



Pennine Pens

A Brief History

We have held this event, and produced this booklet as a way of saying THANK YOU to some of the many people who have given us encouragement and support over the past ten years.

Thanks everyone!

1 CYCLING IN SEARCH OF . . .

Cycling In Search of the Cathars had just come back again from yet another publisher. They'd enclosed a note saying how much they'd enjoyed reading it but it didn't fit in with their list. We'd heard it all before. They couldn't see a market for it, it was rather a minority interest, they weren't taking on any new writers at present and they wished us "every success in placing it elsewhere."

"We could try publishing it ourselves." Do it ourselves! Chris always has been a do-it-yourself fanatic of the intellectual variety - doing the conveyancing when we moved house, researching the Enterprise Allowance which funded our year off teaching. He'd even wanted to arrange the funeral for Elaine's Aunt Lily. Now he wanted to take on the publishing industry!

With the new desktop publishing programmes which were available, he assured Elaine it wouldn't be as expensive as it would have been at one time. He had a little money left from the sale of his house when we'd bought one together. We could start small with a print run of say 500 copies and anyway we might have some fun. It would certainly be an interesting adventure to get our book into print, reviewed, on the shelves and sold?

"Isn't this vanity publishing?" Chris had an answer. William Blake, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound had all published their own work. So reader, Elaine got talked into it whilst being simultaneously haunted by the thought of those 500 books lurking unsold and unread in a corner of our attic.

To our surprise we received the first order for *Cycling in Search of the Cathars* a week before it was delivered from the printer's. The buyer had read an advance review. We almost framed the cheque but it was only the first of far more than we ever dreamed would be possible. The book received what we now appreciate was good coverage in the papers and magazines of widely varying types from cycling magazines, new age publications and even a magazine aimed at the ex-patriate community in France.

We'd known that many people were interested in the Cathars and like us were frustrated by the lack of material available about them in English

at the time. We carry on being surprised by how many orders we keep on getting for this book ten years after we first printed it. We also learned that there are plenty of other mad buggers like us around. We continue to receive letters and emails from people who have read our book, and even retraced our pedals in the Pyrenees, many also on bikes. (The book is now only available on CD or downloadable as an ebook.)

*Quite by chance, I have had the great pleasure of reading for the first time on a CD-Rom, a book entitled *Cycling in search of the Cathars. An absolute delight from beginning to end* . . .*

Patrick Purcell, June 2001

Inspired by our success, when Elaine finished her MA thesis on Sylvia Plath, we decided to develop this into a book as well, one which would introduce the poet to a wider public.

Disappointingly, we did not receive as much publicity as we expected for this publication. In spite of not being covered well by the press, sales for *Sylvia Plath: Killing the Angel in the House* exceeded that of our first book, going into a third edition. We were learning about selling books. We arrived at the view that people buy books because they have a special interest in the subject, or they have had them recommended. One of our authors has recently told us that it is one of the best kept secrets in publishing that reviews don't sell books.

2 SMALL PRESS . . .

By 1994, Pennine Pens was now beginning to look like a proper Small Press. We began to receive manuscripts from other writers. We were particularly delighted when the nationally known historian, Jill Liddington, approached us to publish her book, *Presenting The Past*, a work based on the life of Anne Lister of Halifax. From working with Jill, we realised that we were able to consult and liaise more with authors than one of the bigger publishing firms.

Selling books is a craft which we are still learning. We have learned that there is no easy answer. Each book demands its own strategy. Sadly, we often find it harder to market creative books. As we suggest above, even when the book gets excellent reviews in the national media, this doesn't necessarily help sales.

This is a heartening book, written by a poet full of wit and charm.

*Andrew Motion, Poet Laureate
about *Animal Antics**

Nevertheless, the children's novel,

Nevertheless, the children's novel, play and volumes of poetry, we publish because we are so impressed and committed to the quality of the work in the writings of William Bedford, Andrew Bibby, Debjani Chatterjee, Simon Fletcher and Basir Kazmi.

Manuscripts started arriving from all over, many excellent and even more of average quality. On more than one occasion we have arrived home to find some dishevelled poet on our doorstep clutching a folder of his work!!!

We read far more manuscripts than we are able to publish. It is always difficult when we are presented with something from a friend or colleague, doubly difficult when the writer is both. We immediately admired Simon Fletcher's poetry and we were pleased to have our decision "endorsed" by the late Poet Laureate Ted Hughes who had been given a copy of *The Occasions of Love*.

When a delighted Simon received his letter from Ted he sent us a photocopy which rendered the late poet's already difficult to read handwriting even less legible. Chris was the first to look at the document.

No pong, no poem

"Eh? What's this? 'I admired the daft fluency, the economy, the pure tone, the pong. As Robert Frost says No pong no poem.' I know he's a sheep farmer but pongs in poetry...."

Taking the paper away from him Elaine deciphered it. What Hughes had actually written was "I admired the deft fluency, the economy, the pure tone, the pang. As Robert Frost says: No pang no poem." Chris still wonders . . .

Among our best selling books so far has been the *View from the Bridge* books (*Milltown Trilogy*) by John Morrison. Each chapter had originally been published as an episode on the **Hebden Bridge Web**. Occasionally, if one didn't appear for a while, we would get enquiries from people around the world about when the next one was due. The people of "Milltown" appealed not only to Hebden Bridge but also to small town dwellers in other parts of the country and the world who see themselves or their friends in John's characters.

The editor of the *Hebden Bridge Times* gave us what we're sure was an unintended publicity boost by refusing to have any references to John's book in the paper.. She believed that "the crap local paper" with its headlines of "Bus Routes Stay The Same" was her own. John had been interviewed and a feature on him and the book was pulled by the editor just as the paper went to print. An appointment with the (sister paper) Halifax *Evening Courier* Arts Editor was cancelled.

When news of the ban got around of course everyone wanted to read

the book, mainly to see if they or their friends were in it. (Once again, the initial success of this book had been word of mouth). We understand that the *Hebden Bridge Times* wanted to sue, until their lawyers advised them that they would be laughed out of court.

The week after *View from the Bridge* came out Elaine was stopped by about a dozen people. They all wanted to know who various characters were and seemed disappointed when she told them they were just based on generalised types. Each of these people asked her, "Town Drunk, that's really so and so, isn't it?" Twelve different names were mentioned.

We don't have a Town Drunk. We all take a turn

3 BIKER DAVE . . .

One afternoon, life began to resemble art a little too closely when Nigel, the manager of Forbuoy's, phoned.

"I just thought I'd better warn you that I've had this bloke in here, a Hell's Angel called Dave, going on and on about *View From The Bridge*. Says he's gonna sue because he's in it and everyone's making fun of him. I hope I'm not alarming you but he's coming to see you!"

"No, no, " I lied.

"Wait a minute," says Nigel, "Cheryl here tells me he's not an Angel. He's a Satan's Slave. Let me know what happens."

From my limited knowledge of biker gangs I recalled that Satan's Slaves were members of the Hell's Angels who'd been expelled for brutality. I immediately phoned John who, at around 6ft. 5 is at least a big, if middle-aged, lad. After apprising him of the situation I asked him if he'd like to come round to talk to Dave.

"You must be joking Elaine," laughs John in a nervous manner, "I'm staying at home. I'll be under the bed."

As I put the phone down we heard the roar of a Harley Davison pulling up outside and noticed our bemused neighbours looking at a most unlikely looking visitor for 32, Windsor Road. Even though the fifty-something Satan's Slave who was removing his helmet didn't look too threatening, Chris glanced ever so casually at the bike, the man and back to the bike. "Listen, I think this kind of situation is much better handled by a woman," he gulped as he began to rush back upstairs to the office leaving no time for argument.

I answered the door. Dave, wearing oil-stained, 400 year-old Levis, a black leather waistcoat full of studs arranged in a way which suggested

cult significance, red kerchief tied aggressively round his neck and held there by a skull scarf ring, was standing slightly bending forward, holding the book open in a way which bent the spine back so cruelly I feared it was about to snap in half. I stopped myself from issuing a teacherlike rebuke when I noticed that he had "Love" tattooed on the fingers of one hand and "Hate" on the other. Perhaps this was not a gent ready to receive education in the finer points of handling paperback books.

"Pennine Pens?"

"Yes. Would you like to come in?"

"Ah'm no so sure yer'll want me in yer 'ouse love. This could cost yer it." He almost throws the book into my face.

I had to feign innocence as Nigel had sworn me to secrecy about his phone call. "Sorry?"

"It's this book. It you or yer 'usband who's brought it out?"

I suppose that standing on the doorstep of our terraced house wearing jeans and t shirt I didn't look like his idea of a shoulder-padded, power suited, high heeled publisher. I tell him it's both of us who are "partners", invite him in again and start to put on a placatory kettle. I began to wish we had the sort of biscuits a Satan's Slave might enjoy: Wagon Wheels? Jammy Dodgers? Jaffa Cakes? Certainly not organic, oat-meal cookies sweetened with PC, GM free, worker exploitation free, left wing, raw cane molasses which was all we had in the house.

"Ah'm very upset by this 'eer book. I walked into the Hole In The Wall (only possibly The Grievous Bodily Arms in John's book) and I noticed everyone were laughing at me. They sez, 'ere Dave, yer famous, yer in a book."

"Oh no, none of the characters in *View From The Bridge* are real people - they're just, well just (I wanted to say archetype, stereotype or caricatures but realise from my years of General Studies teaching that he may then be persuaded the author's crime is even worse) you know just types."

"Just types? Well 'ow do yer explain this then?" He grabs the lapel of his waistcoat and thrusts a silver badge with a skull and some odd symbols above it, bearing the number 13 into my face. "Number 13 is my number int' Satan's Slaves' chapter and the chapter int' book about me is Chapter 13."

I tell him it's coincidence, that the writer has only lived in the town for about two years and can't possibly know him. He's actually from that foreign land called Shipley. "Anyway, Dave no -one could really mistake you for this character as he's very young, stupid and if you look at the rest of the book, inarticulate. Now you're certainly not stupid and inarticulate are you?" He almost smiles. Bloody hell all those years of General Studies

are you?" He almost smiles. Bloody hell all those years of General Studies animal taming had finally come in useful.

I decide to give Chris a call and he comes downstairs slowly and reluctantly to shake the hand of the Satan's Slave. Dave resumes. "You see it's not just me. I'm 53, ah've had an 'eart bypass (we nod sympathetically). It's younger Slaves. Theer saying, "Hey Dave what yer gonna do about this writer. He's teking piss. Younger slaves can be reet violent. Ah mean look at description of 'is house. I don't live like this now but when I were younger well. I mean it's a long time since I only took down me keks for a shag and a shite."

Chris and I looked at the floor so we didn't start laughing. Eventually he left reassured and with enough information to persuade his fellow drinkers he was not the character. We promise that the author will contact him and we'll give him a couple of signed copies. He has our word that now we know he exists he won't reappear in any more books. A pity as people missed him in the subsequent two volumes.

After he'd left and we'd briefly stopped giggling, Chris remarked, "Do you think Faber and Faber have trouble like this? Captains of whalers turning up saying they've been libelled, they're really members of Save The Whale." For weeks we feared the knock on the door bringing visits from other characters such as Town Drunk, Dope Dealer, Willow Woman, Wounded Man or the one who we felt most likely to sue, the repulsive Councillor Prattle.

In fact, I'd been so worried about how obvious Councillor Prattle's real identity was that I'd spent hours trying to persuade John to get rid of the character. As it turned out he was such an insensitive politician that he insinuated himself into the launch do where he carried the litre bottle of baby oil that the author had suggested he made regular use of. He bought nearly 2 dozen copies and went around showing off to all his mates about how he'd been savaged in a book. Now that was worrying.

Our latest book *Berringden Brow: Memoirs of A Single Parent With A Crush*, is also humorous and based in the Calder Valley. As we have said, we get many manuscripts arriving here, most of them completely unusable. When Jill's book arrived, Elaine was very busy marking English Literature GCSE's and groaned at the idea of yet another book to plough through. This nearly caused a serious delay in exam results as she found herself engrossed in the book instead of the scripts.

Her tales about the vicissitudes of life as a middle-aged woman with a brain, poor prospects, teenage kids, a sex drive, looking for that rare breed the unattached eligible man, was so similar to the lives of so many of Elaine's female friends that she asked Jill if she'd been spying on them!

4 PUBLISHING TO THE GLOBAL VILLAGE . . .

When we started publishing our books, we had never heard of the phenomenon which was to become the main part of our business: the **Internet**.

Chris, who had spent many, many hours assembling community newspapers and worksheets with cowgum (what ever happened to cowgum?) could not get over the power of his Macintosh computer to do in minutes what had previously taken days or weeks. He began to look for other ways the Mac could be used.

Early in 1995, we started experimenting with web pages, firstly as a way of publicising our books. We knew that there was a potentially world-wide interest in the Cathars and Sylvia Plath. Chris had the imagination to see what the Internet could become, but hardly anyone understood what he was talking about! Frequently, Elaine would ask, "Can you explain to me again about this Internet. I don't understand how anyone could make any money from it."

When Chris first started creating web pages, there didn't appear to be anyone in the area who could help him. He had to email people in news-groups in the US to ask how to do the most basic of things.

In the summer of 1995, we purchased the domain, www.hebden-bridge.co.uk and created what was almost certainly the first community website in the UK - the **HEBDEN BRIDGE WEB**. The site now has thousands of pages, images and visitors. Its success has not only been because of our efforts but also because we live in a town which has both a deep and stunning beauty and because it has a forward thinking, creative community who tend to be radical, imaginative and adventurous.

*Beautiful site from start to finish.
Interesting, artistic and tasteful in
all respects.*

Hebweb guestbook

Many of them, especially writers and photographers, were able to see, very early on, how the Internet would help them develop their endeavours. Their encouragement by coming to us for their web development was crucial. Much of our work is now concerned with web design or "publishing on the world wide web", and we have a portfolio of over 50 websites. Recently, we have gone further by creating a digital store where our books may be bought online: we even offer a selection of **ebooks** - no printing overheads, once written and prepared the book can simply be downloaded directly to the customer's computer.

5 A NEW WAY OF WORKING . . .

We have also been trying to find a new way of working. Working from our home office was important. Work and domestic life became inter-linked. For many, this would be anathema but if the work is meaningful and fulfilling this made sense to us. We think of the handloom weavers working from home, and then being forced out to the mills. In the 21st century, we are coming home again. The new technology will make commuting to offices in the city less necessary. And where better to be than Hebden Bridge.

At first, it was a little awkward - especially when clients came round and had to sit on the bed!!! Or our son's toys were still scattered over the floor and stairs.

We didn't want to be a conventional business whose only motives were to make money. We wanted our work to be part of a commitment to the community, the arts and the environment. Yes, we do need money but although we strive to cover our costs, to be very organised in our business matters and to make a living from Pennine Pens, we do see ourselves as different from the traditional business - the term "social entrepreneur" is one we like. We are happy to be able to do some websites for no payment. We are particularly committed to the the Alternative Technology Centre and the Arts Festival. Both of these organisations run on the commitment and enthusiasm of their supporters - yet both contain the embryos of future industry for this valley.

2 AND ONWARD . . .

We said at the beginning that we thought publishing a book would be an interesting adventure. We didn't realise how it would gradually take over and changes our lives. The fear of 500 unsold books in a corner of the attic now seems amusing. Every corner of our house now has boxes of books, although they continue to sell. One of the best rooms of our house has for some time been made the office, but it is where we spend most of our time. Where did the weavers put their looms if not the living room?

The "adventure" led to us meeting and working with many interesting and fascinating people and collaborating on all sorts of projects which space prevents us going into here.

For the future, we hope to continue publishing the **traditional book**, and to continue to improve our skills in marketing them. However, the

Internet and online publishing will probably remain the main focus of our energies. We will continue to innovate and take advantage of the new technology. Watch out for more ebooks, interactivity and audio-visual dimensions.

The response to this event was far greater than we could have imagined. When we sent out invitations, we never thought that so many would accept. Not only are we delighted and moved, but we realise that together we *can* make a difference. We will help keep Hebden Bridge an interesting and exciting place to live and work, and continue to strive for a world free from war, pollution and injustice.

And yes it has been fun.

7 COMMENTS . . .

I am the Head Teacher of Fairfield Junior School in Stockton and am surfing school web sites to get good ideas for our own! Yours is certainly the best school site I have visited. You must have all put a great deal of hard work into it. Your parents should be very proud of the children and staff. Well done! -

Comment on the **Cheslyn Hay Primary School** website

The Free Catalogue Request form has produced a stunning response - I'm sending them out by the bucketful . . . All very encouraging. It's becoming more and more apparent that the Internet offers tremendous opportunity.

Howard on the Modelsport website

I've been phoning lots of companies to get them to give us stuff for the Alternative Technology Centre. I encourage them to look at the website to see how professional we are, and without exception the reaction is VERY positive -- the standard comment is 'What a professional site, you seem very well organised' and the spin off is that we get what we want!

'H' on the Alternative Technology Centre website

The local weekly and evening newspapers have banned any reference to the book, after the weekly paper was ridiculed with headlines BUS ROUTE STAYS THE SAME and MILL-TOWN MAN CREOSOTES SHED.

Yorkshire Evening Post

The book that lifts the lid on the scandal, the shame and the, er, downright shocking in a little Pennine town in the middle of nowhere.

Big Issue.

A SELECTION OF OUR WEBSITES

This web site improves like a fine claret, with age and special care it just improves. I take US friends on-site to show them the photo gallery, arts fest etc. Webmaster and others involved take a big bow. Well done!

Hebweb guestbook

- ◆ **HEBDEN BRIDGE WEB** - the first UK community website
- ◆ **SYLVIA PLATH FORUM** - one of our most popular sites with more than 5-10,000 visitors a month
- ◆ **ALTERNATIVE TECHNOLOGY CENTRE** - info, back issues of Green Page and newsletter, very useful selection of AT links
- ◆ **HEBDEN BRIDGE HISTORY GROUP** - new site from the history group of the Hebden Bridge Scientific and Literary Society
- ◆ **CHESLYN HAY PRIMARY SCHOOL** - a pleasure to work on and in our opinion an excellent example of a school website, including **KNOCKOUT NEWS** by the children themselves
- ◆ **COUNTRY MATTERS** - Terry Marsh: Freelance Outdoor and Travel Writer and Photographer
- ◆ **CARLTON HOTEL**, Hebden Bridge
- ◆ **TESS, JADE AND STAR** - our beautiful triplets
- ◆ **PENNINE PENS ONLINE STORE**
- ◆ **CHARLESTOWN HISTORY GROUP** - - Local history group website
- ◆ **NATE** -National Association for the Teaching of English
- ◆ **MYTHOLMROYD NET** - community website
- ◆ **ANDREW BIBBY** - journalist
- ◆ **STRAW BALE FUTURES**
- ◆ **OUTDOOR WRITERS' GUILD**
- ◆ **REAL MUSIC CO**
- ◆ **GLYN HUGHES** - award winning novelist and poet
- ◆ **CHARITIES INFORMATION BUREAU**
- ◆ **ACTION FOR CHILDRENS ARTS**
- ◆ **HB TOURIST INFORMATION W CENTRE**
- ◆ **TRUE NORTH PICTURE COLLECTION**

Links to these and our others sites may be found on the **portfolio** page of the Pennine Pens website - www.penninepens.co.uk

We've also **trained** some clients to maintain all or part of their own sites

BOOKS FROM PENNINE PENS.

BERRINGDEN BROW: MEMOIRS OF A SINGLE PARENT WITH A CRUSH (1 873378 0 84) Jill Robinson - meet Jess and her friends, Bridget Jones' elders sisters, the struggling but still optimistic middle-aged women of Berringden Brow.

Three books by John Morrison:

VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE (1 873378 52 1) - first in the Milltown Trilogy (4th edition)

BACK TO THE BRIDGE (1 873378 52 1) - second in the Milltown Trilogy

A BRIDGE TOO FAR (1 873378 57 2) - third in the Milltown Trilogy

ANIMAL ANTICS (1 873378 03 3)

a collection of children's poems by Debjani Chatterjee.

ONCE UPON A TIME (1 873378 33 5)

an autobiography by Eileen Colwell, pioneer of children's libraries

THE REDLIT BOYS (1 873378 87 4)

a collection of poems by William Bedford

EMAIL FROM THE PROVINCES (1 873378 63 7)

latest collection of poems from Simon Fletcher

A LITTLE BRIDGE, a collection of poems by Debjani Chatterjee, Basir Kazmi and Simon Fletcher. These three talented Northern poets have collaborated in a collection of poems which reflects the connections between the cultures of Britain and the Indian sub-continent. (1 873378 77 7)

THE OCCASIONS OF LOVE (1 873378 07 6)

a collection of love poems by Simon Fletcher

THE CHESS BOARD, a play by Basir Kazmi (1 873378 27 0)

SYLVIA PLATH: KILLING THE ANGEL IN THE HOUSE (2nd edition) by Elaine Connell - A very readable introduction to the works of this great poet. (1 873378 01 7)
Elaine Connell also maintains the **Sylvia Plath Forum** - www.sylviaplathforum.com

PRESENTING THE PAST: ANNE LISTER OF HALIFAX (1 873378 02 5)

by Jill Liddington

ME, MICK AND M31 (1 873378 12 2)

by Andrew Bibby - Children's environmental mystery

CYCLING IN SEARCH OF THE CATHARS by Chris Ratcliffe and Elaine Connell
- CD-rom and online ebook versions only of book available

More details of Pennine Pens publications
and web design at the Pennine Pens website

www.penninepens.co.uk