Order of New Zealand, the country's highest honour, has been awarded to Margaret Mahy. Limited to twenty living people at any time, the Order brackets her with such celebrated New Zealanders as Sir Edmund Hillary and Janet Frame . recognition, indeed, of the contribution she's made to Children's Literature.

The recipient of the Esther Glen Award four times over, and twice of the UK's equivalent, the Carnegie Medal - for **The Haunting** (1982) and **The Changeover** (1984) - Margaret Mahy is equally celebrated in America where her books have often been chosen as ALA Notables and Best Books of the Year. To date, her work has also been translated into 15 languages.

For **BfK**'s own tribute to one of the world's most distinguished writers for young people, see our Authorgraph in **BfK 24** (January 1984) written when she was between Carnegie Medals. All readers will join us, we're sure, in offering warmest congratulations.

A VISIT TO GREEN KNOWE

Have you ever wanted to 'enter' a book - to visit Frances Hodgson Burnett's Mistlethwaite Manor, for instance, or the bridge where Christopher Robin played pooh-sticks, or (perish the thought) Blyton's Kirrin Island? Chances are the reality would fall a long way short of the literary? except, maybe, in the case of Lucy M Boston's famous manor-house, Green Knowe. Situated at Hemingford Grey, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire and reputedly the oldest continuously inhabited house in England, much of the Norman original remains - with its 3ft thick walls and round-headed windows. It's now open for visitors - at a charge of £2.50 per adult and £1.50 per child, but with a minimum tour charge of £7.50.

The tour includes much that's instantly recognisable from the Green Knowe novels - the green topiary deer in the garden, for example, or the bamboo grove which was where the **Stranger at Green Knowe** hid. Best of all, perhaps, especially if left till last, is the famous attic described so lovingly in **The Children of Green Knowe**:

'Here there was a room under the roof, with a ceiling the shape of the roof and all the beams showing... There were windows on three sides... a low bed... covered with a patchwork quilt... and lots of smooth, polished, empty floor. At one side there was a beautiful old rocking-horse-not a 'safety' rocking-horse... but a horse whose legs were stretched to full gallop, fixed to long rockers so that it could, if you rode it violently, both rear and kick. By the bed was a wooden box painted vermilion with bright patterns all over it... A wicker bird-cage hung from one of the beams... On the chest of drawers Tolly had seen... an ebony mouse, life-sized with shiny black eyes. It was so cleverly carved you could see every hair, and it felt like fur to stroke.'

Tempted? For full details, and to make an appointment, phone Diana Boston on 0480 463134. All proceeds contribute to the manor's upkeep.

Warmly recommended, too, is **Memories** (see ad. on this page), Lucy M Boston's own account of her life and work ... and the house that inspired both. The book combines all her autobiographical writings with a linking passage by her son, and illustrator, Peter Boston, and an introduction by Jill Paton Walsh.

READING

READING?

As part of the celebrations of its quarter-century, the Reading and Language Centre, University of Reading - now directed by Dr Viv Edwards - holds a Conference at Bulmershe Court, Reading on Saturday, 25th September 1993.

Programme to include:

Aidan Chambers - '25 Years of Children's Literature'

Workshop sessions with Tony Martin, Judith Nicholls, Anne Rowe and others

'Writing for children today' - discussion between a group of people concerned with books for young people, including Malorie Blackman, Wendy Cooling, Judith Nicholls, Chris Powling, Philip Pullman and Ira Saxena

Michael Rosen - 'Looking to the future'

For full information, contact Prue Goodwin (address and telephone number below).

Also on offer on Saturday, 12th June 1993 from 9.00 am to 1.00 pm is: 'Reading the Curriculum' - the implications for schools of the new recommendations for reading in the National Curriculum for English. Speakers: Sue Horner

(Professional Officer for English, NCC), Wendy Body (consultant on the teaching of reading), and Andrew Taylor (English Review Team, NCC).

Application form from Reading and Language Information Centre, University of Reading, Bulmershe Court, Reading RG6 1HY (tel: 0734 318820). Conference fee: £15.00

Available, too, from Reading, and sponsored by the W H Smith Group, are three new Parent Teacher Guides:

Helping children with reading (price 30p)

Helping children with spelling (price 40p)

Children with reading difficulties (price 60p)

The pamphlets are available from the Reading and Language Information Centre (address above). Discounts can be negotiated on bulk orders.

Their Choice Too?

From the Children's Book Foundation, and sponsored by Random House, comes our choice: **Good Reads Recommended by Teenagers** - 74 titles assessed by the very readership to whom they're addressed (a rare occurrence with children's books). Fresh, honest and lively, the publication should also be required reading for those of us who review on their behalf!

Available, at £1.00 a copy, from the Children's Book Foundation (on page opposite).

BABIES NEED BOOKS - THE BOOKSTART REPORT

What, the Children's Book Foundation *again*? This time in association with Birmingham Library Services and South Birmingham Health Authority, the CBF offers **The Bookstart Report** - the culmination of the pilot stage of what's potentially a nationwide project to encourage early reading development. Bookstart packs containing a poetry card, local information on libraries and bookclubs, a booklist, a poster and a bookmark were given to parents by health visitors at the time of routine checks on nine-month-old babies (with outstanding success, according to the Report? not least because the packs overcame some of the factors that inhibit many parents).

Full details available from the Children's Book Foundation.

FOR THE STAFFROOM BOOKSHELF

Looking at Pictures in Picture Books, Jane Doonan, Thimble Press, 0 903355 40 X, £8.50

At last! A full-length text for teachers which takes picture-books seriously as Art Objects. Jane Doonan offers close scrutiny of particular books and illustrations, provides instant INSET on drawing and painting techniques that's perfectly accessible to readers with no background in Fine Art (including a very handy Summary of Useful Terms), deftly links her recommendations with Nat. Curriculum Objectives and throws in, for good measure, a carefully annotated list of further reading. What more could we ask?

Well... a slightly longer book, perhaps. So anxious is the author to establish the aesthetic and intellectual credentials of picture-books as proper subjects of study at both primary and secondary level, she risks shunting the whole enterprise into Pseudos Corner. You'd never guess from this what *a chore* illustration can be (ask Raymond Briggs). Why, for instance, aren't we shown a standard 32-page grid - the basic layout that torments, and inspires, every picture-book artist? Why doesn't she develop more fully picture-book roots in line-drawing, in the political cartoon, in comic books... not to mention the obvious connection with *cinema*? This wider approach would have offset her neglect of a crucial picture-book ingredient - what Brian Alderson calls 'the flow of the images'.

This said, the best possible person to rectify this weakness and write that longer text remains Jane Doonan herself. Till she does so, no one who values illustration and the contribution it makes to a child's Art Education can afford to overlook this ground-breaking book.

The People in the Playground, Iona Opie, Oxford, 0 19 811265 3, £15.95

Rude, funny and heart-warming, this write-up of almost three years' fieldwork in the playground of a Hampshire school reveals, in all their gory glory, those aspects of childhood which few children's authors dare depict... except Roald Dahl, maybe. In her exploration of the jokes, wisecracks and patter which children keep so cannily out of the teacher-on-duty's earshot, Iona Opie celebrates nothing less than the lure, persistence and purposes of storytelling itself. A truly marvellous book.

Chris Powling

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