



John Hudson  
Publishing

I was fortunate to begin my career in international sales which was a great opportunity to travel to exotic places at the expense of others, and brought the realisation, always useful, that books are only worth publishing if someone, be it the reader or an intermediary or benefactor, thinks them worth investing in. In the pursuit of selling books – and collecting money for those ‘sold’ previously – I visited revolutionary Iran, and Lebanon during the Civil War, and at lesser risk consumed a bowl of curried goats’ eyes and attended a gathering of herbalists, known as witchdoctors in less enlightened times, in a Nigerian forest. Also a relaxing period in the Bahamas when lost baggage made it difficult – or unappealing – to keep to the plot of distributing catalogues and engaging with lawyers.

From these origins in sales into scientific and legal markets I made the transition to editorial work, bookselling and general management, initially in medicine and then the heritage field – archaeology, architectural, maritime and landscape history – so along the way I have been lucky to have had a variety of roles in many subjects and at varying levels, in private and public companies, professional bodies and the public sector. Responsibilities have ranged from the ubiquity of Inspector Morse and the Highway Code to the specialism of microfiche (remember that?) of individual square kilometres of North Sea geology, of vital importance to the oil industry.

I’ve always been interested in playing a part in the wider publishing scene, and was a Director of the Independent Publishers Guild for 7 years, and for some years was Chair of the Publishers Association’s Middle East Working Group. While at the British Medical Journal I was pleased to secure funding of a complete print run of the ABC of AIDS for distribution by educational charity Book Aid International. At the BMJ we were early proponents of Print on Demand and e-books. One of the first orders we received for the latter was from Ukraine, a country into which we’d never knowingly sold a physical book which was an encouraging indicator of how digital can transcend geography.

More recently at Historic England I initiated a crowdfunding model to publish a number of books, in association with crowdfunding pioneers Unbound, which was unusual for a public body and for books at a specialist level, and developed a crowdfunded service for other heritage bodies, which brought this method of financing in publishing to greater prominence.

I’ve done a fair bit of public speaking and presentations about publishing over the years for various organisations and haven’t been booed off yet. In the 1990’s I initiated the Booksellers Association’s Academic Bookseller of the Year award. The winners in the first year were unfortunate enough to take a jar of my home-made marmalade as their prize, but it later developed into a widely recognised award complete with a shield, albeit inedible.

In the heritage field, I volunteer as a trustee of the Association for Studies in the Conservation of Historic Buildings and am editor of their annual Transactions, and with other volunteers am involved with restoring a meadow in Richmond Park, giving me hands-on experience with a historic landscape.

As I hope is evident, I am endlessly fascinated by publishing and the increasing variety of channels available to bring authors’ expertise and enthusiasm to wider attention and the innovation which can be used in both print and digital formats.

I look forward to discussing these with potential authors, partners or customers, with the consumption of goats’ eyes strictly optional.

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