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# Ladybird Books: a Study in Social and Economic History

by  
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MA

A Doctoral Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
of Loughborough University

October 2009

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## **Abstract**

The research undertaken for this project relates to the history of the 'Ladybird' imprint together with the company that produced these popular children's books.

The period, from 1914 to present day, during which the books were produced, and throughout which the company operated, was one of great technological change in the print industry as well as one of great social change, and the company was shaped by many outside factors. In turn, its books were widely read and, arguably, themselves influenced generations of children.

The research covers the books and the company from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day. Various factors that have influenced the company and its books, such as the British education system, the First and Second World wars, changes in print and communications technology, the British library system and bookselling practices, evolving social and political attitudes, the impact of the media and the company's competitors, have all been taken into account.

The ways in which the brand has emerged and evolved is discussed within the context of commercial, social and political factors.

A database of Ladybird books published from 1914 to 2009 accompanies the thesis.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the University for providing the funding that has made it possible for me to undertake this research. In addition, I would like to acknowledge my supervisor, Professor John Feather, who has given me the utmost support during my three years at Loughborough. The Hickinbotham Charitable Trust has also generously awarded me the sum of £1,500 to assist with expenses during the three years of study.

I am pleased to place on record my thanks to many people who have provided assistance with my project. The staff of the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland have been helpful. Mr John Walton has very generously provided me with records from visits he had undertaken to Ladybird Books Ltd between 1969 and 1987 in addition to several newspaper and journal cuttings he had collected, and for all his assistance I am extremely grateful.

I also wish to acknowledge Mr George Towers (former director of Ladybird Books Ltd), who has provided information and assistance and who sadly passed away at the end of 2008. Mr Charles Hall (former director of Ladybird Books Ltd) and Mike Banks (also former director of Ladybird Books Ltd) have also contributed greatly.

## **Abbreviations**

BESA	British Educational Suppliers Association
BPIF	British Printing Industries Federation
ELT	English Language Teaching
GPMU	Graphical, Paper and Media Union
ITA	Initial Teaching Alphabet
MBE	Member of the British Empire
KWRS	Key Words Reading Scheme
LEA	Local Education Authority
RoSPA	The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
VAT	Value Added Tax



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# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

### **1.1 Aims**

The study of book history offers an insight into a society's economic, social and cultural history, for it provides the context within which the book itself is created. Books not only influence society themselves but their own content is greatly influenced by external factors.

The aim of this particular study was to describe and analyse the social and economic influences on, and of, Ladybird books. The research documents the origin of the Ladybird imprint and its owners Wills and Hepworth, provincial printers based in the market town of Loughborough in Leicestershire. In addition this research extends to Ladybird Books Ltd subsequently owned by the Pearson Holding Group from 1972 having been sold to them by the company of Wills and Hepworth Ltd. Furthermore, research of the Ladybird imprint continues up until 2009, the decade following the closure of the firm's Loughborough premises in 1999. The company and its imprint are discussed in relation to the British publishing industry in general and, more specifically, children's book publishing.

The overall aim is to contribute a substantial historical study of a children's book publishing company. The period of research covers a century that has witnessed vast social and economic changes and it is interesting to understand their effects upon a British publishing company that has, itself, impacted upon generations of readers.

### **1.2 Objectives**

There are four main objectives of this study:

- to document the history of the firm, Wills and Hepworth, later renamed as Ladybird Books Ltd
- to identify the major external influences on the development of the company
- to identify the company's major competitors where specific competition exists
- to identify as many as possible Ladybird imprint titles of the period from 1914 to 2009.

It was intended that integration and analysis of the results of these objectives should produce a comprehensive insight into this British publishing company.

### **1.3 Scope**

Although the first Ladybird books were not produced until 1914, it has been necessary to begin the study of both the company's founders and the Angel Press itself, in the mid-nineteenth century in order to provide sufficient background history surrounding its origins. In addition, geographical factors relating to the location of the company have influenced its development so it has been useful to investigate the town's history from its earliest days. The period of research specifically relating to the Ladybird imprint is from its inception in 1914 to the present day.

Similarly, many outside factors have influenced the development of the company itself together with the nature of their publishing output. Therefore, to research the company in context, it has been necessary to broaden the investigation to include literacy and education in Britain from the late-nineteenth century to the present, including government education policy and initiatives. The effects of both the First and Second World Wars on British publishing have also been explored. In addition, as publishers, the company was unusual in that the books were printed on the premises. Therefore, it has been necessary to look into the development of printing technologies that have affected the company's production methods as well as the availability of necessary raw materials. It is not unreasonable to assume that, as producers of books, the company may have been affected by the British library system so this has also been taken into consideration. Bookselling trends, especially those involving mass-market publishing have been identified and the company assessed within these criteria too.

Political influences over both the company and its products have been considerable. In order to successfully chart its response to social changes, consideration has been given to shifts in political attitudes, particularly those relating to gender, class and race issues.

Communications technology has had a significant impact on society over the past 50 years. It has been necessary, therefore, to consider the ways in which radio, television programmes, films and the internet have been influential. Resultant branding and licensed characters arising from television, film and even computer games impact hugely upon publishers and Ladybird Books Ltd were no exception. Therefore, licensing deals and the ways in which other media have affected the company have been investigated.

Any publishing enterprise has to survive in a competitive market. Therefore, no study of a publisher would be complete without reference to any major competitors throughout the period in question. However, as the research progressed it became evident that, in many ways Ladybird books, and the company that produced them, were unique. Whilst it is acknowledged that specific areas of their publishing output did encounter competition throughout the company's entire history, it was not until the latter years that the majority of the publishing list faced direct competition for similar products.

## **1.4 Resources**

### **1.4.1 Archives**

An archive of company material exists at the Records Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, and has been used as one of the primary sources. Upon closure of Ladybird Books Ltd's premises in Beeches Road, Loughborough in 1999, many of the company's ledgers, letters, books and general documents were deposited at the Records Office. The Ladybird collection has been divided into two parts. The books will eventually all be catalogued into the Local Studies library, under the reference L094. They consist of around 6–8,000 books, including some talking books and foreign language books (about 42 boxes). The second half of the Ladybird collection is currently listed under the archive reference number of DE5578 and comprises 14 boxes, several volumes and a portfolio.<sup>1</sup> The boxes' contents mainly comprise ledgers with expenditure accounts and minutes of board meetings covering several years.

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<sup>1</sup>An archive listing is currently available:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/records.aspx?cat=056-de5578&cid=0&kw=ladybird#0> [site accessed 22nd September, 2009]

Legal documents relating to substantial transactions are also retained within this archive. Unfortunately, no editorial documentation is included.

Reading University houses a special collection from Ladybird Books Ltd but this is limited to boxes containing only original artwork and published Ladybird books with no actual documentation. In addition there is an incomplete and uncatalogued collection of Ladybird books based at the Children's Book Centre in Seven Stories, Newcastle. These resources would have been used to find any missing information but not as extensively as the Ladybird archive in Leicestershire as this remains the most comprehensive source.

#### **1.4.2 Human Resources**

Former directors of the company have been contacted in order to gain first-hand information about the ways in which the publishing and printing business was conducted, together with day-to-day working practices. These people have provided a range of useful information. However, it was realised that memory cannot be relied upon solely as the basis for fact. Therefore, any information gathered in this manner was verified by referring to additional sources. Two radio programmes featuring Ladybird Books Ltd have been broadcast by the BBC. These include interviews with key personnel from the company and have been a useful resource.

##### **1.4.2.1 Key Informants**

The key informants comprise the following former company directors: Mr George Towers (employee from 1938–1979); Mr Charles Hall (employee from 1947–1986); Mr Mike Banks (employee from 1950–1992) and Mr Douglas Keen (employee from 1936–1974). These personnel were chosen because of the longevity of their service with the company and the senior nature of their positions. In addition, a well-informed observer, Mr John Walton has also provided a great deal of information based upon detailed notes taken upon visits to the printing works from 1969 to 1987.

#### **1.4.3 Printed Resources**

Articles and obituaries relating to those individuals who have played an integral part in the company and its books have also been useful secondary sources of information.

Various trade journals were consulted as these are a valuable source of information, especially regarding technical issues regarding the company's production methods. In addition, the company's own trade catalogues and brochures have also been useful resources.

#### **1.4.4 Electronic Resources**

In order to describe the books and other products produced by the company it has been necessary to locate as many as possible and to create a database. Initial sources of this information were the on-line catalogues of the five legal deposit libraries: The Bodleian Library, Oxford; Cambridge University Library; National Library of Scotland; Library of Trinity College Dublin; and National Library of Wales.

Ladybird books have now become collectable and a range of collectors' websites have evolved which have proved to be additional useful secondary resources.

Electronic sources have been particularly useful when carrying out the initial literature search. Metalib has been used as a tool to access relevant databases for this purpose. Various on-line catalogues, especially those of the legal deposit libraries have proved to be invaluable in the search for titles produced by Wills and Hepworth and Ladybird Books Ltd. Metalib is also useful as a tool to access specific company information such as Companies House, The Patent Office, Mintel and FAME.

### **1.5 Methodology**

#### **1.5.1 Background Reading**

In order to ensure that a thorough understanding of the most suitable formal research methods was gained, it was necessary to read a range of appropriate literature, particularly regarding qualitative research.<sup>2</sup> From the outset it was necessary to have an understanding of the history of British book publishing in general and, more specifically, that of the children's book publishing industry. Therefore, throughout the

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<sup>2</sup>Research literature includes: Lorraine Blaxter, Christina Hughes and Malcolm Tight, *How to Research*, 2nd edition, Open University Press (Maidenhead: Philadelphia, 2001); Alan Clarke, *Evaluation Research: An Introduction to the Principles, Methods and Practice*, SAGE Publications (London: Thousand Oaks: New Delhi, 1999); Janice M. Morse (ed.), *Completing a Qualitative Project: Details and Dialogue*, SAGE Publications (London: Thousand Oaks: New Delhi, 1997) and Martyn Denscombe, *Ground Rules for Good Research: a 10 point guide for social researchers*, (Buckingham: Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2002),



period of research, a broad range of literature about book publishing in Britain, as well as libraries and their relationship with British publishing was consulted.<sup>3</sup>

### 1.5.2 Literature Review

The literature search was undertaken to establish exactly how much material relating to the company and the Ladybird imprint existed. This was initially enacted during the first two months of study and the aim was to find all journal and newspaper articles relating to Ladybird books and Wills and Hepworth. This was constantly reviewed to ensure that all information remained up to date. It was found that there has been no major study of the company and any literature that contains reference to the company or its publications tends to be either newspaper articles documenting particular events, trade journal articles featuring the print technologies being used by the firm, or critical articles relating to Ladybird books' portrayal of gender, race and class issues. Once this was completed, the search was extended to include material relating to children's books in relation to the acquisition of literacy in primary education. Educational trends in teaching literacy have varied greatly throughout the last century and, as Wills and Hepworth Ltd and, later, Ladybird Books Ltd were greatly involved in the creation of material to improve the nation's literacy, it was necessary to find out about the range of reading schemes available to parents and teachers. Therefore, literature searches relating to all methods of literacy teaching employed in the UK have been undertaken.

### 1.5.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection, both quantitative and qualitative, has been determined by the range of resources available. Archives provided some primary documentary resources,

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<sup>3</sup>Research literature includes: Eric de Bellaigue, *British Book Publishing as a Business Since the 1960s* (London: The British Library, 2004); F.J. Harvey Darton, *Children's Books in England: Five Centuries of Social Life*, 2nd ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958); Alec Ellis, *A History of Children's Reading and Literature* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1969); Frank Eyre, *British Children's Books in the Twentieth Century* (London: Longman, 1971); John Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, 2nd edn. (London and New York: Routledge, 2006); Robin Myers (ed.), Michael Harris and Giles Mandelbrote, *Libraries and the Book Trade: The formation of collections from the sixteenth to the twentieth century* (Newcastle, Delaware: Oak Knoll Press, 2000); I.A. Norrie (ed.), *Mumby's Publishing and Bookselling in the Twentieth Century*, 6th edn. (London: Bell & Hyman, 1982); Kimberley Reynolds and Nicholas Tucker (eds.), *Children's Book Publishing in Britain since 1945* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1998) and André Schiffrin, *The Business of Books* (London/New York: Verso, 2000).

including ledgers, accounts, formal valuations, legal documents and board meeting minutes, whilst journals and newspapers have been used as secondary documentary sources. Interviews with former personnel have provided a range of qualitative data. These were carried out sensitively to ensure that an ethical approach to the research was maintained. For example, details of wages and other information relating to former employees were recorded anonymously. Whilst the main emphasis was on collection of qualitative data, the compilation of a database of titles has allowed for the provision of some quantitative data.

The geographical location of the company, together with its transport infrastructure, has proved to be a significant factor in its history. Therefore, for background information regarding the history of the town of Loughborough several visits to the Local History section of Loughborough Library were undertaken (between October 2006 and May 2007) to establish the extent of information available. Several documents relating to the town's history and its industrialisation, including almanacs, maps, gazetteers and trade directories have been excellent sources of information.

A major part of the study has been to identify as many of the titles published by the company from 1914 to the present day, as possible. Therefore, a database has been created to document these titles. This has been a useful tool later used to identify the company's publishing trends during the period undergoing research. The fields in the database, necessary to accurately identify each book, are Title, Author, Illustrator, Date first Published, Series Number or Name, ISBN and Format. The latter three categories were particularly important because there were several similar titles and these fields are used to differentiate between them to ensure that these are not simply duplicates. The database of titles has served as a research tool to underpin the rest of the work.

Initial contact with former directors of the company, some of whom were extremely elderly, was made early in the research and it was realised that some were very frail. As a result of this, it was decided to conduct interviews at an early stage in the research in order to ensure that this valuable resource was still available. This proved to be a wise decision as, sadly, two of the former directors (Douglas Keen and George Towers) died in November 2008. These key personnel were chosen because of their

senior roles and the longevity of their service. They were each interviewed with appropriate questions based upon the relevance to their individual roles and the period in which they were employed by the company. A general questionnaire would have served no purpose in this instance. This resource was approached with caution as this relies upon human memory which is not infallible. Any information gathered in this way was substantiated by 'triangulation' by way of documentation as far as possible and where this was not possible the status and quality of the evidence is indicated.

Several visits to the archive in the Leicestershire Records Office were undertaken during the first phase of research in order to extract as much information as possible from the surviving documentation. It was decided that the legal and taxation documents could be relied upon for their accuracy, thus providing an important primary source of information. Any other documentation, such as advertising pamphlets published by the company, was treated with the necessary caution as it was realised that this may be subjective.

#### **1.5.4 Professional Development**

Several courses have been undertaken and seminars attended during all three years of study. In addition, in the second year of the project, the United Kingdom Serials Group 2007 Conference and Exhibition was attended in order to extend knowledge of research practice and to improve skills. Extracts from the report prepared on the conference have subsequently been published in the group's journal.<sup>4</sup> A second conference, 'Beyond the Campus: An Interdisciplinary Examination of the Value of Research'<sup>5</sup> attended in the final year of study, afforded the opportunity to present the research findings to date. This conference also offered plenary sessions and presentations of a wide range of research topics, providing valuable experience.

#### **1.5.5 Work Schedule**

During the first phase (October 2006 to September 2007) a wide range of resources was identified and located, and work was begun to extract relevant information from them. Visits to the Ladybird archive at the Leicestershire Records Office formed a

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<sup>4</sup>'The students' view: reports from the conference', *Serials for the international serials community*, Vol. 20, No. 2, July 2007, pp. 103–110.

<sup>5</sup>'Beyond the Campus: An Interdisciplinary Examination of the Value of Research', 28th–30th January, 2009, Cumberland Lodge, The Great Park, Windsor.

major part of the information retrieval process during the first phase. In addition, initial contact was made with former key personnel from the company in order to build a working relationship with them. A database of titles produced by the company was compiled and used as a resource upon which quantitative data has been based. Background reading and literature searches provided a sound basis from which to begin the project. In addition, the courses, seminars and conferences attended during the first year proved to be extremely useful for learning new skills and providing a grounding for academic training. The first major chapter providing an historical overview was compiled during this phase.

The next major phase (October 2007 to September 2008) required additional visits to the archives in the Leicestershire Records Office. Firstly, this was necessary to provide any additional material for the database. Secondly, and more importantly, however, having established a wide range of questions, visits to the archive helped provide answers to these. All information gathered was collated and analysed during this phase. Interviews with key former personnel from the company were undertaken during the second year of study and the results collated, analysed and noted. Additional chapters dealing with the company's publishing output were compiled during this phase of the project.

The final phase (October 2008 to spring 2009) completed the research by identifying any gaps and subsequently examining relevant information. The remainder of the thesis was written up, checked and any necessary revisions and additions made. During this phase it was necessary to ensure that the literature search remained up to date and any latest information included. Additional titles were also added to the database to ensure that it remained up to date.

## **1.6 Structure**

Following a substantial chapter (2) in which an historical overview of the company is provided, the next chapter discusses the company's printing and production processes. This third chapter provides an in-depth look at print technologies utilised by the company and the ways in which production methods were to change over the course of a century. Chapter 4 discusses the sales, marketing and export strategies employed by the company. The following three chapters cover the years of the Ladybird imprint

from 1914 to 2009. The decision to divide this information into three chapters was to reflect changes in company ownership, from independent company to takeover by a conglomerate and, finally as an imprint owned alongside many other publishing imprints. The eighth chapter discusses literacy and education and the firm's role as publishers of a substantial amount of educational material. Chapter 9 explores political issues relating to class, gender and race and the ways in which the company was affected by and, indeed, itself had an influence upon them. Chapter 10 investigates the success of the firm and its brand utilising both qualitative and quantitative measures of success. A final chapter (11) provides summarises the research findings and suggests possibilities for further research.

## Chapter 2

### Historical Overview

#### 2.1 Geographical Location

Unlike the majority of British publishing imprints which had generally been founded in the country's capital or centres of learning, Ladybird books originated in a provincial market town, namely Loughborough. Situated in the heart of the Midlands, close to the cities of Nottingham, Derby and Leicester, Loughborough's central location within the country had contributed to a steady growth in its industrialisation. The physical geography of the area had played an important part in the situation of the town of Loughborough for it lies at a point where the Soar valley narrows and is easily bridged. The basis of the town's wealth came from the wool trade which later progressed into the manufacture of hosiery and, subsequently, engineering as the industry became increasingly mechanised.

The town's transport links have also played a significant role in its expansion. Loughborough was on the postal route by 1669 with a broadsheet of that date listing the town in its specified stops.<sup>1</sup> In order to collect tolls for road maintenance and improvement from Loughborough to Market Harborough, the county's first Turnpike Trust was set up in 1726. In 1737 and 1738 two acts were passed for two routes northwards from Loughborough, one to Derby and the other to Nottingham.<sup>2</sup> Loughborough provided a natural junction where the main roads divided, with the eastern section crossing the River Trent at Nottingham and leading to the northeast whilst the western section similarly crossed the Trent but led to the northwest. By 1754 there was a stage between Nottingham and Loughborough and in 1755 there was a post on six days a week between London and Nottingham stopping at Loughborough.<sup>3</sup> Thus Loughborough became established as a coaching link between London through Leicester, northwards. Road building continued throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with improved road links culminating in the

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<sup>1</sup>Copy of 1669 broadsheet reproduced in John Soer, *The Royal Mail in Leicestershire and Rutland*, (The Midland (GB) Postal History Society, No. 4, 1997) p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Arthur Cossons, *The Turnpike Roads of Leicestershire and Rutland*, (Leicester: Kairos Press, 2005), pp. 10–11.

<sup>3</sup>John Soer, *The Royal Mail in Leicestershire and Rutland*, (The Midland (GB) Postal History Society, No. 4, 1997) p. 10.

building of the M1 motorway. The town was afforded the benefit of access to the M1 motorway in 1965<sup>4</sup> and this contributed greatly to the provision of better transport links to the rest of the country. Improved roads allowed for increasingly easier distribution of manufactured products for Loughborough companies, not least that of Wills and Hepworth Ltd, publisher of the Ladybird books.

In order to bring coal to the town from the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire coalfields and to transport its produce from the town, Loughborough was endowed with a canal system following a 1776 act finally authorising the scheme. The act allowed for the formation of the Loughborough Navigation Company and the subsequent cutting of a canal between Loughborough and the River Trent which was completed by 1779.<sup>5</sup> The canal aided the industrialisation of the town, primarily insomuch as the transportation of coal allowed for expansion of the town's heavy industry.

The invention of the steam locomotive and the spread of railways was one of the most important factors in the country's industrialisation. Leicestershire had one of the earliest railways in Britain. An 1836 act approved the building of a railway 'commencing at the London and Birmingham Railway'<sup>6</sup> and providing a line 'passing from, through, or into the parishes, townships, and places of... [list includes Loughborough]'.<sup>7</sup> The 1840 opening of the Midland Counties Railway established Loughborough's rail link. The line was extended to St Pancras in London with trains finally running from the Midlands to St Pancras from 1868.<sup>8</sup>

Loughborough is the main junction in the Soar Valley where the canal, roads and rail meet, making it an ideal location for a business with ease of transportation being vital for the distribution of goods produced, as well as for receiving raw materials.

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<sup>4</sup><http://www.cbrd.co.uk> [site accessed 25th January, 2007]

<sup>5</sup>Charles Hadfield, *The Canals of the East Midlands*, (Newton Abbot, London, North Pomfret: David and Charles, 1966) pp. 37–38.

<sup>6</sup>Document entitled *An act for making a Railway, with Branches commencing at the London and Birmingham Railway, in the Parish of Rugby, in the County of Warwick, to communicate with the Towns of Leicester, Nottingham and Derby, to be called "The Midland Counties Railway"*, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup>Document entitled *An act for making a Railway, with Branches commencing at the London and Birmingham Railway, in the Parish of Rugby, in the County of Warwick, to communicate with the Towns of Leicester, Nottingham and Derby, to be called "The Midland Counties Railway"*, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup>E.G. Barnes, *The Rise of the Midland Railway 1844–1874*, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1966) p. 248

## 2.2 Nineteenth-century Printers

By 1904 William Simpson Hepworth had joined Henry Wills to form the business known as Wills and Hepworth, the firm responsible for bringing Ladybird books to millions of readers over a period of almost 60 years. The premises in Loughborough town centre from which they operated, however, had been used for printing and publishing long before this joint venture. The town's newspaper, the *Loughborough Monitor and General Advertiser for the Northern Division of the County of Leicester* had been launched by John Henry Gray in October 1857<sup>9</sup> and printed on his presses located in premises at Angel Yard, conveniently situated on a sizeable plot at the rear of his shop in the Market Place. In addition, Gray published an almanac from 1858 onwards, a tradition continued by the subsequent owners. The 1871 census describes John Henry Gray as 'Printer, Bookseller and Stationer' indicating that his business was identical in nature to that later run by Henry Wills. An 1863 gazetteer of the town describes the business of John Henry Gray as 'bookseller, printer and publisher of the *Loughborough Monitor* Market Place, Loughborough'<sup>10</sup> and Gray's almanac published in 1873, indicates that his address was 5, Market Place.<sup>11</sup> This confirms that the firm was run from the same premises at which Henry Wills, later joined by William Hepworth, operated his own bookselling and printing business. Having published his final almanac earlier in the year, John Henry Gray died in September 1873 aged just 40.<sup>12</sup>

It is believed that the twenty-three year old Henry Wills purchased both the shop in the Market Place and the adjacent printing works in Angel Yard at the rear of the shop, upon Gray's demise in 1873.<sup>13</sup> No documentary evidence is available to support this but it is fair to assume that the business was transferred to Henry Wills around this time as he definitely owned the firm by 1876. Described as 'Stationer and

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<sup>9</sup>Diana Dixon, 'What is a town without a newspaper?', *Leicestershire Historian* (2006), p. 7. The British Library holds copies of the *Loughborough Monitor* from No. 69 published on 20th January, 1859.

<sup>10</sup>*Historical Gazetteer and Directory of Loughborough, Shepshed, Osgathorpe and Belton* Volume One, (1863), p. 35.

<sup>11</sup>J.H. Gray's *Loughborough Almanac and Street Directory for 1873* (Loughborough: John Henry Gray, 1873).

<sup>12</sup>Index to registers. Deaths registered in July, August and September 1873. District of Loughborough, Volume 7a, page 56. National archives <http://content.ancestry.co.uk> [site accessed 8th March, 2007]

<sup>13</sup>*Loughborough Past and Present* Ladybird Books Ltd, (1988), p. 36 and *Publishing News*, May 18th, 1990, p. 1.



Bookseller' in a trade directory he is listed as the sole proprietor of the business.<sup>14</sup>

Henry Wills had been born in Narborough, Leicestershire in 1850, the son of George and Elizabeth Winifred Wills.<sup>15</sup> His was a fairly wealthy family background for his father owned the Auburn House School for boys. The 1861 census lists George Wills as 'Schoolmaster' and the household comprised staff and scholars in addition to the family members themselves.<sup>16</sup> Henry Wills' subsequent interest in publishing and the provision of reading materials to the public probably stemmed from his upbringing in an environment where the pursuit of knowledge and the importance of education would have been highly valued.

Henry Wills acquired and owned the business during a period of growth and relative prosperity for the town. Loughborough's population had increased from around 14,733 at the 1881 census to over 18,000 by 1887.<sup>17</sup> In addition, it was acknowledged that 'the granting to Loughborough of the Charter of Incorporation in September 1888 was the most significant step forward of the 19th century towards promoting the prosperity of the town.'<sup>18</sup> Henry Wills' business was favourably located in the town's market place where it was well placed to attract passing trade. In fact, to celebrate the town's incorporation as a municipal borough, and taking advantage of a commercial opportunity, he published and printed *Wills' Illustrated Guide to Loughborough with Excursions to Places of Interest in the Neighbourhood* in 1889.<sup>19</sup>

As jobbing printers the firm produced a multitude of titles and products, including an annually published cloth-bound trade journal, *Wills' Loughborough Almanac and Street Directory*, full of useful and fascinating information about nineteenth-century life in, and around, the area. Henry Wills was certainly not afraid to diversify and had described his business, at 5, Market Place, Loughborough, as 'The Library', Printer,

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<sup>14</sup>*Kelly's Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland* (1876).

<sup>15</sup>1861 Census and 1901 Census. Public Record Office ref. RG13/2975. National archives <http://content.ancestry.co.uk> [site accessed 20th March, 2007]

<sup>16</sup>1861 Census. Public Record Office ref. RG9/2257. National archives <http://content.ancestry.co.uk> [site accessed 20th March, 2007]

<sup>17</sup>Document: Petition for Incorporation drawn up by the local board of health following a public meeting on 6th May, 1887.

<sup>18</sup>W. Arthur Deakin, *The Story of Loughborough 1888–1914* (Loughborough: Loughborough Echo Press Ltd, 1979), p. 5. Book based on archive of the Loughborough Echo, founded and owned by the Deakin family.

<sup>19</sup>*Wills' Illustrated Guide to Loughborough with Excursions to Places of Interest in the Neighbourhood* (Loughborough: Henry Wills, 1889).

Bookseller and Fancy Stationer' in this trade journal published in 1878.<sup>20</sup> It was, in fact, common practice for a town's circulating library to be run by a commercial bookseller. The town of Loughborough did not have a public library until 1886 so Henry's subscription library service was, no doubt, invaluable in its provision of literature for the town's reading population. Described in the 1881 census as 'Bookseller and Printer Master', the thirty-one-year-old Henry Wills was responsible for 21 employees comprising '7 men, 12 boys and 2 girls'. He was, at that time, living in the town centre at the business premises of 4 and 5, Market Place with his wife Katherine (aged 29), daughter Winifred (aged 4), son Edward (aged 3) and daughter Dorothy (aged 4 months) along with two female domestic servants.<sup>21</sup> The business address had always been 5, Market Place but it is clear that he must have additionally owned the neighbouring building by 1881. His almanac for 1882 specifies a move involving the shop premises to 4, Market Place:

#### NOTICE OF REMOVAL

H. Wills

Begs to Inform his customers that he has removed his Business Premises to No 4 Market Place where he trusts to be still honoured with their patronage. He also begs to thank them for the kind support he has received during the time he has been in business.<sup>22</sup>

By 1891 business was thriving and the firm had gained an admirable reputation for producing high-quality printing and for its provision of a diverse range of services. It was thus described in *Kelly's Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland*, 'Bookseller, Printer, Stationer, Bookbinder, Lithographer, Relief Stamper, Frame Maker and Circulating Library'.<sup>23</sup> By this time Henry Wills and his family had moved out of the business premises and were residing at 5, Forest Road, Loughborough.<sup>24</sup> An eloquent description of his commercial establishment appeared in a town guide to Loughborough, published in 1892. Whilst it is realised that the business's attributes would have been greatly extolled in this advertising text, it does nevertheless provide a detailed insight into the nature of the business.

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<sup>20</sup>Henry Wills, *Wills' Loughborough Almanac and Street Directory* (Loughborough: Henry Wills, 1878).

<sup>21</sup>Census Returns of England and Wales, 1881. Class: RG11; Piece: 3144; Folio: 91; Page: 1; GSU roll: 1341750.

<sup>22</sup>*Wills' Loughborough Almanac and Street Directory* (Loughborough: Henry Wills, 1882), p. 161.

<sup>23</sup>*Kelly's Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland* (1891).

<sup>24</sup>Census Returns of England and Wales, 1891. Class: RG12; Piece: 2516; Folio: 92; Page: 1.

‘Mr. H. Wills, Bookseller and Stationer, Printer and Bookbinder, etc., 4, Market Place

Pre-eminent among similar establishments in Loughborough, the printing and stationery business at present under the proprietorship of Mr. H. Wills stands out as conclusive proof of what may be accomplished by combining ability and enterprise in the management of any commercial undertaking. Its foundation dates back for upwards of a quarter of a century. The premises, which are extensive and centrally situated in the Market Place, comprise a good front shop for the general stock with workshops at the rear, where both lithographic and letterpress printing, bookbinding etc. are carried on and another front shop and show-room devoted to the picture frame making trade. The appointments have been ably planned, with the view of facilitating business in a first-class establishment. In the first-named department special attention is given to books. The standard literature of the day is represented, and the stock of authoritative works on theology, art, science etc. is fully equal to local demand. History, biography, travel, poetry, fiction and other phases of current literature are also *en evidence*, showing that Mr. Wills is anxious to place within the reach of his customers pure and healthy literature. There is also a well-stocked circulating library in connection with Mudie’s where the reading public of Loughborough have within their reach ample food for their intellectual digestion. The shop also contains a choice assortment of stationery, photo albums, frames and fancy goods.

In the works which are situated in the yard at the rear, competent men are engaged in every class of printing, with modern plant, printing presses and a varied selection of modern types. Every description of printing is undertaken and executed promptly, also engraving and lithographing, to which great attention is paid, a competent staff of lithographic artists being always employed. Plain and coloured stamping is also executed by experienced workmen. For picture frame making there is a large stock of plain and gilt mouldings of the newest design, from the best English and continental manufacturing houses, suitable for framing the highest class of pictures. In this department there is also a choice selection of artists’ materials, of which Winsor and Newton’s oil and water colours form an important feature. The business is of a very comprehensive character, and is conducted upon the highest principles.’<sup>25</sup>

The firm was certainly in a position to offer a comprehensive printing service, having the means of producing letterpress printing, lithographic printing, pen machine ruling, engraving and stamping all under one roof. (See Chapter 3 for detailed descriptions of printing and production methods.) These various printing processes required much

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<sup>25</sup> *Loughborough 1892: Its History, Manufactures and Trade* (London and Brighton: Robinson, Son and Pike: 1892), p. 33.

skilled labour and competent operatives. A pamphlet printed by the firm at the turn of the century, advertising their services states that, 'H. Wills, 4 and 5 Market Place, Loughborough' was a 'General Printer, Lithographer, Bookbinder and Stationer'. The firm offered letterpress printing services which included the production of, 'Fashion circulars, business cards, menus, illustrated catalogues, show cards, share certificates, invoices, noteheads, memorandums, posters, brewers' labels, calendars, seed catalogues, programmes and bazaar handbooks' whilst their lithographic printing services extended to 'Illustrated catalogues, photo-litho, plans and particulars, process work, address cards, labels, tea papers, cake bands, furniture catalogues, posters, handbills, labels and show cards.'<sup>26</sup> The premises were additionally being used for book production and that included books specifically published for children, with the firm undertaking contracts to produce children's books for the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK). One of the principal sources for books in Sunday school libraries, the SPCK was 'responsible for books on a wide range of topics for many years.'<sup>27</sup>

Following Forster's 1870 Education Act, which effectively initiated the provision of elementary education throughout the entire country,<sup>28</sup> many more publishers had begun to include children's books in their publishing programmes. The increased production of children's books during the latter part of the nineteenth century up until the First World War was partly due to the growth of public libraries. According to Ellis, by July 1900 there were 401 local authorities in the UK which had adopted the Public Libraries Act in order to provide public library facilities. In addition, 225 libraries were established in England and Wales between 1897 and 1913 following grants from Andrew Carnegie.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, Ellis specifies that in 1891 there were around 40 public libraries throughout the country owning special collections of children's books, a figure that had grown to 108 by 1898.<sup>30</sup> The new Public Free Library in the town of Loughborough, opened on 22nd June, 1905, was one of those

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<sup>26</sup> Advertising pamphlet published and printed by Henry Wills, Angel Yard, Loughborough (c. 1900), Ladybird archive DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

<sup>27</sup> Alec Ellis, *A History of Children's Reading and Literature* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1969), pp. 106-7.

<sup>28</sup> Gillian Sutherland, Education, in F.M.L. Thompson, ed, *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950*, Vol. 3, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge) 1990, p. 142.

<sup>29</sup> Ellis, 1969, pp. 108-9.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

to benefit from Carnegie's generosity. In 1903 the Town Council had applied to Carnegie for a grant, a request that was granted with the proviso that the site was provided and that the Corporation would levy a penny rate to support the library service. This offer was accepted and Major Frank Griggs of Island House, Granby Street, Loughborough, donated the necessary land whilst Carnegie provided the substantial sum of £5000 to support the building programme.<sup>31</sup>

By the beginning of the twentieth century Loughborough's population had risen to over 21,000.<sup>32</sup> The 1901 census indicates that Henry Wills, now aged 51, was living at 49, Forest Road, Loughborough along with his family. He is described as 'Printer, Bookseller, Stationer [and] Employer'.<sup>33</sup> By 1901 there were approximately 150 people employed in the paper, print and stationery businesses in the town of Loughborough, a third of whom were women.<sup>34</sup>

Photographs taken at the turn of the century, of the printing premises of the Angel Press, situated in Angel Yard, are an excellent source of evidence regarding the print machinery and processes being used by Wills and Hepworth at the time. (See Chapter 3 for a description of this technology.) It is also apparent from the photographs that, of the 150 people working within such trades in the town, quite a substantial number of these must have been employed by Henry Wills. Although only three departments within the firm are depicted, the photographs show that there was a minimum of 46 employees. There were likely to have been additional staff in the stationery shop and other areas of the print works. The photographs also indicate that several women and girls were employed by the firm.<sup>35</sup>

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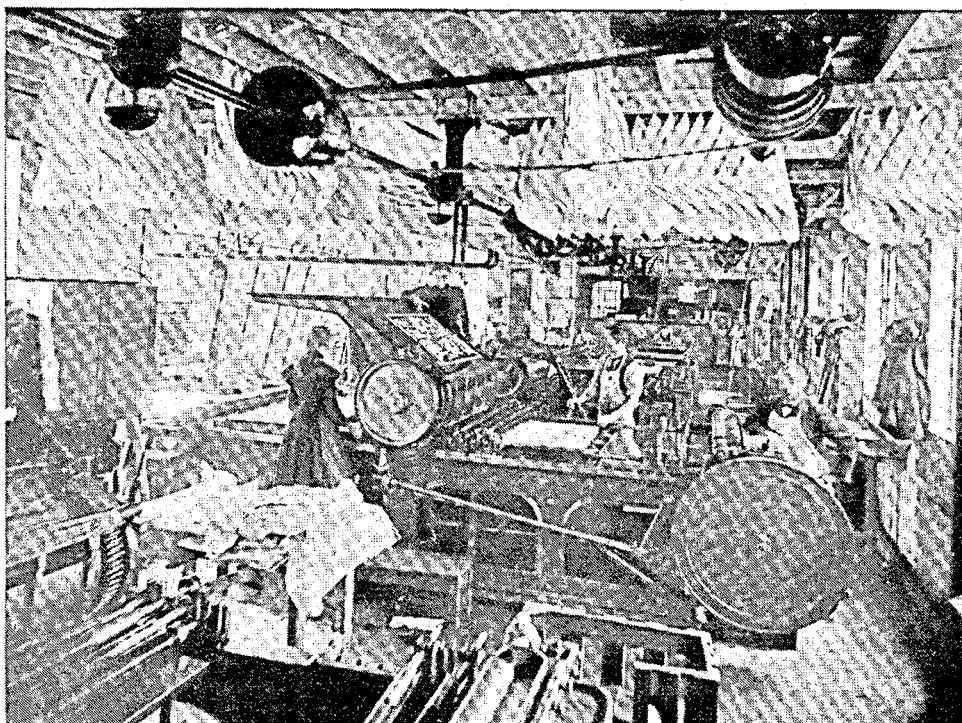
<sup>31</sup>Deakin, 1979, p. 80.

<sup>32</sup><http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/> [site accessed 15th February, 2007]

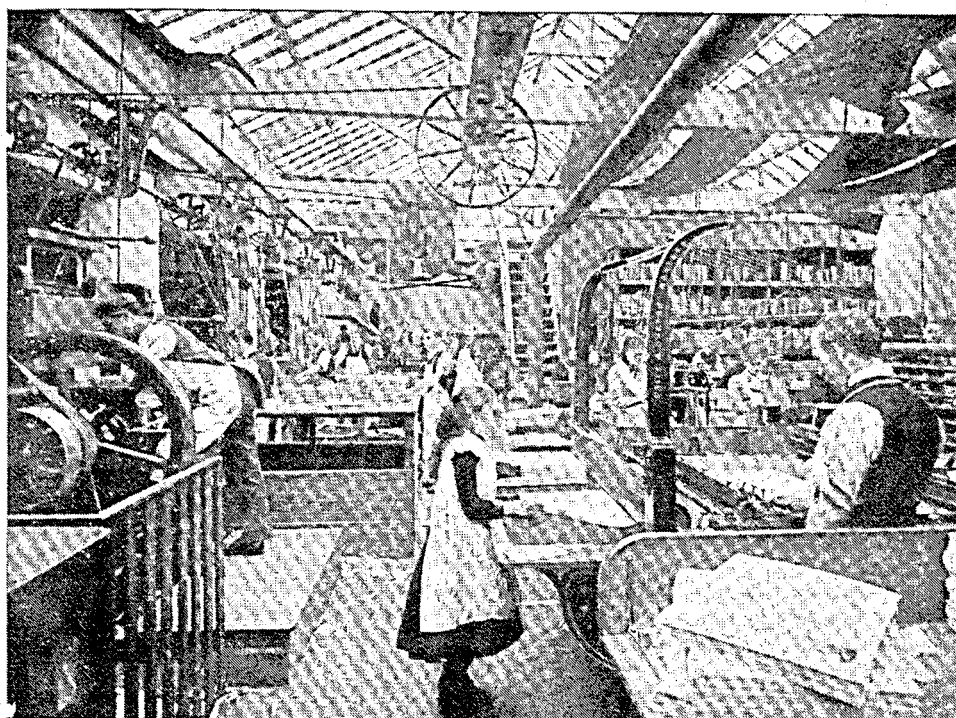
<sup>33</sup>1901 Census. Public Record Office ref. RG13/2975.

<sup>34</sup>Rose M. Boylan, *Geographical consequences of Industrialisation of Loughborough*, dissertation for BA (Hons) degree, Polytechnic of Central London, 1985, p. 62.

<sup>35</sup>Photographs of the Henry Wills' printing operation at Angel Yard, Loughborough (c. 1900) courtesy of Leicestershire Records Office, Ladybird archive DE5578.



MACHINE ROOM.



BINDING ROOM.

Figure 1: Machine and binding rooms, The Angel Press, Angel Yard, Loughborough, c. 1900.



COMPOSING ROOM

Figure 2: Composing room, The Angel Press, Angel Yard, Loughborough, c. 1900.

### 2.3 The Ladybird Imprint

William Simpson Hepworth, who joined forces with Henry Wills, was destined for the book trade. Having been born in Hartlepool, Durham on 24th June, 1877, he was the son of William Hepworth whose own occupation is registered on the birth certificate as 'Stationer'.<sup>36</sup> By 1881 the family were living in Kidderminster where his father was still described as a 'Stationer'.<sup>37</sup> William Simpson Hepworth obviously learnt the trade from his father as he was working as a stationer's assistant at his father's business in Kidderminster in 1901.<sup>38</sup> Although Ladybird Books Ltd's own publication states that 'William Hepworth joined the Angel Press in 1906 and the firm then became Wills and Hepworth',<sup>39</sup> this cannot be the case, for Hepworth was already in partnership with Henry Wills by 1904. *Wills' Almanac, Diary, Trade and Street Directory for 1904* clearly states that it was printed and published by Wills and Hepworth and, in addition, contained several advertisements for each aspect of their

<sup>36</sup>Birth certificate of William Simpson Hepworth, (No. CM842924). Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578, Leicestershire Record Office.

<sup>37</sup>Census Returns of England and Wales, 1881. Class: RG11; Piece: 2901; Folio: 124; Page: 3; GSU roll: 1341696.

<sup>38</sup>1901 Census. National archives <http://nationalarchives.gov.uk> [site accessed 20th March, 2007].

<sup>39</sup>*Loughborough Past and Present* (Loughbrough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1988) p. 36.

joint business.<sup>40</sup> They must have become partners between 1903 and 1904 as *Wills' Almanac, Diary, Trade and Street Directory for 1903* was printed and published solely by Henry Wills.<sup>41</sup>

Wills and Hepworth, themselves listed as 'Stationers' in the 1904 edition of *Kelly's Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland*<sup>42</sup> were evidently much more than mere stationers. Their role as providers of a substantial library service for the readers of Loughborough continued unabated despite the opening of the newly built public library. An advertisement in their almanac for 1904 stated that Wills' library, run in connection with Mudie's had 'over 7,000 volumes in stock'.<sup>43</sup> In fact, the firm's almanacs continued to advertise this library service as late as 1925. In the early 1900s the firm was a strong contributor to the local economy providing jobs for many people. Ledgers for 1904 give a clear indication of the substantial amount of work being carried out by the firm with annual expenditure on wages and materials for each department thus defined: composing (wages and materials) £217.6s.3d.; letterpress machining (wages) £97.16s.5d.; lithographic transferring (wages and materials) £65.7s.8d.; lithographic machining (wages) £56.-s.8d. and bindery (wages) £138.10s.2d.<sup>44</sup> The ledgers remaining in the archive today were themselves produced by the company and are testimony to the high quality of workmanship that afforded them their good reputation. The ledger containing details of wages and materials covering the period at the beginning of the twentieth century, from 1903 onwards, for example, was manufactured by H. Wills as specified in a label on the inside cover. Leather bound with gold embossed lettering, the ledger was produced on paper of an exceptionally high quality and remains in perfect condition today. It is highly likely that this would have been printed on the pen ruling machine shown in the photograph featured on page 18. (See Chapter 3 for more information.) Advertising their printing capabilities in 1906, the firm claimed to have 'one of the most up-to-date plants in the

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<sup>40</sup>*Wills' Almanac, Diary, Trade and Street Directory for 1904* (Loughborough: Wills and Hepworth, 1904).

<sup>41</sup>*Wills' Almanac, Diary, Trade and Street Directory for 1903* (Loughborough: Henry Wills, 1903).

<sup>42</sup>*Kelly's Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland* (1904).

<sup>43</sup>*Wills' Almanac, Diary, Trade and Street Directory for 1903* (Loughborough: Henry Wills, 1904).

<sup>44</sup>Expenditure taken from accounts ledger in Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 in Leicestershire Records Office.



country' stating in addition, that 'Every description of colour work or lithography actually [sic] produced on the premises.'<sup>45</sup>

Although the name of Wills and Hepworth remained for decades, the partnership was comparatively short-lived, for it is believed that Henry Wills retired in 1905, selling his share of the business to William Simpson Hepworth.<sup>46</sup> It is not possible to verify this as no relevant documentation exists and Wills' almanacs for the period make no mention of his retirement. Remaining as sole proprietor until 1924, it was Hepworth who was to make the crucial decision from which Ladybird books were born.

At the outset of the First World War the firm was printing not only stationery, almanacs and seed catalogues but its services were additionally being utilised by other publishers for the printing of many kinds of books. Wills and Hepworth's almanac for 1914 includes several advertisements for different aspect of the business. The circulating library is featured in the almanac, indicating 'an annual subscription fee of 10s. 6d. or, weekly 3d. per volume', alongside separate advertisements for the firm's role as book binders, picture framers and sellers of artists' materials and maps. At this period they had further diversified into acting as agents for many large shipping companies including Cunard, White Star and Canadian Pacific amongst others.<sup>47</sup>

In 1914, Hepworth took the decision to establish his own range of children's books and the firm produced the initial Ladybird books. (See Chapter 5 for a detailed description of the initial series of books.) Adopting a logo featuring an open-winged ladybird and the words 'A Ladybird Book', the famous brand was born. (See Chapter 4 for details of the company's use of branding and trade marks.) It was generally believed that the first Ladybird books were produced in 1915<sup>48</sup> or 1916<sup>49</sup> but two earlier books have been located which were deposited with the British Library in 1914. (See Chapter 5 for more information on these titles.) It is interesting that

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<sup>45</sup>Wills' *Almanac, Diary, Trade and Street Directory for 1906* (Loughborough: Wills and Hepworth, 1906), p. 1.

<sup>46</sup>Pat Grundy, 'The Ladybird from Angel Yard', *Leicestershire Historian* (2006), p. 24.

<sup>47</sup>Wills' *Almanac, Diary, Trade and Street Directory for 1918* (Loughborough: Wills and Hepworth, 1918), p. 43.

<sup>48</sup>*Loughborough: Past and Present* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1988) p. 36.

<sup>49</sup>Bygone Loughborough in *Photographs, Volume 2* and Paul Medlicott, 'A 52 page package' *New Society*, 13th February, 1975, p. 399. and Janet Whitehead, 'Collecting Ladybird Books', *Book and Magazine Collector*, Issue 195, June 2000, p. 40.

Hepworth should decide to launch his own series of children's books at a time when, because of the outbreak of the First World War, the production of books was restricted due to a scarcity of paper and other raw materials. The outcome of the resultant downward trend was that, during the war years, the overall numbers of books produced in Britain dropped from 12,379 in 1913 to 7,716 by 1918.<sup>50</sup> However, Hepworth's children's book publishing venture was certainly a shrewd move as there was great demand for books and that demand included children's literature. (See Chapter 5 for further discussion on the impact of the war.)

Whilst the publishing aspect of the business remained minuscule in comparison to its other enterprises, the publishing foundations had been laid. By branching out into children's book publishing, the firm had taken advantage of a trend that was developing throughout the British publishing industry. Book historian, Frank Eyre acknowledges that this period witnessed a burgeoning children's book industry,

'The first twenty years of the century had seen a tremendous development in the business of publishing for children. It was a period of expansion, during which the great 'children's houses' established their reputations and many of the larger firms formed separate children's departments for the first time. Many new firms were founded...'<sup>51</sup>

The book trade was fairly stable during this period with many publishers abiding by the Net Book Agreement. In fact, 'By the end of World War I, most fiction was also being published on net terms.'<sup>52</sup> Having been established on 1st January, 1900 the Net Book Agreement was a voluntary arrangement whereby publishers were able to set a minimum price at which the book was to be sold. This would, of course, have benefited Wills and Hepworth as both publishers and booksellers who were, at the time selling both net and non-net books. Advertisements in the firm's almanacs suggest that discounts were available on those non-netted books sold in the shop.

Hepworth's foray into the world of children's book publishing was a cautious one and, during the 1920s, he published a small number of additional titles in the newly

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<sup>50</sup>Ian Norrie (ed.), *Mumby's Publishing and Bookselling in the Twentieth Century*, 6th edn. (London: Bell & Hyman, 1982), p. 20.

<sup>51</sup>Frank Eyre, *British Children's Books in the Twentieth Century*, (London: Longman Group Ltd, 1971) p. 21.

<sup>52</sup>John Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, 2nd edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 155.

established Ladybird series. (See Chapter 5 regarding these titles.) In 1924 William Simpson Hepworth decided to relinquish his sole proprietorship. Before the firm could change its business status, however, it was necessary for a formal valuation to be undertaken. The resultant inventory indicates that the premises were quite substantial for a provincial printing firm of the time.<sup>53</sup> They comprised a stereo room, warehouses, a framing department, a rotary machine room, a gluing department, a sewing department, a bindery, a composing department, a machine room with both a letterpress and lithographic section and an end gluing room, indicating their book manufacturing capability. The valuation accompanying the inventory valued the firm at £5,724.18*s.2d.* before depreciation and £5,706.8*s.2d.* after.<sup>54</sup> (See Chapter 10 for a full financial analysis of the company.) Book publishing was not their main occupation during this period, however, and they remained primarily commercial printers up until, and beyond, the Second World War.

## **2.4 A Limited Company**

In 1924 William Simpson Hepworth sold the business to Wills and Hepworth Ltd for a sum of £11,997. The transaction, applicable from 1st April, 1924, provided for the sale of the business but not for the freehold of the premises in Angel Yard and Market Place, Loughborough, of which Hepworth retained ownership.<sup>55</sup> In a simultaneous transaction he leased the property at 4, Market Place and Angel Yard to the company of Wills and Hepworth Ltd for a period of seven years, from 1st April, 1924, at an annual rent of £250. Hepworth by no means gave up his position within the company ensuring that he retained an overwhelming majority of the shares. He remained as Governing Director until his death in 1961 although he did not take part in the day-to-day running of the business after 1934. Incorporation documents were filed with Companies House on 29th August, 1924. The Register of Directors or Managers dated 5th September, 1924 lists Hepworth together with Percy William Roberts and John Graham.<sup>56</sup> At the first meeting of the board of directors it was recorded that Hepworth retained share number 1 whilst his wife, Olive, had share number 2 and share number

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<sup>53</sup>Inventory of The Angel Press 1924. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

<sup>54</sup>Inventory and valuation of The Angel Press 1924. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

<sup>55</sup>Agreement for sale of a business – legal document. Ladybird archive ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

<sup>56</sup>Register of Directors and Managers dated 5th September, 1924. Ladybird archive ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

3 went to Harry Holland. Hepworth then retained shares numbered 4 to 11,500, Percy Roberts had numbers 11,501 to 11,750 and John Graham 11,751 to 12,000.<sup>57</sup> At the second board meeting on 17th October, 1924 shares 4 to 1003 were transferred to Percy Roberts and numbers 1004 to 1253 transferred to John Graham.<sup>58</sup>

A wages' ledger for 1925 indicates that there were six compositors, ten people employed in the letterpress machine room, two in the rotary press room, six in litho transferring, six in litho machining, 14 in book binding, six employed in 'picture books' (but does not specify their exact tasks) and two people in the warehouse.<sup>59</sup> The stationery shop, also owned by the company was, by 1929, managed by Miss Jessie Graves and staffed by 'Richards, Miss Mason, Stafford and a 'boy'.<sup>60</sup> Miss Graves, who frequently attended trade fairs around the country in order to purchase leather goods, toys and cut-glass to sell alongside the books and stationery, had joined the company at the age of 16 in 1924 at a salary of 12s.6d. per week.<sup>61</sup> She had, allegedly, been advised by William Hepworth to attend night-school in order to learn book-keeping and French, a skill encouraged to enable her to understand the titles on the French books supplied to Loughborough Grammar School.<sup>62</sup>

The firm was prudent in its publishing output during the 1920s and this was a wise approach for the children's book publishing business had become much more competitive. They produced a few titles including colouring books, story books with black and white illustrations and some 'untearable' picture books and others featuring colour illustrations. Larger publishers had become better established and, according to Frank Eyre, it was becoming 'increasingly difficult to compete successfully against the appeal of the innumerable mass-produced series which were the predominating feature of the period.'<sup>63</sup> By relying predominantly upon the commercial printing

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<sup>57</sup>Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors 5th September, 1924. Ladybird archive ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

<sup>58</sup>Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors 17th October, 1924. Ladybird archive ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

<sup>59</sup>Wages ledger in Ladybird archive ref. DE5578, Leicestershire Records Office.

<sup>60</sup>Staff list, 1929. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

<sup>61</sup>Rosemary Holmes [daughter of Jessie Graves] recalling her mother's period of employment with Wills and Hepworth Ltd. As quoted in Janet Whitehead, 'Collecting Ladybird Books'. *Book and Magazine Collector*, Issue 195, June 2000, p. 43.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Eyre, 1971, p. 21.

aspect of the business, the children's book publishing venture remained a relatively low risk sideline.

As in the previous decade, during the 1930s the company continued to produce a small number of titles each with coloured pictorial covers. (See Chapter 5 for descriptions of books produced during the period). The Register of Directors and Managers dated 26th October, 1934 lists two additional names Eric Mackenzie Brown and James Shields Clegg who was to play an important role in the company's future book publishing venture. James Shields Clegg joined the company in 1934 at a time when the business was in expansion and eventually went on to become the company's managing director in 1961. Percy Roberts was in charge of the company's Leicester office, which dealt with printed material for the shoe and stocking trade.

Douglas Keen, who was also to play an extremely significant role in the production of children's books and in particular the Key Words Reading Scheme (KWRS) when he returned to the company after service in the Second World War, first joined the firm in 1936. (See Chapter 8 for further details on the reading scheme.) Based in an office in Birmingham, Douglas Keen dealt with commercial printing customers in the West Midlands, especially in the automotive industry. He was initially employed as a travelling sales representative and proved to be particularly influential.

There is evidence in one of the company's ledgers of payment to the 'Educational Supply Association', in 1933.<sup>64</sup> It is possible that this refers to the trade association now known as The British Educational Suppliers Association (BESA) which was founded in 1933 to 'serve education and training – in the UK and world-wide.'<sup>65</sup> Wills and Hepworth Ltd sought to take full advantage of the opportunities afforded by publishing books for use in the educational sector during the decades that followed. (See Chapter 8 for a full description of the company's role as educational publishers.)

The firm's premises occupied a substantial area within the town by the mid 1930s. A map of Loughborough town centre, (see below) published in 1935 by Wills and

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<sup>64</sup>Ledger in Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578. Leicestershire Records Office, Leicestershire.

<sup>65</sup><http://www.naace.org> and <http://www.besonet.org.uk> [site accessed 1st March, 2007]

Hepworth Ltd indicates that the premises (highlighted in red) were adjacent to the Market Place, Market Street, Swan Street and Derby Square.<sup>66</sup>

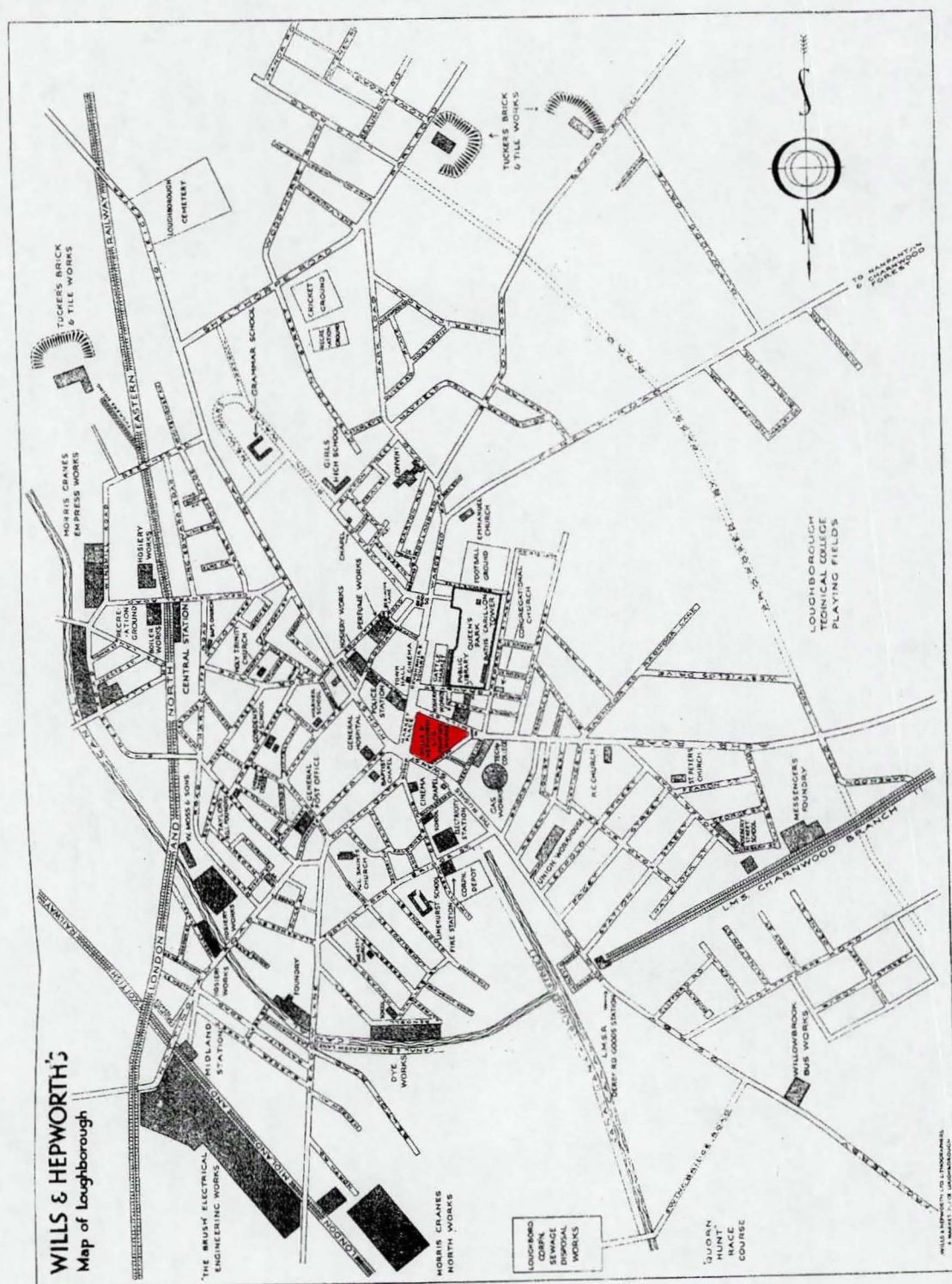


Figure 3: Map of Loughborough town centre indicating extent of premises occupied by Wills and Hepworth Ltd, 1935.

<sup>66</sup>Map published in *Wills' Loughborough Almanac and Street Directory* (Loughborough: Wills and Hepworth Ltd, 1935).

The 1938 almanac produced by the company denotes a change of business address to 60, Market Street, Loughborough.<sup>67</sup> By the end of the 1930s the company's order books boasted a distinguished list of customers providing lucrative commercial printing contracts for the production of car catalogues, stationery and almanacs and, at this period, these most certainly remained the primary function of the business. Customers included famous names such as the perfume-makers Yardley's, car manufacturers Austin and Rover and motorcycle manufacturers BSA.

However, the company's business underwent a radical change in direction with the onset of the Second World War in 1939. Following the outbreak of war, the directors took the decision to publish and print a range of children's books in a standard format to 'tide them over' through the perceived difficult times ahead. Each book, sized at 7" x 4<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub>", was created with exactly the same physical structure: printed endpapers, the same number of pages, hard-backed cover with dust jacket, illustrations on the right-hand pages and text of the left-hand pages. These standard format books were priced at 2s. 6d. and were to become the company's greatest asset in its future success. (See Chapters 3, 5 and 6 for additional information on the standard format books).

Realising the potential difficulties in operating a commercial printing enterprise during wartime, company directors decided that diversification was necessary in order to survive. It was director, Percy Roberts who was given the responsibility of the children's book publishing output during the war and he went on to oversee the initial few series produced during the war years. The threat of war did not adversely affect the company's business plans. In fact, the Board of Directors decided at a meeting on 19th September, 1939 to continue with plans to build a new extension approving a quote of £2,445. It was also decided at this meeting that extra land would be purchased from Freeman, Hardy and Willis for the sum of £50.<sup>68</sup>

The scene had been set for the expansion of children's book publishing in Britain throughout the 1930s. According to Frank Eyre, the factors bearing upon this were threefold: there had been an increased awareness of the importance of children's reading, with teachers and librarians in the United States of America highlighting its

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<sup>67</sup>*Wills Loughborough Almanac and Street Directory* (Loughborough: Wills and Hepworth Ltd, 1938).

<sup>68</sup>Minutes of Board of Directors meeting 19th September, 1939 in Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Record Office.



significance to both parents and publishers; the Library Association had recognised that children's librarianship was a speciality; and, a periodical, *The Junior Booksheif* was launched for the sole purpose of discussing children's books.<sup>69</sup>

Therefore, whilst Hepworth's decision to begin producing children's titles during the war was certainly a brave one, it was a calculated risk set against the backdrop of a national recognition that children's literature was an important aspect of the book publishing industry. In fact, he proceeded with caution producing a small, but steady, stream of new titles throughout the Second World War. The firm continued to be very profitable during the war years and bonuses were paid to staff, including those absent on war service, from 1942 to 1945.<sup>70</sup> The book publishing venture proved to be highly successful with the books' subsequent popularity resulting in several reprints for each title throughout the war years. In general, the period spanning the Second World War saw much fluctuation and a subsequent fall in the number of new titles produced within the children's publishing industry in Britain. (See Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion on the impact of war.) However, Ladybird books were not alone in their success. For example, another imprint that fared particularly well as a result of the Second World War was that of Penguin. According to Malcolm Bradbury,

'It was with the advent of war, however, that Penguins really came into their own. Economically produced and marvelously distributed, they reached, at a time of paper-rationing and reduced book publication, a massive audience newly eager to rediscover the culture they were fighting for.'<sup>71</sup>

Following the end of the war, the directors were anxious to, once again, concentrate more fully upon the commercial side of their printing business and took the decision to scale down the children's book publishing. However, Douglas Keen, who had returned to the company following his war service, remained committed to the children's publishing venture, and proposed to the directors that they continue in this vein. A letter to him from Percy Roberts, one of the company's directors, voiced a rather different opinion, for he had written, 'It is not anticipated that our books will form a major part of our business after the ceasefire. We feel, therefore, while not

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<sup>69</sup>Eyre, 1971, p. 23.

<sup>70</sup>Minutes of Board of Directors meetings from 1942 to 1945 in Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Record Office.

<sup>71</sup>Malcolm Bradbury in Foreword of Lloyd Jones, 1985, p. 7.



wishing to discourage your interest in books, it would be wiser to focus your mind on the commercial side of printing: the car market, for example.<sup>72</sup> Not to be deterred, Douglas Keen together with his wife and his mother-in-law, who was a trained artist, compiled a prototype book entitled *British Birds and their Nests* in order to persuade the directors of the merit of continuing with children's book publishing. The directors were suitably convinced and production of new children's titles continued. In a later letter to Douglas Keen, Percy Roberts acknowledged the folly of his original less than enthusiastic reception to Keen's idea and wrote: 'you are, all three of you, to be very much congratulated on a very big job, I think, extremely well executed. I must say at once that however lukewarm my reaction may have been to your suggestion initially, I am 100 per cent in favour...'<sup>73</sup> With the benefit of hindsight, it can be seen that this was, indeed, a pivotal point in the company's history and the development of such a very successful imprint. According to Douglas Keen, sales of these standardised format books had reached 23,000 copies in 1946 and had subsequently grown to a figure of over 23 million by the time he retired in 1974.<sup>74</sup> He had not made these publishing decisions in isolation for he had taken the opportunity to undertake informal market research. In an interview he described his information-gathering methods revealing that, 'To research the market, I travelled to shops and schools across the country, in Manchester, Edinburgh, Leeds, Liverpool, looking at trends in children's book publishing.'<sup>75</sup>

At this point a decision was made to concentrate upon the printing and publishing side of the business and, in 1946, the stationery shop occupying the premises in the Market Place was sold to Major Rowland Gaskill who purchased the goodwill, fixtures and fittings of the business excluding the freehold of the property, at a total cost of £1,850.<sup>76</sup> William Hepworth who, since 1934, had played no role in the day-to-day running of the firm and, although retaining a strong financial interest in the company

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<sup>72</sup>Letter from Percy Roberts to Douglas Keen. *Ladybird, Ladybird*, BBC Radio 4 programme broadcast 28th December, 2001.

<sup>73</sup>Letter from Percy Roberts to Douglas Keen, 26th May, 1948. *Ladybird, Ladybird*, BBC Radio 4 programme broadcast 28th December, 2001.

<sup>74</sup>Douglas Keen in an interview. *Ladybird, Ladybird*, BBC Radio 4 programme broadcast 28th December, 2001.

<sup>75</sup>Interview with Douglas Keen, [http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/douglas\\_keen.php](http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/douglas_keen.php) [site accessed 24th April, 2007]

<sup>76</sup>Conveyance document dated 6th June, 1946. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

as well as his position as Governing Director, had decided in May 1943, to relinquish his ownership of the premises of the printing works. Having leased the premises to the company for an annual fee for many years, he finally decided to sell the freehold of the premises to the company. A conveyance document dated 21st May, 1943 testifies to the transaction which provided for the sale and transference of ownership, relating to the freehold property comprising the printing works at Angel Yard, from William Hepworth to the company of Wills and Hepworth Ltd for the sum of £7,200.<sup>77</sup> Investment in the company continued following the end of the war. In 1947 directors opted to increase the company's plant insurance policy to £70,000 due to the purchase of new machinery and the plant policy to £21,500 for building's fire insurance.<sup>78</sup>

Throughout the 1940s the company remained a substantial employer within the town of Loughborough and a strong contributor to the local economy as the business continued to thrive. William Simpson Hepworth who had retired and moved to Maidenhead by this period remained as Governing Director and was still receiving an annual wage of £150 from the company.

Wills and Hepworth Ltd had produced 32 new titles between 1940 and 1949 all of which had proved to be very popular, each enjoying several print runs. Indeed, by 1949 some titles were on their tenth impression. (See Chapter 5 regarding the company's wartime publishing programme.) Whilst the children's book publishing venture was successful during the war years, it particularly flourished during the immediate post-war period. One reason for their success during this period may have been that post-war years reinforced family life as fathers were reunited with their families after many years' absence and many mothers returned to their domestic roles. According to Akhtar and Humphries, mothers of the period were advised to approach motherhood in a more liberal way and were encouraged to spend time creatively with their children.<sup>79</sup> Writing about the period in question, Nicholas Tucker states that, 'Publishers both endorsed this new spirit of maternalism whilst, also providing for it with a succession of picture books depicting mother and child spending time lovingly

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<sup>77</sup>Conveyance document dated 21st May, 1943. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

<sup>78</sup>Meeting of Board of Directors 17th July, 1947. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

<sup>79</sup>Miriam Akhtar and Steve Humphries, *The Fifties and Sixties: a lifestyle revolution*, (London: Boxtree, 2001) p. 14.

together'.<sup>80</sup> Ladybird books were no exception providing 'safe' and comforting literature for parent and child to enjoy with each other. The decision to launch their children's books at the outset of war, and to boost production even further following cessation of hostilities, proved to be a most fortuitous and profitable one.

## 2.5 Post-war Publisher

The firm continued as commercial printers during the 1950s with contracts for car catalogues, advertising material and greetings cards providing an income alongside the book publishing and production enterprise. During the first decade of producing children's books in a standard format, Wills and Hepworth Ltd had predominantly concentrated their efforts on works of fiction. Although several additional fiction titles appeared throughout the 1950s each maintaining the same high quality and the standard format of those produced during the previous decade, their total number began to be eclipsed by non-fiction. The company continued to reprint each of their earlier titles launched throughout the previous decade many of which continued to sell in large quantities. In fact, some of these titles exceeded their twentieth impression before the end of the 1950s. During the early part of the decade, the company's directors decided to expand their publishing field with the introduction of several different series of non-fiction titles tackling a diverse range of subjects as they began to realise the possibilities of moving into the educational realm. This was another great innovation for a company keen to produce books that were informative, yet accessible and attractive as well as being keenly priced. Various authors and illustrators were commissioned to create informative books covering a diverse range of topics under different series divided into such subjects as nature, history, geography and religion. (See Chapter 5 for more information regarding the books published).

Expansion and improvement were never far from the directors' minds and, in 1951 they approved plans for alterations to the warehouse at a cost of £4,191.<sup>81</sup> Then, in 1954 they made the decision to purchase the 'Smithy and three cottages' for £4,250

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<sup>80</sup> Nicholas Tucker 'Setting the Scene' in Kimberley Reynolds and Nicholas Tucker (eds) *Children's Book Publishing in Britain since 1945* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1998), p. 5.

<sup>81</sup> Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors 13th March, 1951. Ladybird ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

and a plot of land containing the Kingdom Hall at the rear of the litho building for £900.<sup>82</sup>

During the early 1950s, keen to further exploit the export market, the company turned its thoughts to the translation of its texts. The government was actively encouraging exports during the depressed post-war economic climate and publishers were, once again, beginning to re-establish export relationships fostered before the war<sup>83</sup> and Wills and Hepworth Ltd were no exception. (See Chapter 4 for discussion about the company's exports.)

Wills and Hepworth Ltd continued to thrive and went from strength to strength in its publishing ventures. Sales ledgers for the decade reveal that the company was selling a considerable number of titles. During 1957, the month of April, for example, saw sales totalling £7,211.15s.2d. with exports accounting for £335.8s.2d. For the month of June 1957, the company achieved an overall total sales figure for their publications, of £6,682.18s.0d., with film strips accounting for just £43.12s.4d.<sup>84</sup> By the end of the decade Ladybird books were selling extremely well. (See Chapter 10 for a full financial analysis of the firm.) The company was not only producing a multitude of new titles, but earlier titles were also still enjoying substantial sales with their *Nursery Rhymes* title, for example, already on its 26th impression by 1958.

Unions for print and paper workers had a reputation for being particularly robust and it is recalled that all departments of Wills and Hepworth Ltd had their own particular union to which staff members belonged. By 1963 the National Graphical Association had been formed by an amalgamation of other unions and, according to former director, Mike Banks it was to this union that the Ladybird books' printers belonged.<sup>85</sup> It is recalled that the printers were involved in a strike lasting several weeks and that, during that period the company's printing presses were manned by managers and

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<sup>82</sup>Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors 16th February, 1954. Ladybird archive ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

<sup>83</sup>Feather, 2006, p. 199.

<sup>84</sup>Ledger. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Record Office.

<sup>85</sup>Communication to author from Mike Banks, former employee of Ladybird Books Ltd (1950–1992, production director (1986–1992). E-mail response to question received 22nd January, 2007.

apprentices.<sup>86</sup> Unfortunately there is no record of this in the documents that have been deposited in the archive. The industrial dispute in which the company's printers were most likely to have become involved, was probably the 1959 national print strike which lasted for a period of six weeks. The final outcome, a triumphant one in so far as the printers were concerned was that, along with their fellow print and paper workers, they were the first group of manual workers to achieve the 40 hour working week.

The 15 years following the end of the Second World War witnessed an increase in the overall number of children's books published in Britain with less than 1,000 children's books published per year in 1945 whilst, by 1960, this had risen to approximately 2,000.<sup>87</sup> The pace of output from Wills and Hepworth Ltd had far exceeded the national trend for the period for it had increased its annual number of titles from two in 1945 to 12 titles in 1960.

The decade of the 1960s began on a particularly strong financial note for the company as is revealed in documents regarding a valuation of the Angel Press undertaken on 16th September, 1960 which quotes an overall figure of £166,900.6s.11d. as the company's value after depreciation with a pre-depreciation sum of £239,330.17s.6d.<sup>88</sup> The accompanying inventory also provides evidence of the substantial premises the business occupied: on the ground floor was the general office together with an office kitchen and ladies lavatory, the directors' secretary's office, reception office, Mr. J.S. Clegg's office, the telephone exchange and filing office, the binding room, the overseer's office, store room, lavatories for men and women, a boiler house, packing materials store, letterpress overseer's office, letterpress machine room, composing department, overseer's office, platen machine department, printed paper stock department, transfer room, litho machine department, overseer's office, lithographic paper store, a tea-making enclosure, an oil store, a waste paper store and bicycle store and a garage. On the first floor were an office store room, accounts office, costing office, artist's room and a book store. The lower ground floor held a waste paper

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<sup>86</sup>Communication to author from George Towers, former employee of Ladybird Books Ltd (1938–1979), director (1963–1979).

<sup>87</sup>Judith Graham 'Picture Books', in Kimberley Reynolds and Nicholas Tucker (eds) *Children's Book Publishing in Britain Since 1945* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1998), p. 62.

<sup>88</sup>Inventory and Valuation, The Angel Press, 16th September, 1960 undertaken by Frank Colebrook and Partners. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

baling and printed stock room and an envelope store. The basement comprised an ink store and a store for lithographic plates. There was an additional store for boards at premises on the Nottingham Road together with trucks and transporters (these being valued at £1,088.10s.0d).<sup>89</sup> This inventory also reveals the balance of the printing output at the time, for the total value of the work in hand was £7,808.15s.8d. with the Monotype machine composed matter in foreign languages for Ladybird books accounting for £3,980.7s.10d whilst the general commercial work comprised the rest.<sup>90</sup>

In 1963 George Towers, who had joined the company in 1938 as a lithographic artist, was appointed to the board of directors. He, along with Douglas Keen, played an important role in the company's publishing output. A prime example of Douglas Keen's persuasiveness resulted in another very successful venture for Wills and Hepworth Ltd in 1964. An educational range of 36 books designed to teach children how to read, entitled the Key Words Reading Scheme, was launched by the firm. (See Chapter 8 for information on this and other reading schemes). To coincide with this new venture, a decision was made to cease commercial printing in order to concentrate production on those books incorporated in the scheme.

Having expanded into the publishing and printing of such large numbers of books, the firm had outgrown their premises, despite the fact that their property ownership had steadily grown to include buildings covering an increasingly large plot in the town centre. By 1969 the company's address was Derby Square, Loughborough.<sup>91</sup> Keen to attract new employees and maintain a high level of expansion, the company exhibited at a local careers exhibition. In an accompanying brochure the firm's directors explained the rationale for the decision to move from its town centre location.

'Wills and Hepworth's present site can no longer sustain further growth and already the first phase of a completely new development is functioning as a bound stock warehouse and despatch department. Phase two, which will move all production, is now in progress and

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<sup>89</sup>Inventory of the Angel Press, 16th September 1960. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

<sup>91</sup>Address confirmed by John Walton in letter to author dated 12th June, 2003.

when, ultimately, the whole project has been completed, the new Ladybird factory should rank as one of Loughborough's best examples of industrial architecture.'<sup>92</sup>

Therefore, the bold decision had been undertaken to purchase a substantial plot of land in order to create purpose-built premises. In 1967, the company acquired a 3.25 acre site in Windmill Road toward the outskirts of the town of Loughborough and so began the first phase of building a modern plant. Architects, Fuller, Hall and Foulsham were contracted to design and oversee the construction of suitable buildings appropriate for housing the print works. Building work started in 1967 with the first phase being occupied in December of that year. Wills and Hepworth Ltd commissioned the next phase of the venture, comprising additional storage areas together with the bindery and lithographic departments, in December 1968<sup>93</sup> and this second stage of the building work had been completed by 1970. Once this had been finished, the printing presses were moved to the new premises. By 1971 the new works were up and running boasting modern premises and some new machinery. (See Chapter 3 for details of the print technology being used).

The 1960s saw a prolific output of titles and this decade is now regarded as one of the most significant in terms of the company's popularity. Ladybird books could now be found in the majority of British schools and homes and by the end of the decade 260 titles were in production. At the end of the decade, the firm made the claim that, 'Ladybird Books have since grown to become what may well be the world's largest single series of books for children.'<sup>94</sup>

In 1970, it was reported that the company was producing 15 million books a year and was described in one trade journal as 'one of the biggest specialised printing and publishing operations in Europe.'<sup>95</sup> Although the great majority of Ladybird books were being produced in the standard format, in fact, 14,300,000 during the year to March 1970, the company had begun to experiment with additional formats with

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<sup>92</sup> *Loughborough Industry and Careers Exhibition Official Handbook*, Monday, 28 April–Saturday, 3 May, Loughborough Town Hall (Loughborough: Echo Press Ltd, 1969), p. 41.

<sup>93</sup> Legal document between Ladybird Books Ltd and architects, Fuller, Hall and Foulsham dated December 1968. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

<sup>94</sup> *Loughborough Industry and Careers Exhibition Official Handbook*, Monday, 28 April–Saturday, 3 May, 1969, Loughborough Town Hall (Loughborough: Echo Press Ltd, 1969), p. 40.

<sup>95</sup> 'Fifteen million Ladybirds a year', *British Printer*, September 1970, p. 90.

larger page sizes as well as increased pagination.<sup>96</sup> Just a year later, it was reported that for the year ended March 1971, '20 million 'Ladybirds' were sold in the UK and abroad' and 'total cash sales were £1.5 million'.<sup>97</sup> The company's massive expansion is no surprise when looked at in context, for the 1960s saw a significant increase in British children's book publishing. Therefore, the success of Ladybird books should not be viewed in isolation for this upward trend was also applicable to other publishers. Indeed the children's publishing industry as a whole witnessed a great period of growth in the total number of publishers engaged in children's book production. Frank Eyre bore testimony to this growth when he wrote,

'When the first edition of this book was written [1952] there were less than a dozen publishers who maintained editorial departments specially for children's books, and not more than five or six specialist children's editors. In 1970 here are some sixty publishers actively engaged in children's books.'<sup>98</sup>

The publishing activities of Wills and Hepworth Ltd were obviously applicable to both periods under comparison. Similarly, by the middle of the 1960s there were a greater number of titles available to the younger reader. 'The annual publication of children's books did not exceed 1,000 volumes [titles?] until 1947, but the increase was rapid in the 1950s and 1960s so that in 1965 the total was approximately 2,500.'<sup>99</sup> There were several social, economic and political reasons for this increase. For example, increased public expenditure meant that additional resources were made available with library resources for children being one of those to benefit. As Ellis says, 'One particularly important agent for the immense changes in children's literature that eventually started to occur in the 1960s was the growth of children's libraries.'<sup>100</sup> The number of children's libraries grew steadily until, 'by 1964 there was a 30 per cent increase in overall expenditure on public libraries, with children's needs often foremost in mind. With their enlarged budgets and improved facilities, children's librarians became a significant force for publishers to bear in mind.'<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

<sup>97</sup>'Ladybirds join Penguins, Pelicans and Puffins in the same 'nest'', *Smith's Trade News*, 1st January, 1972, p. 1.

<sup>98</sup>Eyre, 1971, p. 28.

<sup>99</sup>Ellis, 1969, p.192.

<sup>100</sup>Kimberley Reynolds 'Publishing Practices and the Practicalities of Publishing' in Kimberley Reynolds and Nicholas Tucker (eds) *Children's Book Publishing in Britain since 1945* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1998), p. 13.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid.



However, there is no evidence in the archives to indicate that Wills and Hepworth Ltd sold their children's books directly to the library market but the books were certainly to be found in many school libraries. The importance of school libraries should, similarly, not be discounted for post-war regulations required the establishment of libraries within schools themselves. By the early 1960s the Labour government had 'poured money into school and public libraries, making it possible for specialist librarians to develop children's collections and child-friendly environments.'<sup>102</sup>

As in the 1950s, the importance of state education provision in the growth of a young readership should not be underestimated. According to Ralph, expenditure on education was liberal under the Labour Government with greater sums at schools' disposal from which to purchase teaching resources gained, partially, from the political lobbying of such groups as The National Book League who advocated that school libraries should not be limited to books as the only resources and that, 'film, film strips, slides, gramophone records etc.'<sup>103</sup> should be incorporated into a school's resources. Having firmly established themselves in schools throughout the previous decade, Wills and Hepworth Ltd were well placed to provide a multitude of resources from books, to work cards and film strips to film slides.

The earlier books published by Wills and Hepworth were not issued with a standard book number for the scheme was not in use at that stage. The standard book number (SBN), a unique machine-readable identification number for books, was first used in Britain in 1969. Following this, the international standard book number (ISBN) was established in 1972.

## **2.6 The End of an Era**

During this period Ladybird books became even better known and the firm had gained a good reputation as publishers of quality children's books. When reviewing the state of British children's books in 1971, historian Frank Eyre, stated, 'Younger children in

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<sup>102</sup>Kimberley Reynolds 'Publishing Practices and the Practicalities of Publishing' in Kimberley Reynolds and Nicholas Tucker (eds) *Children's Book Publishing in Britain Since 1945* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1998), p. 22.

<sup>103</sup>R.G. Ralph, *The Library Book in Education* (London: Phoenix House, 1962), p. 75.

the period were fortunate to have access to the useful and usually attractive Ladybird Books which were published by Wills and Hepworth Ltd.'<sup>104</sup>

A significant change was implemented in the summer of 1971 when, following decimalisation on 15th February, 1971 the company revised the price of its books to the sum of 15p; the first price rise in over thirty years. At this time the company's directors were faced with a rather difficult decision, for James Shields Clegg, managing director and the major shareholder, had passed normal retiring age. His financial advisors were concerned that the fate of the company in future years would be uncertain should it remain unplanned. They suggested to him that the company should be sold to a customer of his own choosing. This was a not uncommon practice in the publishing industry at the time. For example, in 1970, when it was realised that Penguin's controlling shareholder Allen Lane was terminally ill, similar arrangements were made for the company to be merged with Longman<sup>105</sup> which was owned by the Pearson Group.<sup>106</sup> Longman's status as an independent firm had ceased in 1968 when the firm had been bought by the Financial and Provincial Publishing Company for a sum of between £16m and £17m.<sup>107</sup> Whilst the remaining Longman family member remained as Chairman, he had also suffered years of illness and, having no sons to take over his role, had been keen to be amalgamated with the Penguin brand.<sup>108</sup> Thus, the three firms each became part of the larger group for similar reasons, the ageing or death of the key members and the belief that stability for the firms' future lay in choosing the most appropriate collaboration.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s it was widely believed that the way forward was to combine communications groups with publishing companies. Many American media firms were keen to acquire British publishing companies in order to amalgamate these variant forms of addressing an audience. British firms IPC and Pearson were regarded as 'good citizens in thwarting North American ambitions.'<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>104</sup>Eyre, 1971, p. 197.

<sup>105</sup>The takeover of Longman is discussed in: Asa Briggs, *A History of Longmans and Their Books, 1724–1990: Longevity in Publishing* (London: Oak Knoll Press and The British Library, 2008)

<sup>106</sup>Eric de Ballaigue, *British Book Publishing as a Business Since the 1960s* (London: The British Library, 2004) p. 36.

<sup>107</sup>Norrie, 1982, p. 117.

<sup>108</sup>Norrie, 1982, p. 118.

<sup>109</sup>Ball-igue, 2004, p.4.

It is understandable, therefore, that it was the Pearson holding company to whom an approach was made. They were subsequently offered the chance to purchase the company of Wills and Hepworth Ltd together with its famous Ladybird imprint. The offer was accepted and, on 3rd January, 1972, the auspicious company passed into the hands of a conglomerate for the sum of £3,370,000.<sup>110</sup> A statement issued by the directors explained the rationale behind their decision,

‘The board of directors have for some time been considering what steps should presently be taken to ensure the long term well-being of this company and its employees. They have decided that it would be in the best interests of all concerned to join a large publishing company.’<sup>111</sup>

In addition, the directors were keen to point out that Pearson Longman,

‘wish to encourage the further growth of Wills & Hepworth (Ladybird) on the same lines that have been successful in recent years, and that they intend the company to continue with the minimum amount of change in policy and staff.’<sup>112</sup>

This purchase meant that a children’s publishing company was to join Penguin Publishing and Longman as a subsidiary of the Pearson Longman group, increasing its market share considerably.<sup>113</sup> To give an indication of the importance of the acquisition of the firm at this time it is useful to compare its worth to other publishing enterprises previously acquired by Pearson.<sup>114</sup> As can be seen, the assets of the Ladybird brand were worth roughly half those of the well-established Longman and Penguin imprints. This is not an inconsiderable valuation for a provincial children’s book publisher.

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<sup>110</sup> ‘Ladybirds join Penguins, Pelicans and Puffins in same ‘nest’.’ *Smith’s Trade News* (London) 1st January, 1972.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> Bellaigue, 2004, p. 36.

<sup>114</sup> Figures taken from a memo written by F. Taylor of Pearson Longman Ltd, dated 4th July, 1973. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

**Table 1: The Pearson Longman consolidation at 31st December, 1972**

	<b>Book Cost at Valuation</b>	<b>Depreciation</b>	<b>Net Book Values</b>
Longman	£1,950,000	£255,000	£1,695,000
Penguin	£2,162,000	£93,000	£2,069,000
Ladybird	£1,009,000	£32,000	£977,000

The group's publishing successes grew over the next few years with the three publishing divisions achieving reported sales of £45.7m for Longman, £9.03m for Penguin and £5.9m for Ladybird, in 1980.<sup>115</sup> This change in company ownership and direction was not unique to Wills and Hepworth Ltd for it was, in fact, mirrored by the fates of the majority of initially independent British publishers. Indeed, it is generally acknowledged that the nature of the book publishing industry in Britain during the latter period of the twentieth century has been constantly changing and adapting. It has been the case that, 'mergers, acquisitions and takeovers had shaped British publishing since the 1960s, a trend that continues to the present.'<sup>116</sup>

In 1972, a further 2.25 acres of land was bought and the building work finally completed to provide 150,000 square feet of work space<sup>117</sup> enabling the entire company to be housed on the one site abutting Windmill Road to the east and Beeches Road to the south. The totally integrated accommodation housed all the printing presses, the bindery and warehouses together with offices for all Ladybird staff including marketing, editorial, sales and directors. With the office accommodation fronting Beeches Road, the official company address became Beeches Road, Loughborough. The photograph (below) shows the new premises fronted by the four-storey offices with the print works directly adjacent and behind.<sup>118</sup>

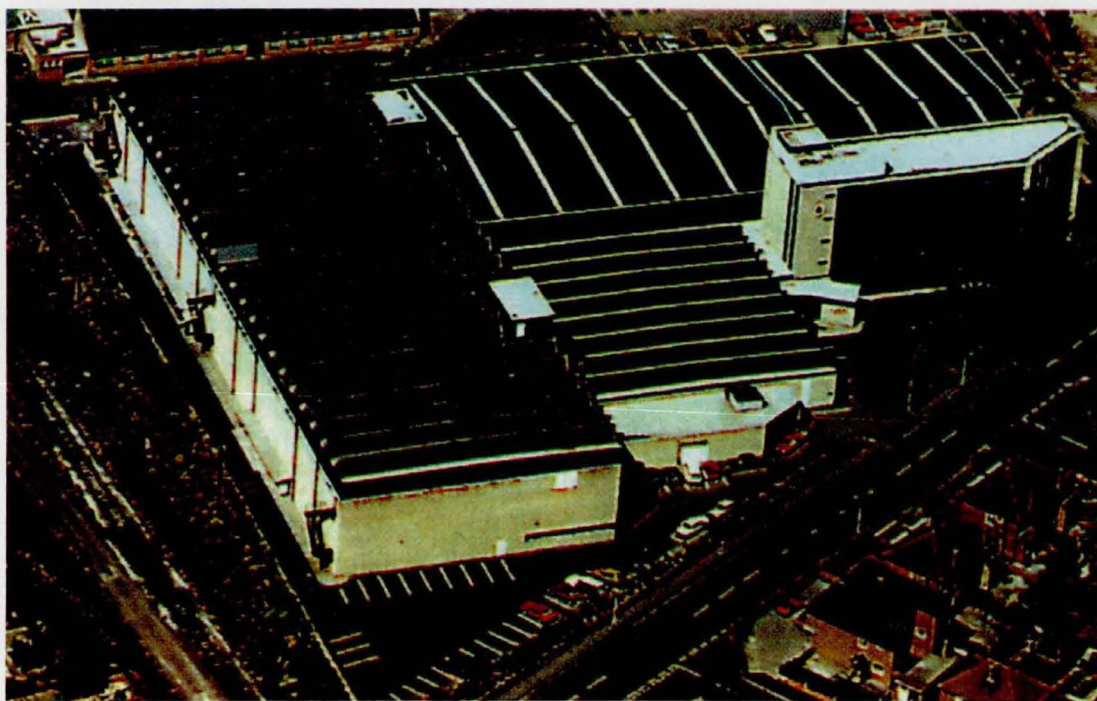
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<sup>115</sup>Norrie, 1982, p. 118.

<sup>116</sup>Bellaigue, 2004, p. 3.

<sup>117</sup>Audrey Daly, Memorandum: 11th May, 1977. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

<sup>118</sup>Photograph published in *Printing World*, 13th December, 1999. Reproduced with permission.



**Figure 4: Aerial photograph of Ladybird Books Ltd premises, Beeches Road, Loughborough.**

On 22nd September, 1972 Wills and Hepworth Ltd officially became Ladybird Books Ltd.<sup>119</sup> A document outlining the name change was filed with Companies House on 18th October, 1972. This brought to a close the final chapter in the Wills and Hepworth story and, although the Ladybird imprint continued to flourish, marked the end of an era. Over a period of 70 years, the company had grown from a small provincial printer to a multi-million pound globally-recognised company. (See Chapter 10 for a financial analysis of the company). There was an abundance of potential competition within the children's book publishing arena at this time for by 1970 there were, reportedly, 'sixty publishers actively engaged in children's books.'<sup>120</sup> However, the publishing output by Wills and Hepworth Ltd was deliberately targeted towards the mass market with large print runs, low prices and marketing in non-traditional outlets. (See Chapter 4 for more information on the company's marketing strategies.)

It was not only other children's book publishers which provided potential competition for Ladybird books but, in addition, the popularisation of television was to add

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<sup>119</sup>Legal deed of transfer. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

<sup>120</sup>Eyre, 1971, p. 28.

another complication. For 'by 1970, television was nearly universal in Britain'<sup>121</sup> and was vying for a large stake in the leisure time of the population. However, this would not necessarily spell disaster for the publishing industry as was gloomily predicted. For those publishers who were able to successfully utilise the opportunities afforded by the new medium, it was a most positive addition to the existing forms of mass communication. (See Chapter 4 regarding the company's interaction with various forms of media.)

## 2.7 Modern Manufacturers

By September 1973 Ladybird Books Ltd was poised to embrace the new era. An open day, attended by over a hundred booksellers, was held at the company's premises. At this time world sales of Ladybird books were exceeding 20 million copies per annum, exactly as had been planned when the expansion was undertaken. The promotional event had been arranged to launch two new series and was a successful marketing venture. (See Chapter 4 for discussion of the company's marketing strategies.) It was reported that global sales of Ladybird books for 1973 amounted to a total of £21m, a healthy sum to boost the new owner's coffers.<sup>122</sup>

In 1974 James Shields Clegg finally retired after 40 years with the company. He was credited with playing the principal role in taking the company from a small provincial printer to a company described as, 'one of the most influential publishing developments'.<sup>123</sup> It was generally accepted that had it not been for his vision, drive and determination, the publishing facet of the business would never have grown to such considerable proportions. He was replaced as managing director by Malcolm Kelley. In January 1975, Vernon Mills replaced Douglas Keen, who had also retired in 1974, as Editorial Director. Described as the 'most universally familiar children's book imprint', it was reported that, by 1975 Ladybird had produced a total of 370 different titles, selling a total of 24 million copies during the previous year.<sup>124</sup>

In 1975 the company undertook an important venture to export a large number of books to the Middle East. This significant event resulted in the 'largest single

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<sup>121</sup>Feather, 2006, p. 201.

<sup>122</sup>'The difference a decade makes', *The Times*, 21st January, 1974.

<sup>123</sup>'Ladybird books chief retires after 40 years', *Leicester Mercury*, 4th April, 1974.

<sup>124</sup>Pauli Medicott, 'A 52 page package', *New Society*, 13th February, 1975, p. 399.

Ladybird consignment ever exported' which was believed to be 'the largest quantity of books printed in Arabic ever to be imported by any Arab country'.<sup>125</sup> (See Chapter 4 for more detailed export information). In 1978 the marketing department began to exploit the possibilities offered by utilising both radio and television media by launching a high-profile advertising campaign. (See Chapter 4 for information on links with other media).

Throughout the entire decade of the 1970s, Britain had experienced major social changes that affected the children's book publishing industry. Editors could no longer ignore public opinion and were forced to consider their depiction of female characters, the inclusion of characters from ethnic minorities and the portrayal of more working class members of society. Reacting to criticism and impending changes in the laws relating to discrimination, children's book publishers had to take stock of such issues. The company of Ladybird Books Ltd was greatly influenced by these issues during the 1970s and changes to the books' contents were made. (See Chapter 9 for discussions on the political and social changes affecting the company's publishing output.)

Never a company to remain complacent, despite its considerable success over the decades, Ladybird Books Ltd provided itself with a major challenge in the early 1980s. In July 1981 the company produced what one newspaper described as, 'The book of the year on the wedding of the year'.<sup>126</sup> The resultant volume was the 'fastest' book ever produced by the company. A feat it achieved in a matter of days, publishing 500,000 copies of a souvenir edition entitled *Royal Wedding* to celebrate the marriage of HRH the Prince of Wales to Lady Diana Spencer. The title had a subsequent wide appeal and the company sold a million copies within a fortnight.<sup>127</sup> (See Chapter 6 for more information on this project.)

By 1983 the earlier investment in additional plant and machinery was beginning to pay dividends. A local newspaper reported that the company's employees totalled 293

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<sup>125</sup>Malcolm Kelley, 'Ladybirds find a home in the Arab World', *The Bookseller*, 31st May, 1975.

<sup>126</sup>*Leicester Trader*, 23rd July, 1981.

<sup>127</sup>'Ladybird flies home', *Printing World*, 13th March, 1991, p. 22.

producing over 20 million books each year.<sup>128</sup> In addition, their books were being translated into 60 languages and printed at the Loughborough premises for worldwide distribution.

Keen to capitalise on its success with the Key Words Reading Scheme, yet anxious to update the system that had been in use for two decades, Ladybird Books Ltd. launched a new venture in 1985. The Puddle Lane Reading Programme comprised an initial 12 titles with a further 50 planned. Malcolm Kelley, managing director, stated that it was, 'the company's biggest venture in 20 years' and forecast sales of well over a million by the end of that year.<sup>129</sup> (See Chapter 8 for more information on reading schemes). By September, 1985 sales of the Puddle Lane books had already reached half a million. In October a television series based on the books was broadcast nationwide by Yorkshire Television prompting the need for reprints of the books to be undertaken. The decade of the 1980s witnessed a proliferation of book tie-ins with television programmes and Ladybird Books Ltd were happy to exploit this medium.

An additional investment of one million pounds was made in the mid 1980s. This money was earmarked for improvements and the upgrading of machinery in the finishing department and was used to purchase a new case maker and high-speed thin book casing-in machine. As with many of the company's previous innovations, this acquisition represented a 'first' in the UK.<sup>130</sup> Additionally, in order to better manage an increased workload, a new four-colour press was installed in August 1985 which enabled the book covers to be printed separately from the book block, before being laminated at a nearby company. However, the company was, at this stage, considering adding facilities at its own premises for the cover lamination. A shrink wrapper was also added in 1984 to allow for twelve books to be packaged together for transportation. (See Chapter 3 for detailed information regarding the investment in new technology). By this time the print works operated a two-shift system with each shift producing over 50,000 books. A trade journal reported that the company at this stage employed a total of 285 people and produced 27 million books per year.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> 'Investment the key to Ladybird success', *Leicester Mercury*, 7th June, 1983.

<sup>129</sup> *Leicester Mercury*, 'Fantasy world of Puddle Lane, but rewards are real', 30th September, 1985.

<sup>130</sup> 'Lego makes UK debut at Ladybird', *Printing World*, 29th May, 1985.

<sup>131</sup> 'Letterpress, lamination and binding fit to burst', *Printing World*, 23rd October, 1985, p. 13.



During the mid 1980s the only type that was not being set at the premises in Loughborough was Arabic which was typeset in Beirut. The export aspect of Ladybird's business accounted for about 35 per cent of total output by 1985.<sup>132</sup> Books were being produced in 60 languages but the majority of the exported titles were to English-speaking countries with Ladybird Books Inc. being formed in the United States of America when the company bought an American book distributor. (See Chapter 4 for details regarding export).

As in previous decades, the company was still keen to explore other formats and joined forces with Pickwick Cassettes to produce book and cassette packs covering both fiction and non-fiction titles. Additional products being manufactured by the company at this time included friezes, jigsaws and games. As in the 1950s when they first realised the value of utilising the power of other forms of media by hiring 'Uncle Mac' from radio (see Chapter 4 for more information), in the mid-eighties the company moved increasingly into books associated with television series. Ladybird Books Ltd began ventures to reproduce characters from television series such as the 'Transformers' and 'Masters of the Universe' taking advantage of the new publishing opportunities afforded by the expansion of this medium. Transatlantic ventures also created new products and opportunities which the company was keen to exploit. Ladybird's marketing manager, Mary Haggard, explained the company's strategy saying that, 'while programmes may come from America we obtain the publishing rights so that the UK industry also benefits.'<sup>133</sup>

In 1987, Ladybird Books Ltd acquired Studio Publications, a small publishing company. Following a fire at its Suffolk premises in 1989, Studio Publications was moved to Loughborough and renamed as Sunbird Publishing. Its books, aimed at preschool children continued to be published and printed by Ladybird Books Ltd but under the Sunbird imprint.<sup>134</sup>

The personnel making these decisions during this period were the board of directors comprised of Tim Rix, the Chairman of Longman with six executive directors. The

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<sup>132</sup>'Clothes for the emperor', *Printing World*, 23rd October, 1985, p. 13.

<sup>133</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup>'Ladybird – the first 50 years', *The Bookseller*, 20th July, 1990, p. 184.

directors were Malcolm Kelley, managing director; Charles Hall, MBE, deputy managing director; Brian Cotton, sales director; Vernon Mills, editorial director; Roy Smith, editorial and art director; and Alan Warren, finance director.<sup>135</sup>

The decade of the 1980s was a particularly profitable and positive one for Ladybird Books Ltd. Having been owned by the Pearson group under Longman's wing for such a long period, its success tended to be overlooked. However, a profile of Ladybird produced in *The Bookseller* in 1989 highlighted the fact that the company was indeed, 'in its own right, a substantial and successful children's book publisher.'<sup>136</sup> A financial summary for the decade indicated its success. The figures for 1984 showed a pre-tax profit of over £2m on a turnover of £9m whilst the company enjoyed a profit of £2.7m on a turnover of £14.3m in 1987. The ratio of pre-tax profit to turnover consistently exceeded 20 per cent for 15 years up to 1987. Whilst the total number of titles produced by the company each year had risen from 76 in 1986 to around 150 in 1988, prices remained relatively consistent. The Ladybird maxim of keeping the price low still held firm during the 1980s. It was found that the price of Ladybird books sold in a general book shop over the period of Christmas 1986 to 1988 had increased by only 7 per cent over this two-year period. Exports accounted for 30 per cent of turnover.<sup>137</sup> The low pricing of the books was maintained because production undertaken at Loughborough was highly streamlined and automated. Selling a total of 30 million books per annum by 1990 providing an income of £16m, the company's foreign editions were produced in 70 languages.<sup>138</sup> (See Chapter 10 for a full financial analysis of the company.)

Despite its status as a major publisher in the international arena, the company still played an important role in the town of Loughborough. The town celebrated the centenary of its incorporation as a municipal borough in 1988, and Ladybird Books Ltd published a special edition title of the town's history to commemorate the occasion. Of the 10,000 copies produced, the town council purchased 4,000.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>135</sup>'In charge', *Printing World*, 23rd October, 1985, p. 13.

<sup>136</sup>'Ladybird – low profile, high sales', *The Bookseller*, 10th March, 1989.

<sup>137</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup>'Ladybird – the first 50 years', *The Bookseller*, 20th July, 1990, p. 183.

<sup>139</sup>'Book firm to mark centenary', *Mail*, 10th March, 1988.

By the late 1980s, the number of staff employed by the company remained at around 320 people with 60 of these engaged in administration and editorial and the rest in sales and production. The publication range from the company had expanded into book and cassette packs and stationery, whilst the introduction of videos was made possible by a partnership with Pickwick, a company in which Pearson had a 21 per cent interest. (See Chapter 6 for publishing output including multimedia products.)

Bookselling throughout the 1990s underwent some radical changes. With the introduction of computer technology into the trade, it was possible to monitor book sales more closely. In addition, with WH Smith's electronic point of sale system booksellers were able to introduce much better control over their stock manipulation. Books were given a much higher profile with strong advertising and marketing techniques. Ladybird Books Ltd had always been aware of the importance of high market visibility and strong market penetration together with the need to invest in latest technology. (See Chapter 4 for a review of the company's marketing techniques).

In 1990 the company embarked upon a series of events to celebrate the fiftieth birthday of Ladybird books. Whilst the Ladybird imprint had been in existence since 1914, the company had chosen the 1940 launch of the standard format book as the date from which to officially recognise the birth of the Ladybird book. It is significant that the company should mark its progress based upon the years of standard format production rather than those earlier years of book production preceding the Second World War as it was the standard format books for which the company had become renowned. The Ladybird catalogue produced for 1990 featured over 600 titles with approximately 100 new titles appearing each year at an average print run of 60,000 copies. The title which had, by that stage, sold consistently well was the *Ladybird ABC* which had been revamped several times.<sup>140</sup>

A highlight of 1990 was a visit to the company made by the Princess of Wales. She was greeted by hundreds of flag-waving local children together with 300 staff from Ladybird Books Ltd. Her tour of the premises included the litho department where she was shown how the company printed its books. Here, she performed an official

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<sup>140</sup> 'Leafing through pages of tradition', *Leicester Mercury*, 17th February, 1990.

ceremony to start a brand new press with its first print run which, rather appropriately, was for the covers of a book marking the Queen Mother's 90th birthday. She was then shown the despatch centre which stored 4.5 million books.<sup>141</sup> The new press that the princess had officially 'switched on' was a four-colour Roland Ultra press which, due to its special size modifications, allowed for several different formats to be quickly and easily printed. (See Chapter 3 for more information.) By the early 1990s the company's product range had expanded to a great extent resulting in the need for additional space in the warehouse. By adopting a more streamlined approach to working practices, the company was still able to despatch orders more quickly and efficiently.<sup>142</sup> (See Chapter 3 for details of this.)

As the last decade of the millennium began, Ladybird Books Ltd appeared to be in good shape. A local newspaper reported, in 1990, that the company was enjoying a positive period of development stating that, 'In terms of sales success, availability and penetration of the international markets, the homely Ladybird has never flown so high.'<sup>143</sup> The following year, however, witnessed a global recession with the British printing industry being particularly affected. In fact, the rate of British prepress and printing companies declaring bankruptcy reached an average of one per day for a period of several months in 1991.<sup>144</sup>

The printers best placed to survive were those able to adapt and exploit the European markets. Ladybird Books Ltd responded to this new challenge by doing just this. When unrest in the Persian Gulf threatened its export markets in the Middle East, the company looked for new markets closer to home. Muriel Dahan, export manager for the company discovered 'that four countries in the European Community recently had legislated the teaching of English to primary school children.'<sup>145</sup> As a well-established publisher of books specifically designed to teach children to read, the company was well placed to respond. It rapidly printed short-run reprints of these primary school readers in French, German, Italian and Spanish with a resultant high volume of

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<sup>141</sup>'Booking in late but crowds cheer Diana', *Leicester Mercury*, 25th April, 1990, p. 18.

<sup>142</sup>'Ladybird flies home', *Printing World*, 13th March, 1991, p. 23.

<sup>143</sup>'Leafing through the pages of tradition' *Leicester Mercury*, 17th February, 1990.

<sup>144</sup>W. Pincus Jaspert, 'The lowdown on European markets', *American Printer*, 1991, Vol. 207, Issue 5, p. 94.

<sup>145</sup>*Ibid.*

sales.<sup>146</sup> Nevertheless, the company did not survive unscathed for it, too, became a victim of the British economic recession and, on 13th March, 1991 the company was forced to announce a total of 54 redundancies from a workforce of 300. These job losses were split evenly between office and shop-floor staff. Managing director at the time, Malcolm Kelley, put the blame firmly upon the shoulders of the government stating, 'The Government needs to take note of the seriousness of this recession when a company of our standing and efficiency selling a high-profile product at a low price has to take such steps.'<sup>147</sup> He is also reported as saying, 'We can no longer wait for signs of any improvement in the recession. The measures are now absolutely necessary.'<sup>148</sup>

In the same year Malcolm Kelley was replaced as managing director by Anthony Forbes Watson. The incoming managing director was later interviewed for *The Bookseller* in 1995 giving an overview of his changes in the previous four years.<sup>149</sup> Upon taking up his new role Anthony Forbes Watson had not been 'happy at the way the business was going'.<sup>150</sup> His plans to change the direction of the company included building a more diverse publishing list both in terms of content and format, a decision he quickly acted upon. In addition, he instigated a large programme of market research which led to a rethink of the company's image and branding. (See Chapter 4 for more details relating to the marketing strategies implemented.)

Anthony Forbes Watson changed the management and editorial teams with publishing director, Mike Gabb employing an entirely new team of commissioning editors 'poached' from competitors. A new art director, Douglas Wilson, was also brought into the company. Other directors all brought in from outside the company were Charles Sanderson as UK sales director, Jeff Satterley as production director and David King as international sales director. This wide-ranging regime of change was similarly undertaken throughout the whole company.

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> '54 book workers lose jobs', *Leicester Mercury*, 13th March, 1991.

<sup>148</sup> 'Jobs go', *Printing World*, 20th March, 1991.

<sup>149</sup> 'How Ladybird changed its spots', *The Bookseller*, 13th October, 1995, p. 50.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

By the early 1990s the company was excelling at overseas trade. Its exports accounted for 38 per cent of overall sales and the firm won the British Printing Industries Federation (BPIF) Export Achievement Award. (See Chapter 4 for more information regarding the award.)

By 1992, the company was enjoying considerable success with its educational publishing with its books being closely linked to the National Curriculum. In addition, the previous year had seen Ladybird secure an exclusive contract to publish Disney books which had subsequently resulted in strong sales of those titles.<sup>151</sup> The deal, initially due to run for four years, gave the company a financial boost, and it was reported by Mary Haggart, head of publicity that sales were 'phenomenally successful and well above our initial expectations.'<sup>152</sup> The opening of Eurodisney in Paris represented an additional marketing opportunity for these books and with new Disney stores opening throughout the UK, it was hoped that sales would grow even further. The staff, comprising some 280 employees, worked increasingly harder to maintain production of their usual rate of 12 new titles per month alongside the 70 new Disney titles. When producing titles to coincide with the release of the latest Disney movies, production increased rapidly to ensure that sales were matched by output. Demand was so great that the company could barely keep production to the pace required. Having made staff redundant to cope with the recession, the remaining workforce was forced to increase output.

From mid 1991 to the end of 1992 Ladybird Books Ltd produced 110 Disney titles which achieved sales of 6.5 million copies. Of these, *Beauty and the Beast* tie-ins sold 500,000 copies.<sup>153</sup> Ladybird Books Ltd was able to achieve the incredible production rate induced by the Disney project because of previous investment in machinery and the latest printing technology making it well-placed to offer the necessary print quality demanded of any company granted a licence to produce anything with the Disney link. Ladybird's desk-top publishing facilities, printing technology and its unrivalled packaging ability placed it in a good position to be able to exploit this market. With the 1995 abandonment of the Net Book Agreement, publishers were at

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<sup>151</sup>'Ladybird on the wing', *The Bookseller*, 13th November, 1992.

<sup>152</sup>'Ladybird books a place with Disney', *Leicester Mercury*, 2nd June, 1992.

<sup>153</sup>'Ladybird on the wing', *The Bookseller*, 13th November, 1992, p. 1499.

the mercy of strong retail competition with booksellers able to discount their books. By obtaining exclusivity with the Disney licence, Ladybird Books Ltd was able, to some extent, to guard against its impact. With no direct competitor, the company was able to protect its prices.

In 1995 Ladybird became part of the Penguin Group. The greatest success story of this period in terms of financial gain was the Disney contract. Originally the deal negotiated with Disney was limited to a retail price ceiling of £3 on all of the titles relating to films. This limit was subsequently renegotiated to £10 and because of this the Ladybird/Disney publishing schemes were flourishing across all areas of the market.<sup>154</sup> Since the Disney contract was negotiated in 1991 sales had reached 20 million books up to 1995.<sup>155</sup> During 1994 sales of books related to just one particular film tie-in, *The Lion King*, stood at over three million copies, whilst predictions for sales by the end of 1995 were for five million copies. Predicted sales figures for *Pocahontas* tie-ins were equally large.

Another promising aspect of Ladybird's new products was the idea of home learning titles. Such series as 'My First Learning Books' together with a range of books aiming to coordinate with Key Stages 1 and 2 of the National Curriculum Maths and English subjects taught in primary schools in England were created. The introduction of the National Curriculum had earlier followed the 1988 Education Reform Act.<sup>156</sup> (See Chapter 8 regarding the company's educational publishing.)

In 1996 the Loughborough printing works gained the contract to print most of the Ladybird books for distribution in the United States following Penguin's decision to branch out into the American market. The Penguin Group, it was reported had 'absorbed Ladybird from Longman two years ago.'<sup>157</sup>

In the summer of 1997, the company published a special memorial edition book featuring HRH, The Princess of Wales following her death. This title, produced ten

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> 'How Ladybird changed its spots', *The Bookseller*, 13th October, 1995, p. 50.

<sup>156</sup> Education Reform Act, [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1988/ukpga\\_19880040\\_en\\_1](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1988/ukpga_19880040_en_1) [site accessed 27th November, 2008].

<sup>157</sup> 'Loughboro' to gain US print', *Printing World*, 15th April, 1996.

days after her death and priced at £1.50, 'made an unprecedented rise to number two in the hardback bestsellers'.<sup>158</sup>

In early 1998 it was revealed that Ladybird was to hand over responsibility for its trade sales accounts to Penguin resulting in 13 redundancies. Managing director at the time, Laurence James said that, 'by reducing costs Ladybird would be able to improve its service to customers and maintain its reputation for publishing books at excellent value for money.'<sup>159</sup> The result of this decision was that seven staff from field sales together with six personnel from the warehouse and despatch area lost their jobs. The trade accounts being moved to Penguin's control made up 20 per cent of Ladybird's business and included such outlets as Dillons, Waterstones and Books Etc. At the time Ladybird's total revenue was £20m per annum and together with the trade accounts, comprised WH Smith, supermarkets and other non-traditional outlets. The warehouse changes were supposed to result in an improved service of 98 per cent availability on key lines and a 24-hour turnaround for orders. Ladybird was, at this time, managed separately from Penguin whilst both being owned by Pearson. Mr James stated that the move had been Ladybird's decision.<sup>160</sup>

By the summer of 1998 it had been reported that Penguin UK was to take over the management of Ladybird. In the move Laurence James who, since 1996, had been Ladybird's managing director, was made redundant. The previous managing editor, Anthony Forbes Watson, was by this stage managing director of Penguin and was now in overall charge of Ladybird once again. It was announced that 'Ladybird will establish a new publishing unit in Penguin's London offices, which will operate alongside its Loughborough-based team. It was Anthony Forbes Watson who had been instrumental in moving Ladybird into the Penguin group during his period as managing director of the company. He maintained that Ladybird would have the 'benefit of full operational support from Penguin.'<sup>161</sup> However, this support was to be extremely short-lived for just three months later the Ladybird workers were informed that they would lose their jobs with the company.

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<sup>158</sup> 'Bye-bye Peter, bye-bye Jane', *The Times*, 10th April, 1999.

<sup>159</sup> 'Redundancies at Ladybird as trade accounts move', *The Bookseller*, 6th February, 1998.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> 'Penguin to look after Ladybird', *The Bookseller*, 7th August, 1998.



Despite the fact that Ladybird Books Ltd was the UK's leading mass market publisher of children's books, the company's fate was sealed. By November 1998 it had become public knowledge that Ladybird Books Ltd was to close its printing works with the loss of 210 jobs and subsequent damage to the local economy. The company's explanation for the factory closure blamed changing reading habits. However, sales of Ladybird books were still exceeding 30 million each year<sup>162</sup> and the range of titles was by no means redundant with even the outmoded Key Words Reading Scheme enjoying great export success. Staff members were shocked at the news and many wept as the blow was dealt by Anthony Forbes Watson. He said, 'The decision is made with much personal sadness. Ladybird has been part of Loughborough life as printer and publisher for many, many years.'<sup>163</sup> Penguin's decision to close the plant was 'expected for some time but staff were said to be devastated.'<sup>164</sup> The factory, it was reported, had been 'considered one of the most efficient of its kind in the world, is to close next spring as a result of rationalisation by its owner, Penguin Books, part of Pearson group.'<sup>165</sup> The decision to cease book production and vacate the premises appears to be unjustifiable for the plant was considered an efficient production unit with both printing and binding carried out at an alarmingly high rate. The parent company had also consolidated its United States' production to the Loughborough plant and the number of books produced on the premises, annually, was over 20 million. The causes of the resultant works' closure were cited as, 'the heart of the problem has been the specialist nature of the Loughborough works, resulting in high overheads, a severe problem as recent sales have been in decline. This inability to diversify into a wider range of book production, or for Penguin to sub-contract spare capacity would have been major factors in the closure.'<sup>166</sup> In addition it was said at the time that children over the age of nine were not tempted by Ladybird books and that they did not appeal to older readers. The reasons for this sad demise were given by the parent company, Penguin, 'because of falling sales and high overheads at the plant.'<sup>167</sup> (See Chapter 10 for a full financial analysis of the company.) The government were also targeted when it came to apportioning blame for the closure and subsequent redundancies, 'In Loughborough,

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<sup>162</sup>'Bye-bye Peter, bye-bye Jane', *The Times*, 10th April, 1999.

<sup>163</sup>'Tears as 210 jobs axed at Ladybird Books', *Leicester Mercury*, 26th November, 1998, p. 1.

<sup>164</sup>'Penguin to make big job cuts at Ladybird', *The Bookseller*, 27th November, 1998.

<sup>165</sup>'Ladybird Books axes Loughborough plant', *Printing World*, 30th November, 1998, p. 1.

<sup>166</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup>'Ladybird Loughborough plant is no more', *The Bookseller*, 26th March, 1999.

Ladybird Books and the textile manufacturers Coats Viyella blamed the high value of sterling and high interest rates for factory closures.<sup>168</sup>

The local economy was dealt a major blow with the company's closure for Ladybird Books Ltd had featured prominently in the town's history. The Loughborough railway station had greeted visitors to the town with a sign, erected in 1988, saying, 'Loughborough – Welcome to the home of Ladybird Books' and the worldwide renowned imprint was an integral part of the town's identity providing testimony to the firm's long association with the area. It had been common practice for the company to offer tours of the factory to local school children and college students which had not only served as a good marketing venture but was thoroughly enjoyed by those who had participated. The local newspapers reported the closure with great sadness.<sup>169</sup> In addition the company had been known for its philanthropic nature having, over the years, supported local libraries, reading groups and literacy projects. During the 1990s the company had been at the forefront of support for the Government's launch of the National Year of Reading. Testimony to this came from the Leicestershire County Council education officer who was acting as co-ordinator of local projects for the National Reading Year who expressed a hope that Ladybird would continue its role in the initiative. In an interview she said, 'We were developing a parent-toddler initiative with Ladybird along with a reading corner in a supermarket. Both projects are very valuable and, in the past, Ladybird has been very generous in providing books for the local community.'<sup>170</sup>

In March 1999, Pearson announced a five-fold increase in profits from £129m in 1997 to £629m with an increase of 19 per cent in its operating profits to £389m.<sup>171</sup> It was, however, reported that, 'Its Penguin book publishing subsidiary results were subdued by the strength of sterling and the one-off costs of closing its Loughborough operations and integrating Ladybird books into its children's division.'<sup>172</sup>

As the printing premises closed, 210 employees were made redundant and although the parent company offered 40 production vacancies at its headquarters in west

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<sup>168</sup> BBC News Business John Hess 'East Midlands: the dent in Labour's feel good factor' 26th April, 1999.

<sup>169</sup> 'Ladybird demise on a sad, sad day', *Leicester Mercury*, 26th November, 1998.

<sup>170</sup> Bob Walker, 'No happy ever after', *Leicester Mercury*, 27th November, 1999, p. 18.

<sup>171</sup> BBC News Business 'Profits surge at media group' 10th March, 1999.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

London, this would not have provided much consolation for those loyal employees who had given so many years service to the Midlands-based firm. Many people were deeply saddened at the closure. Those interviewed by the local press on the day of closure included Roger Harlow who had worked at Ladybird for 19 years who stated, 'It is a sad occasion. People are a little bitter about the closure but we just have to take it and start life again. This is the second time I've been made redundant.' Another employee, Lionel Watkins, who had worked for the company for 13 years said, 'Staff are feeling a bit demoralised about the closure. A lot of the workforce especially the younger ones, know that it is going to be very difficult to find another job in Loughborough which will match the levels of pay provided by Ladybird Books.'<sup>173</sup> Efforts were made to retrain the print workers utilising a government training award. The Rapid Response Fund secured by Leicester Training and Enterprise Council in conjunction with Leicester's National Printing Skills Centre paid for the retraining of 40 workers. Ladybird contributed a third of the total cost whilst the shortfall was met by the Graphical, Paper and Media Union (GPMU). The skills centre offered a four month course to update the workers' printing skills using the latest technology and its purpose was to assist their search for work with other print companies in the local area. As the five presses fell silent, many grieved the end of an era of printing and publishing in the East Midlands market town.

The printing presses and specialised binding lines were sold off, some to a dealer in the United Kingdom whilst others went abroad. (See Chapter 3 for more detailed information). Most of the printing contracts for Ladybird books went overseas both to printers in Europe and the Far East. One fortunate British printer did win one contract, however, Ebenezer Baylis based in Worcester. As for the site itself, the estate agents handling the sale of the premises, Weatherall, Green and Smith, reported a healthy interest in the site with several enquiries from house building companies for what was, after all, a prime location on the outskirts of a town with excellent communication links to the rest of the country. Offers were being invited in the region of £2.2m for the 5.2 acre site including the 15,000 sq m premises.<sup>174</sup> It was reported that 50 of the

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<sup>173</sup> 'Final day for Ladybird staff', *Leicester Mercury*, 1st April, 1999.

<sup>174</sup> '£2.2m factory sale as print ceases at Ladybird', *Printing World*, 22nd March, 1999.

210 redundant staff had secured alternative employment prior to the shutdown of the firm.<sup>175</sup>

Although it was generally assumed that the site of the Ladybird works would be earmarked for housing developments with the subsequent demolition of the factory buildings, in July 1999 it was reported that a Hemel Hempstead-based company had submitted plans to the local council regarding the site. Walker Greenbank plc sought planning permission for an extension to the existing plant room and boiler and to erect a 9.5 metre chimney stack. As this same company was seeking residential planning permission in a nearby village on a site used for the printing of wallpapers and fabrics, together with a smaller local company of screen printers, it was surmised that the premises at Beeches Road was to be used for the printing of wallpaper.<sup>176</sup> By the end of 1999 the new site owners finally revealed the completion of the sales transaction and that the factory was, indeed, to be used for the printing of wallpaper having been sold to Anstey Wallpaper, a subsidiary of the Walker Greenbank Group. The purchase price was £1.9m for the 165,500 sq ft factory that had remained empty since April together with the 5.2 acre site. The premises were particularly suitable for the printing of wallpaper because they were equipped with 'an extensive air humidification system.'<sup>177</sup>

The closure of the factory certainly marked an end of an era. During April 1999, the factory produced a special edition of *Tootles the Taxi*, a copy of which was presented to every member of staff still working for the company on its last day. For despite the fact that the Ladybird imprint was to be continued by its owner, the very essence of the Ladybird tradition was certainly at an end. This view was reported at the time, 'The label will be kept going by Penguin, but we can doubtless be assured that Ladybird's essential and rather charming, provincial out-of-dateness will not survive integration into a big, tough London publishing company.'<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>175</sup>'New chapter for ex-Ladybird staff', *Leicester Mercury*, 19th March, 1999, p. 2.

<sup>176</sup>'New plan for Ladybird site', *Leicester Mercury*, 12th July, 1999.

<sup>177</sup>'Books to wallpaper – Ladybird factory sold for £1.9m', *Printing World*, 13th December, 1999.

<sup>178</sup>'Bye-by Peter, bye-bye Jane', *The Times*, 10th April, 1999.

## 2.8 A Corporate Company

Following closure of the Loughborough premises, Ladybird Books Ltd became a division of the Penguin Group. Michael Herridge, Ladybird's managing director, was determined to move the brand forward. Speaking at a Penguin sales conference, he announced that the Ladybird brand was moving into a 'new phase' and two distinctive publishing groups were formed. The first, named the 'home learning team' focused on developing the Ladybird brand in this market whilst the second 'popular culture team' concentrated upon items based on 'the child as consumer, drawing on the influences of today's media culture.'<sup>179</sup> Many new ranges and formats were launched in 1999 deemed by the firm as a 'Year for Innovation'. (See Chapter 7 for products and publications.)

In the new millennium the famous Ladybird format was 60 years old. The flurry of media attention at what it deemed (incorrectly) to be 'Ladybird's 60th anniversary' was a catalyst for renewed nostalgic interest in the books. Prices of some second hand Ladybird books, particularly first editions of books from the 1940s to 1970s, doubled over the latter part of 2000 as they became increasingly sought after. There were, at this point, several internet sites devoted to swapping and auctioning copies of the books by avid collectors. When interviewed in 2000, Douglas Keen, the main creative force behind the books for almost thirty years, attributed their enduring appeal to these factors, 'The idea was to produce books that were informative and cheap. We had very good machinery and kept to an identical format: 24 pages of text and 24 pages of pictures.'<sup>180</sup>

In the same year, the company established a telephone helpline to assist parents with advice on reading and book purchasing for children, the first company to do so. In addition, a website<sup>181</sup> was created in 2000 to provide guidance for parents.<sup>182</sup>

In 2001 Penguin (which now owned Ladybird) was integrated with Dorling Kindersley resulting in the closure of Ladybird's Nottingham office with the loss of

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<sup>179</sup>Michael Herridge, 'Moving ahead with Ladybird', *The Ladybird Books Newsletter*, 19th March, 1999, p. 1.

<sup>180</sup>Douglas Keen, in 'Peter and Jane hit 60'. *The Times*, 9th December, 2000.

<sup>181</sup><http://www.ladybird.co.uk>

<sup>182</sup>*The Independent*, (London) 13th May, 2000.

eleven positions, and the last tenuous link with the East Midlands was finally broken.<sup>183</sup> Ladybird was merged with Dorling Kindersley's creative departments in London thus by this stage being nothing but an imprint. Key members of staff were offered alternative positions under the merger, managing director Michael Herridge became publisher of the new licensing division comprising Dorling Kindersley, Ladybird and Funfax whilst Stephanie Barton, head of non-licensed publishing became publishing director of Dorling Kindersley's preschool and primary division. Ladybird's UK marketing and publicity teams were also reorganised with Catherine Bell, Ladybird's marketing director becoming UK marketing director for Dorling Kindersley.<sup>184</sup>

From this point the fortunes of Ladybird books were inextricably linked to other lists acquired under the parent company umbrella. In 2002, Penguin amalgamated two of its lists, Frederick Warne and Ladybird to create a new preschool publishing division. The Warne managing director, Sally Floyer, took overall control whilst the former publishing director of the Ladybird division, Stephanie Barton, became second in command. The two lists shared rights and marketing resources whilst the creative teams of editors and designers were to remain separate. The aim was to increase the list of 110 titles per year to about 200 by 2004.<sup>185</sup>

Ladybird Warne, as it became known, obtained the rights to produce Disney books. Obviously, Ladybird was a valuable asset to the parent company for it was described as a 'key driver' in the renewal of Disney's three-year contract with Penguin.<sup>186</sup> This led to discussions with Disney on the production of new formats. The Ladybird name itself was, of course, a valuable acquisition for as Sally Floyer of Ladybird Warne said, 'Ladybird has the advantage of high brand recognition among the nought to six years' consumer market.'<sup>187</sup> By amalgamating the two preschool imprints it was hoped that Ladybird's expertise in product development combined with Warne's speciality of managing and growing brands would prove mutually beneficial. They

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<sup>183</sup> 'Ladybird's job losses', *Printing World*, 5th February, 2001.

<sup>184</sup> 'Jobs go at Ladybird and DK', *The Bookseller*, 2nd February, 2001.

<sup>185</sup> 'Ladybird and Warne link up', *The Bookseller*, 19th July, 2002.

<sup>186</sup> 'Ladybird unveils plans for growth', *The Bookseller*, 27th December, 2002.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

were particularly keen to attract and develop licences in the same way as they had managed to negotiate the Disney contract and rights.

The company maintained a firm idea of exactly which target areas it wished to concentrate upon at this time with a statement defining its brand image saying, 'Ladybird publishes innovative illustrated books for the 0–8 age group, focusing its publishing in the categories of baby and toddler, preschool, home learning, learning to read and stories.'<sup>188</sup>

The general children's book publishing market during 2003 was described as having many tough areas. Markets for preschool and picture books, young fiction, teenage literature and non-fiction remained competitive whilst spending on school libraries was at 'an all-time low'.<sup>189</sup> Whilst it was acknowledged that government funding was available for schools, it was reported that much of this was being spent on information technology to the detriment of books.<sup>190</sup> Thus the market for educational publishing was diminishing. Success for publishers meant searching out niche areas such as preschool publishing or gaining the advantage over competitors by negotiating publishing rights for licensed characters. It was recognised by Sally Floyer, who was in charge of the amalgamated Frederick Warne/Ladybird imprints that publishers had to 'be much more inventive with their licences.' She confirmed that Ladybird was enjoying success with its 'Starting School' range of books during 2003.<sup>191</sup> The following year it was announced that she was to lead a new imprint with Penguin publishing tie-ins with BBC children's programmes.<sup>192</sup>

By 2004 the Pearson Holding group were looking to 'achieve major economies across each of its book publishing activities in the UK, combining warehouse and distribution of both Penguin and Pearson Education at Magna Park, Leicestershire.'<sup>193</sup> This central location and ready access to the country's road transport infrastructure had, similarly been enjoyed by Wills and Hepworth Ltd.

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<sup>188</sup>*The Bookseller*, 21st March, 2003.

<sup>189</sup>'How will 2004 shape up?' *The Bookseller*, 16th January, 2004, p. 33.

<sup>190</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>191</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup>Joel Rickett, 'Penguin joins hands with BBC' *The Bookseller*, 7th May 2004.

<sup>193</sup>Bellaigue, 2004, p. 192.

Following the departure of UK chief executive, Anthony Forbes Watson, in 2005, Penguin's chairman and chief executive officer, John Makinson, announced his intention of working closely with Ladybird managing director, Sally Floyer, stating 'There are challenges in the marketplace for all preschool publishers – but in Ladybird, Warne and BBC Children's we have some of the strongest brands in publishing.'<sup>194</sup> In the same year Ladybird lost the Disney licence to Parragon Publishers. It did, however, retain the licences for several other characters. Like many other children's book publishers, Ladybird have realised the potential of using the internet. Currently the imprint has a good, interactive website where books can be bought on-line. Taking advantage of the marketing opportunities created by children and parents searching on the internet, the site capitalises on its remaining licences: Angelina Ballerina,<sup>195</sup> Batman,<sup>196</sup> Captain Scarlet,<sup>197</sup> Little Red Tractor,<sup>198</sup> Meg and Mog,<sup>199</sup> Miss Spider,<sup>200</sup> Peppa Pig,<sup>201</sup> Scooby-Doo,<sup>202</sup> Spot<sup>203</sup> and Topsy and Tim.<sup>204</sup> The Ladybird imprint is now clearly aimed at younger children with marketing deliberately targeted toward parents who were probably brought up with the strong brand image built up over many years.

<sup>194</sup>Tom Holman, 'Makinson sets out new Penguin structure', *The Bookseller*, 18th February, 2005, p. 7.

<sup>195</sup>Angelina Ballerina is a ballet-dancing mouse © 2009 HIT Entertainment Limited, created and devised by Helen Craig and Katharine Holabird. <http://www.angelinaballerina.com> [site accessed 28th September, 2009].

<sup>196</sup>Batman is a comic book superhero co-created by artist Bob Kane and writer Bill Finger appearing in publications by DCComics. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Batman> [site accessed 29th September, 2009].

<sup>197</sup>Captain Scarlet was created by Gerry Anderson. A television series featuring Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons was first broadcast in September 1967.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/cult/anderson/scarlet/intro.shtml> [site accessed 29th September, 2009]

<sup>198</sup>Little Red Tractor is an animated children's television series produced by the Little Entertainment Group, broadcast by the BBC, usually on the CBeebies channel.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little\\_Red\\_Tractor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little_Red_Tractor) [site accessed 29th September, 2009].

<sup>199</sup>The Meg and Mog stories were created by Helen Nicoll and Jan Pieńkowski.

<http://www.janpienkowski.com/books/meg-and-mog/index.htm> [site accessed 29th September, 2009]

<sup>200</sup>Miss Flora Spider is a character in a range of children's books created by David Kirk.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miss\\_Spider](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miss_Spider) [site accessed 29th September, 2009].

<sup>201</sup>Peppa Pig © Astley Baker Davies Ltd/E1 Entertainment UK Ltd. [www.peppapig.com/](http://www.peppapig.com/) [site accessed 29th September, 2009].

<sup>202</sup>Scooby-Doo is the dog character in an animated television series of the same name. SCOOBY-DOO™ and all related indicia are trademarks of and © (s08) Hanna-Barbera Productions, Inc. [http://www.warnerbros.co.uk/web/sd\\_brand/index.jsp](http://www.warnerbros.co.uk/web/sd_brand/index.jsp) [site accessed 29th September, 2009].

<sup>203</sup>Spot is a dog character created for a range of children's books by Eric Hill.

<sup>204</sup>Topsy and Tim are characters from a series of children's books created by Jean and Gareth Adamson.



Penguin purchased a company called The Book Studio, in 2005. This offered an opportunity for its books, including those published under the Ladybird brand, to be developed and packaged by the newly acquired firm.<sup>205</sup>

A change of leadership for the Ladybird brand was announced in 2007. A press release from Penguin UK was published on 30th November, 2007 reporting the retirement of Sally Floyer as managing director of the Brands and Licensing Division, and which indicated that Stephanie Barton was to succeed Ms Floyer from 1st January, 2008 following a year as deputy managing director. Ms Barton had long been associated with Ladybird having worked for Ladybird Books Ltd at the Loughborough premises for many years.<sup>206</sup>

The company says, on its website 'Ladybird books have been loved by children and trusted by parents for generations. Our easy-to-use, clear and enjoyable stories and activities will stimulate your child to learn and help you to enjoy the time that you spend together.'<sup>207</sup> Clearly, the future of the imprint is being built on the strong foundations of its past.

The following chapter deals with the printing and production practices employed by the firm. These are of particular significance for two reasons. Firstly, its roots were firmly grounded in the printing industry, its primary business being that of a commercial printer for many decades. Secondly, whilst the business became increasingly concerned with publication of its children's books, it continued to print and manufacture them on the premises.

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<sup>205</sup>'Penguin takes direct route', *The Bookseller*, 3rd March, 2006, p. 20.

<sup>206</sup>'Sally Floyer announces her retirement', Press release, London 30th November, 2007, <http://pressoffice.penguin.co.uk/static/cs/uk/3/downloads/releases2007/SALLYFLOYERANNOUNCEMENT.pdf> [site accessed 18th September, 2008].

<sup>207</sup><http://www.ladybird.co.uk/playzone/index.html> [site accessed 2nd March, 2007].

## Chapter 3

# Printing and Production

### 3.1 Printing Processes

The rapid growth of trade and industry in Britain at the beginning of the nineteenth century meant that printing was in greater demand than ever before. Development of trade outside communities necessitated the use of advertising and packaging, stationery, forms, banknotes, tickets, timetables and catalogues which all required the services of printers. There was also an increase in the number of items being printed following the abolition of stamp duty in 1855 and of paper tax in 1861.<sup>1</sup> To keep up with demand, new printing methods had to be invented in addition to the introduction of mechanisation in all areas related to the printing trades. Such technical innovations included the mechanisation of papermaking first undertaken in England in 1803.<sup>2</sup> Another step forward in the printing industry was the introduction of stereotyping to commercial book production, from 1805 onwards.<sup>3</sup> This involved making a mould from cast type thus allowing it to be used many times. Additionally, improvements to printing presses as well as steam-driven mechanisation of the presses dramatically increased output as did the mechanisation of the binding processes. New techniques in illustration such as wood engraving, steel engraving and lithography opened up new opportunities for book manufacturing. The later invention of composing machines provided for a great improvement over the laborious task of setting the type by hand. All of these innovations combined to make mass-market publication and large-scale printing feasible.

#### 3.1.1 Women's Roles

The introduction of mechanisation into the printing and book production processes provided some roles for women who were often employed to undertake unskilled tasks. There was fierce opposition, from men, to women entering the printing trades. The Typographical Association, a trade union strongly opposed to the inclusion of women in its trade, 'closed' businesses employing women, to their members. However, despite this many women were employed in the printing trade prior to the

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<sup>1</sup>John Feather, *A History of British Publishing* (2nd edition), (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 113.

<sup>2</sup>S.H. Steinberg, *Five Hundred Years of Printing* (rev. edn) (London: The British Library and Oak Knoll Press, 2001), p. 138.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

First World War. The 1911 Census indicates that over 16,000 females were working 'in printing' with 464 employed as hand compositors and 81 as composing machine operators.<sup>4</sup>

The results of a substantial and thorough sociological study of women employed in the printing trades were published in 1904. It was found that in letterpress printing women were employed in the setting up of type, in correcting and distributing. Generally imposition was carried out by male labour because, as the report specifies 'no instance has been found in which this latter work [imposition] which in some cases is extremely heavy, is done by women.'<sup>5</sup> Similarly, it seems also to have been the case in bookbinding firms that female labour was used for tasks requiring little skill or training. In this aspect of the trade women were employed in the folding of the pages, either by hand, or by feeding sheets of paper into the folding machine. They were employed in subsequent processes to collate the pages and to sew them together, again either by hand or with a sewing machine. Any detailed handcrafting of the gilding on the book covers was classed as a skilled trade and was exclusively undertaken by men. However, laying the gold leaf onto the books for machine embossing was invariably undertaken by women as they were particularly dextrous and had the necessary light touch for carefully handling the delicate gold leaf sheets. Rebinding and repairing of books was also undertaken by women. Lithographic work for women was restricted to machine feeding only. Girls were preferred as feeders because they were 'cleaner-handed, more careful and accurate, less disposed to meddle with the machinery, and therefore less liable to accidents; above all quieter, more docile and less apt to strike.'<sup>6</sup>

Photographs of Henry Wills' Angel Press (later Wills and Hepworth) taken around 1900 (see page 18) indicate that women and girls were, indeed, working alongside their male colleagues. The women can be seen working as paper feeders on the mechanised lithographic flat-bed stop-cylinder presses. In addition, while it was a

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<sup>4</sup>A.E. Musson, *The Typographical Association: Origins and History up to 1949* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 102.

<sup>5</sup>James Ramsay MacDonald (ed.), *Women in the Printing Trades: A Sociological Study* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1904), p.3.

<sup>6</sup>MacDonald (1904), p.11.

male employee minding the Waite and Sheard<sup>7</sup> pen ruling machine in the binding room, the photograph clearly shows a young girl employed in the task of feeding the paper into it. It would have been a male employee appointed the task of setting up the machine for it was a job that required a high level of skilled craftsmanship. Ruling machines were used in the printing of ledgers, account books and index cards and calculations would have had to be undertaken to ensure the uniform spacing of the faint ruling required before carefully setting up the machine to accommodate various sizes of paper and card.<sup>8</sup> It is only men that can be observed operating the guillotines, an often dangerous form of employment where losing a finger was an occupational hazard. Women can also be seen in the firm's bindery employed in the task of operating the sewing machines to stitch the book pages together. This tradition remained for decades with the bindery employing a number of girls and women operating the sewing machines until the introduction of an adhesive binding line. However, from the photograph, there appears to be no female labour in the composing room at the beginning of the twentieth century which is not atypical. The photograph also shows sheets of paper suspended from the roof trusses of the machine room which would have been completed printed sheets in the process of drying. These are evidently staged photographs designed to show the assets of the business at the period and capture only a brief moment in time. The information to be gained from them, however, should not be dismissed for they do provide an insight into working practices and the type of machinery being employed in the printing business as well as the human resources utilised by the firm.

### 3.1.2 Technological Advances

The printing trade witnessed a series of technological changes in the first half of the twentieth century. Most notable was the universal employment of composing machines for the setting of type. In general it was the Monotype system that was chosen for the commercial typesetting of books because the paper ribbon produced by this method could be easily and cheaply stored for subsequent reprints.<sup>9</sup> Whilst the majority of books were printed on flat-bed presses up until the middle of the twentieth

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<sup>7</sup>Waite and Sheard, Manufacturers of Paper Ruling Machinery, Enterprise Works, Honley, Huddersfield

<sup>8</sup>S.R. Spreckley, *Practical Paper Ruling* (Honley: John Shaw & Sons, 1908).

<sup>9</sup>John Child, *Industrial Relations in the British Printing Industry: The Quest for Security* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1967), p. 157.

century, rotary presses were being used for those titles with longer print runs. The rotary press used curved metal or rubber stereotype plates. Direct lithography was increasingly used for some illustrated books whilst offset lithography was particularly useful for those books with integrated pictures and text.<sup>10</sup> Photographs of Henry Wills' premises, from around 1900 (see page 18), show that the firm had mechanised lithographic flat-bed stop-cylinder presses at that stage. By the time the firm had become a limited company in 1924, Wills and Hepworth had adopted the use of a rotary press. Following the Second World War, investment continued with the purchase of a two-colour off-set printer, in 1946.<sup>11</sup> At this period the firm was an example of a typical provincial printer of the kind generally found in any large town in Britain. Whilst the business was successful, housed a wide range of up-to-date plant, and prided itself on the quality of its workmanship, it was not at that time in any way unique in its operations.

However, following the increasing success in the sales of its children's books during the 1960s, Wills and Hepworth Ltd ceased its commercial printing enterprise to concentrate solely on the publishing and printing of its standard format books. It was, the only children's book publisher to print, bind and despatch its books on the same premises. It was this unique business operation that ensured its economic success and formed the foundation for an imprint that became renowned in both Britain and overseas. During the late 1960s the company began a significant investment programme in order to purchase up-to-date machinery. This investment continued throughout the next three decades (details of which can be found later in this chapter). Charles Hall, in his role as works director, travelled to many countries including the United States of America, Denmark and Germany to witness all kinds of printing technology in action before committing to orders for such a significant investment. He recalls that, when searching for a new guillotine, he and the works manager looked at both English and German versions but he opted for the German machinery because it was fully automated.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Steinberg, pp. 231–2.

<sup>11</sup>Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors 9th January, 1946. Ladybird archive ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

<sup>12</sup>Charles Hall (former Works Director Ladybird Books Ltd.). Interview with author 30th October, 2007.

### 3.1.3 Production of a Ladybird Book

The exact production processes involved in the manufacture of the 'Ladybird' book were set out in a document which can now be found in the archive. In preparation for a visit by the BBC, in 1977, staff compiled this useful document in which each process was detailed in the precise order of operation together with information relating to the appropriate department responsible for each part of the production process.<sup>13</sup> As can be seen, there were six main departments, each involved in one particular aspect of the books' manufacture and sales. The majority of the work was undertaken at the firm's offices and factory at Beeches Road, Loughborough. The only two processes not being undertaken on the premises, at the time, were the machine typesetting and the plate making. It is not unusual for these two specialised components of the book production business to have been contracted out to local firms. In addition, the text and illustrations would have been created by freelance staff who would also not have been employed on the premises. This is a similarly common practice.

**Table 2: Production of a Ladybird Book**

EDITORIAL	Text commissioned
	Text edited
	Text typeset (some by hand but mainly machine which is bought in)
	Artwork commissioned (freelance)
ART DEPARTMENT	Text and illustrations to art department for upmake [sic]
	Plate proofs for checking
	Printing plates (bought in)
LITHO DEPARTMENT	Lithographing sheets
	4-colour Roland VII machines
	Flat sheet warehouse
BINDING DEPARTMENT	Guillotine into sections and cover
	Folding and bundling

<sup>13</sup>Document entitled 'Production of a Ladybird Book', created for visit by Midlands Today crew from the BBC, to Ladybird Books Ltd, on 20th May, 1977. Ladybird archive DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

	Gathering (4 sections)
	Sewing
	Backstripping
	Three-knife trimming
	Casemaking
	Casing in (marrying case and book block)
	Wrapping in 12s
WAREHOUSING	To finished stock warehouse
ACCOUNTING	Credit control check on all orders
	Orders edited
	Books despatched

### 3.2 Letterpress Printing

The oldest method of printing, letterpress printing has been used since the mid-fifteenth century. Basically, the process involves applying ink onto a raised surface which is then pressed onto the paper to form the printed image. There are two kinds of letterpress printing: the first utilises a flat-bed machine whilst the second method employs a rotary machine. The flat-bed printing press prints from a 'forme or some other horizontal mounting of type and blocks' and a rotary press has a printing surface in the form of a 'wrap-round plate fitted to a rotary cylinder.'<sup>14</sup> During the industrial revolution, letterpress printing was to benefit from the advent of steam driven machinery with national newspapers first adopting this form of mechanised printing as early as 1814.<sup>15</sup>

#### 3.2.1 Letterpress at Angel Yard

Even before the end of the nineteenth century, Henry Wills' print works at Angel Yard in Loughborough town centre housed an up-to-date range of printing plant. A guide to the town of Loughborough, published in 1892, revealed that 'modern plant' was being used for letterpress printing.<sup>16</sup> An almanac published in 1914 by Wills and

<sup>14</sup>David Carey, *'How it Works': Printing Processes* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd: 1971), p. 34.

<sup>15</sup>Steinberg, p. 139.

<sup>16</sup>*Loughborough 1892: Its History, Manufactures and Trade* (London and Brighton: Robinson, Son and Pike: 1892), p. 33.

Hepworth features an advertisement proudly announcing that the firm 'have the largest printing machine in Loughborough for printing a sheet 50" x 40".<sup>17</sup> The firm owned a stereo press by 1919 and an inventory of the company's premises indicates that they were using a rotary press by 1924.<sup>18</sup>

A later inventory of Wills and Hepworth Ltd's business, compiled in 1960, reveals the existence of a platen machine department.<sup>19</sup> By 1969 the premises housed an 'Arab' platen press made by Wade of Halifax, and three Wharfedale presses made by Dawson, Payne and Elliott, Otley, Yorkshire. The Wharfedale presses each 'printing a separate colour require a day's make ready between each colour printing' and were used to print advertising material.<sup>20</sup>

### 3.2.2 Letterpress at Beeches Road

By 1971 the printing presses had been moved from the town centre premises to the purpose-built factory at Beeches Road on the outskirts of Loughborough. In addition, the newly built premises housed a range of up-to-date machinery following investment by the company. The letterpress department boasted three Heidelberg cylinder machines and one platen used to print the company's catalogues, promotional material and for the overprinting of foreign texts onto the litho-printed sheets of colour illustrations for the foreign editions.<sup>21</sup> As recently as 1985, the company were still using letterpress for the printing of stationery, the overprinting of prices onto book covers and to create some point-of-sale material.<sup>22</sup>

### 3.3 Lithography

The lithographic process was invented by Senefelder in 1798. The principle behind the technique is 'the antipathy of grease and water, the attraction of these two substances to themselves and to a common porous ground.'<sup>23</sup> Senefelder was

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<sup>17</sup>Wills' *Loughborough Almanac and Street Directory* (Loughborough: Wills and Hepworth, 1914).

<sup>18</sup>Inventory of The Angel Press 1924. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

<sup>19</sup>Inventory and Valuation, The Angel Press, 16th September, 1960 undertaken by Frank Colebrook and Partners. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

<sup>20</sup>John Walton. From notes taken on visit in February 1969. Letter to author 12th June, 2003.

<sup>21</sup>'Fifteen million Ladybirds a year', *British Printer*, September 1970, p. 91.

<sup>22</sup>'Letterpress, lamination and binding fit to burst', *Printing World*, 23rd October, 1985, p. 13.

<sup>23</sup>Michael Twyman, *Lithography 1800-1850: The Techniques of Drawing on Stone in England and France and their Application in Works of Topography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 3-4.



granted a patent in 1801 and, by 1825 it was a widely practised printing method in Britain.<sup>24</sup>

### 3.3.1 Lithography at Angel Yard

A guide to the town of Loughborough, published in 1892, provides evidence that lithographic transferring and lithographic machining was being undertaken by Henry Wills' employees at the Angel Yard premises, before the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>25</sup> An advertisement, published in a 1906 almanac, reveals that the firm was able to provide a photo-lithography service, and that all types of colour printing were being undertaken on the premises. This was a particularly early instance of the use of photo-lithography and their claim to have 'one of the most up-to-date plants in the country' was not unfounded.<sup>26</sup> Lithographic artists were employed by the firm to create the artwork for the lithographic plates. This process entailed creating an image on metal plates, usually zinc, with a greasy ink or crayon resistant to water. The printers at Wills and Hepworth would then carry out a process whereby the plate was exposed to greasy printing ink which adhered to the image whilst simultaneously being repelled by a thin film of water. The lithographic printing process had, by this time, moved into mass market production having been automated by means of powered printing machines.<sup>27</sup> Henry Wills' establishment produced high quality lithographic prints of the local scenery, just one of the many facets of the business helping to establish its reputation for excellent workmanship. Skilled artists were also employed on the premises to produce engravings which could also be used for book illustration. By 1920 Wills and Hepworth had purchased a Quad Crown Furnival Litho machine.

In 1940, following the outbreak of the Second World War, Wills and Hepworth Ltd began to produce children's books with fully coloured inside pages. A post-war inventory lists lithographic plates for some of the titles produced between 1940 and

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<sup>24</sup>Twyman (1970), p.26.

<sup>25</sup>*Loughborough 1892: Its History, Manufactures and Trade* (London and Brighton: Robinson, Son and Pike: 1892), p. 33.

<sup>26</sup>*Wills' Almanac, Diary, Trade and Street Directory for 1906* (Loughborough: Wills and Hepworth, 1906), p. 1.

<sup>27</sup>Michael Twyman, *Breaking the Mould: The first hundred years of lithography* (London: The British Library, 2001), p. 99.

1945.<sup>28</sup> The extent of skilled labour required should not be underestimated for, in the colour lithographic process, artists were required to prepare individual plates (usually four) for each page of their artwork. Those parts to be tinted were drawn in black lithographic ink or chalk and the artists would identify which colour they required for each part of the illustration. The printing process involved the plates being printed onto the same sheet of paper in succession with the cyan, yellow, and magenta inks before, finally being exposed to the black ink. With some of the lithographic artists away from Loughborough putting their skills to use in the service of their country, this work would have been carried out by those few individuals left behind. The company was able to make good economic use of the largest sheet of paper available to printers at the time which measured 40" x 30" and this, together with the colour printing technology already in situ for the commercial side of the business, enabled the full-colour books to be produced easily and inexpensively. The company's production department devised a format that enabled a 52-page book with a page size of 7" x 4<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" plus endpapers and the outside cover to be produced from a single sheet of paper. Figure 5 shows the imposition sheet for a complete Ladybird book.<sup>29</sup>

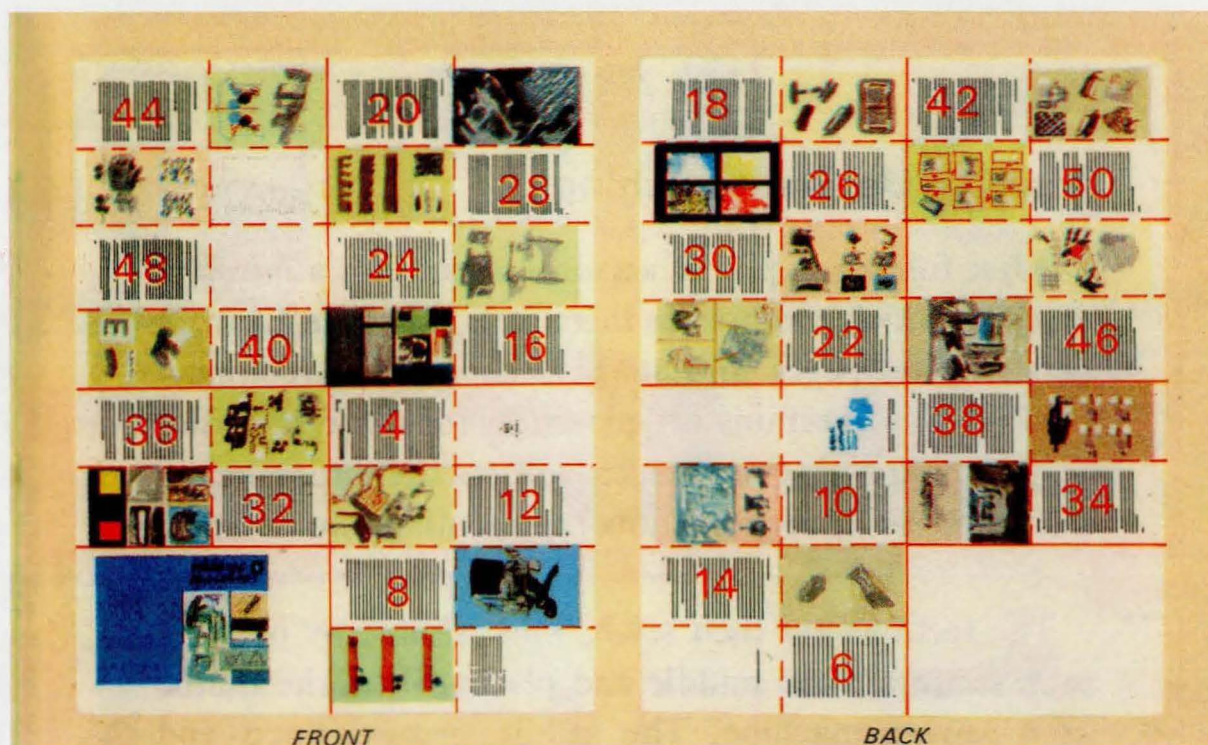


Figure 5: Imposition sheet of a standard format book.

<sup>28</sup>Inventory and Valuation document dated 10th December, 1945. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578.

<sup>29</sup>Extract from *How it works: Printing Processes* by David Carey, illustration by John Kenney Copyright © Ladybird Books Ltd., 1971. Reproduced by permission of Ladybird Archive.



This created a conveniently sized book that could be easily handled by young children. The imposition was arranged in such a manner that the whole process could be suitably automated. This highly mechanised approach made possible by maintaining a single format enabled the books to be produced in an extremely efficient manner and, most importantly, more cost effectively. The key to the ease of manufacture was that, because of the standard format, once the machinery had been set up, little intervention was required and, whatever the title, the presses could continue to roll unhindered producing a high volume of copies at low cost. Each of the Ladybird books produced, whether fiction or non-fiction, followed the same layout, comprising a full-colour plate on the recto pages with corresponding text on the opposite verso.

In 1946 directors resolved to order a Mann two-colour offset machine.<sup>30</sup> This machine allowed the firm to print two colours in quick succession as the paper was fed through a series of cylinders before going over the printing plates. As soon as each page was printed, the machinery immediately sprayed each printed sheet with a fine powder to avoid the problems of set-off, by the use of an anti-set-off sprayer. That is, it prevented the wet ink from one sheet marking the underside of the next sheet being printed.<sup>31</sup>

By the early 1960s the publishing venture had become the mainstay of the business exceeding the importance of the commercial printing. The most significant factor of Wills and Hepworth Ltd's successful venture into children's publishing was the standardisation of their children's books which allowed for cheap and easy production. Indeed, the presses were operated on a non-stop, two-shift day of 16 hours churning out half a million copies per week. Investment in new technology by the company had certainly been worthwhile. These investment decisions had not been taken lightly, however, as is revealed in a letter from valuer, Frank Colebrook to Managing Director, James Shields Clegg. It is a reply to a letter from James Shields Clegg and discusses the finer points of company expansion together with the concerns

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<sup>30</sup>Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors 9th January, 1946. Ladybird archive ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

<sup>31</sup>Carey, 1971, p. 36.



he previously voiced over the prohibitive costs of the 'four-colour Roland',<sup>32</sup> These difficult decisions were subsequently made, however, and between 1967 and 1978 the four Roland Ultra VII four-colour machines were installed in order to print two standard format books on a 58" x 38" sheet.<sup>33</sup> These large presses required plenty of space in which to accommodate them for their dimensions were an incredible 6,885mm long, 4,110mm wide and 2,300mm high. Their efficiency ensured that they were capable of printing a maximum of 6,800 sheets per hour.<sup>34</sup> The first Roland four-colour press was purchased in 1967 at a cost of £85,000. By 1971, a second Roland four-colour press, costing £95,000, had been purchased by the firm. Manufactured by a German company, if the presses required any repair or maintenance, engineers were obliged to travel from Germany in order to undertake the necessary tasks. According to one observer, the press differed from British lithographic machinery in as much as the order of the inking process was reversed.<sup>35</sup> With the entire company valuation amounting to £3,370,000 in 1972<sup>36</sup>, it can be seen that the purchase of such a piece of equipment represented a significant investment.

The Roland press was extremely large and the purchase of the first of these machines presented the company with a major logistical problem as this occurred prior to the move to new premises. Access to the town centre premises was severely restricted and it was not physically possible to manoeuvre the large machine into the building. The problem demanded a radical solution. Hepworth owned some houses on Market Street (see map page 26) which he subsequently sold to the company. These were then demolished to create a roadway, and thus a valuable access, to the print works in Angel Yard.<sup>37</sup> It became evident that the company was rapidly outgrowing the town centre premises and, once a radical decision to move the business had been made, the manufacture of Ladybird books ceased at the town centre print works at Easter 1970. All production was moved to the new factory at Beeches Road.

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<sup>32</sup>Letter from Frank Colebrook, C.M. Colebrook & Partners, Valuers to James Shields Clegg dated 12th May, 1967. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578.

<sup>33</sup>*Printing World*, March 13th, 1991.

<sup>34</sup>Company information poster printed on the stand of the British distributors of Roland Offset presses, Price Service & Co. Ltd, Thames Ditton, Surrey. IPEX trade exhibition 1971.

<sup>35</sup>John Walton. From notes taken on visit in February 1969. Letter to author 12th June, 2003.

<sup>36</sup>'Ladybirds join Penguins, Pelicans and Puffins in the same 'nest'', *Smith's Trade News*, 1st January, 1972, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup>Charles Hall (former Works Director Ladybird Books Ltd.). Interview with author 30th October, 2007.



### 3.3.2 Lithography at Beeches Road

With the move to purpose-built premises on the outskirts of Loughborough, the company's considerable investment in new technology was reported in several trade journals. The firm was well equipped to undertake their long-term plan, which was to increase production of the annual number of books from 15 million to 20 million by 1972, upon completion of all the building works and the installation of new equipment.

The following decade was one of major investment by the company. Four Crabtree two-colour presses, built in Leeds, were installed, in addition to two Roland Ultra VII four-colour machines. The Crabtree presses were capable of printing one complete book (54 pages, including endpapers, plus cover) per sheet whilst the Roland presses printed two books per sheet. The printed sheets were then cut in half with a slitter when printing the reverse side (see photographs of the Roland Ultra VII four-colour press below).<sup>38</sup>

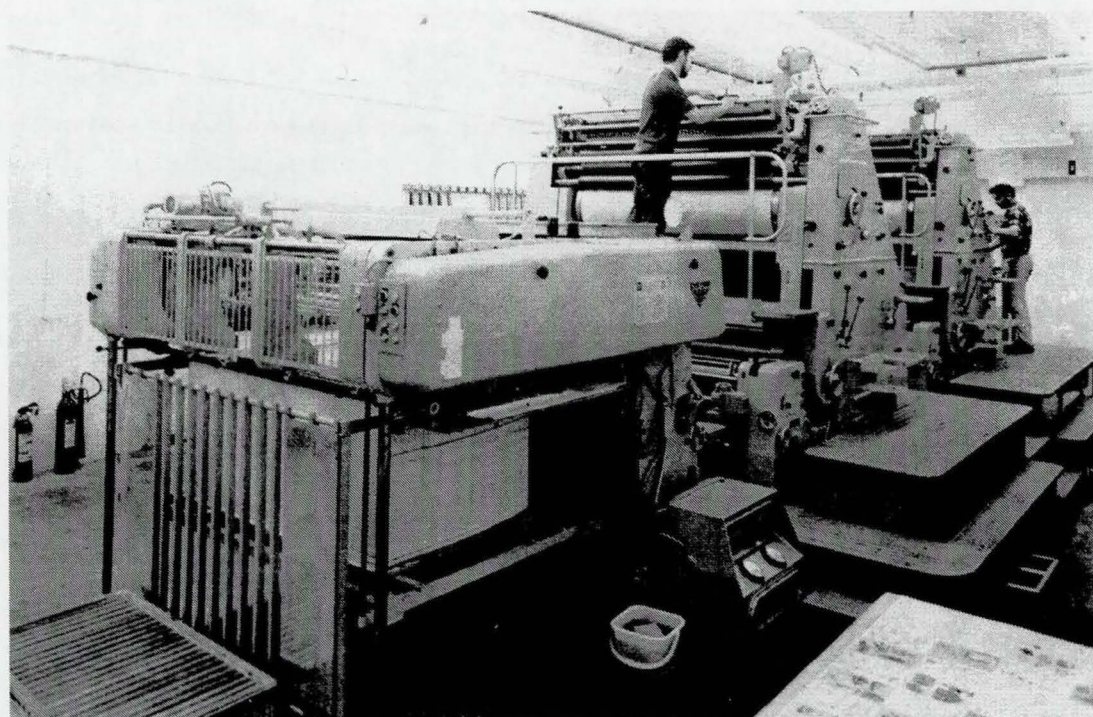
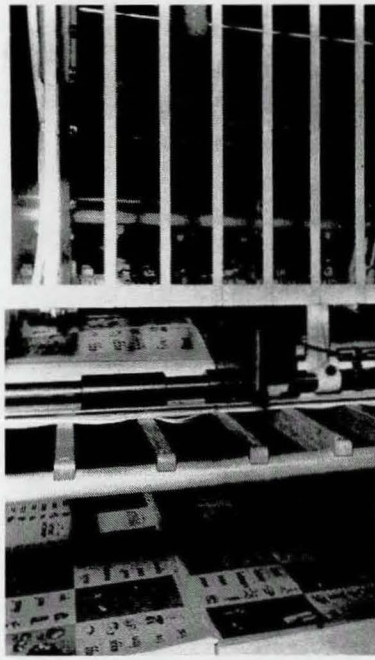


Figure 6: Roland Ultra VII four-colour press.

<sup>38</sup>Roland Ultra VII four-colour press. *British Printer*, September 1970. All efforts have been made to trace the copyright holder of photograph but journal no longer exists.





**Figure 7: Delivery end of the Roland Ultra VII press.**

The initial purchase of the Roland four-colour press, in 1967, had caused the firm great logistical problems. However, the installation of the second Roland in the new premises by 1970 was less problematical and the press was purchased at a cost of £95,000. Whilst this represented a substantial investment for the firm, the production benefits were significant. With four Crabtree two-colour presses<sup>39</sup> and two Roland four-colour presses, the litho printing department was well equipped. Whilst the With the Crabtree two-colour presses printing one book per sheet and the Roland four-colour presses printing two books per sheet, production was increased. A trade journal reported that, 'As the four-colour presses are run at about 50 per cent higher speed than the two-colours (4,500 to 5,000 sheets per hour compared with 3,000 to 3,500), they are approximately six times as productive, in terms of output per day.'<sup>40</sup>

At this stage the company's art department prepared the artwork for litho printing but reproduction and plate making was carried out by trade houses. The company contracted a local pre-press firm, Leicester Photo Litho, to make its litho plates.<sup>41</sup> It

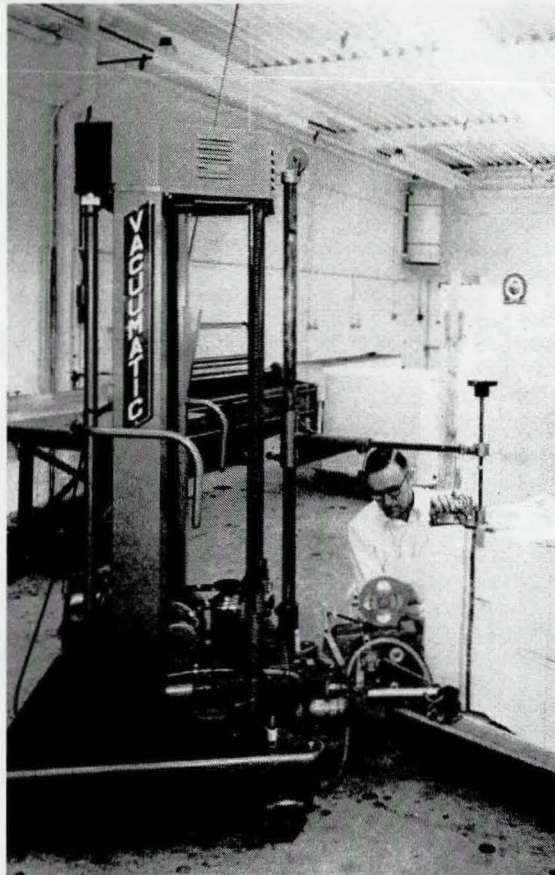
<sup>39</sup>In order to print a four-colour book on the two-colour presses the sheet is passed through four times.

<sup>40</sup>'Fifteen million Ladybirds a year', *British Printer*, September 1970, p. 92.

<sup>41</sup>Mike Banks (former Production Director, Ladybird Books Ltd.), in response to questions from author in e-mail of 22nd January, 2007; also corroborated by John Walton in response to questions from author in conversation dated 7th December, 2007.

was common practice in the print industry at the time, to leave repro and plate making to specialists.<sup>42</sup>

The litho machine room also housed a counting and sorting section equipped with a new Vacuumatic counting machine.<sup>43</sup> (See Figure 8, below.)



**Figure 8: Vacuumatic counting machine.**

By 1973 the company owned four Roland Ultra 7 four-colour offset litho machines, representing a substantial investment. Print runs on the litho presses varied from between 20,000 to 100,000 but the average print run was usually around 50,000.<sup>44</sup> Investment in the machinery allowing the process to be highly automated made sound economic sense. In printing it is more cost effective and easier to undertake long print runs thus being a good incentive to invest in the technology.

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Photograph of Vacuumatic counting machine. *British Printer*, September 1970, p. 92. All efforts have been made to trace the copyright holder of photograph but journal no longer exists.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.



By 1977 the firm had acquired a Roland 800 colour press. The order in which this machine printed its colours was also opposite to that of British presses being black, cyan, magenta followed by yellow.<sup>45</sup> The typical British press employs a four-colour process whereby each sheet passes through the printer four times. The first colour to be printed is usually yellow, followed by red (magenta), blue (cyan) and finally, black.<sup>46</sup> By 1982 a decision had been made by the company to install another Roland press. This was a two-colour Parva 2C which, because it was smaller than the four-colour presses, was used to print anything that was uneconomical to print on the larger Roland Ultra machines.<sup>47</sup> To cope with an increased workload a four-colour Parva with rci (remote control inking) was installed in August 1985 which enabled the book covers to be printed separately from the book insides before being laminated at the local firms of Celloglas, and Crusader in Leicester.<sup>48</sup> (See photograph of the Roland Parva four-colour press below.)<sup>49</sup> The directors at Ladybird Books Ltd were, at that stage, considering adding facilities at their Loughborough premises in order to facilitate cover lamination.



**Figure 9: Four-colour Roland Parva press with rci (remote control inking).**

<sup>45</sup>John Walton. From notes taken on visit in May 1977. Letter to author 12th June, 2003.

<sup>46</sup>David Carey, 'How it works': *Printing Processes* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1971), p. 26

<sup>47</sup>'Ladybird Books: new Parva press prints publishers' promotional material', *Printing and Bookbinding Trade Review*, July 1982, p. 22.

<sup>48</sup>'Letterpress, lamination and binding fit to burst', *Printing World*, 23rd October, 1985, p. 12.

<sup>49</sup>Photograph of four-colour Roland Parva with rci, *Printing World*, 23rd October, 1985. Reproduced with permission.



In 1990 a new printing press was inaugurated by HRH, The Princess of Wales. The four-colour Roland Ultra press, due to its special size modifications, allowed for various formats to be quickly and easily printed. The company's new print and bind concept meant that they could now print as many sheets as required on demand, dependent upon the number of sales. Prior to the introduction of this new equipment and printing philosophy, the company would print the sheets en masse in advance of the predicted sales for the forthcoming year, thus causing storage problems in the warehouse. This more efficient method ensured a timely response to market factors. The new working practice enabled the company to fulfill an order within 48 hours. The plates for all titles were stored on site and could be placed on the press up to 17 times for print runs of 7–8,000 whereas prior to this method print runs would have had to be for 50–60,000.<sup>50</sup> By 1991 the company had installed its own book cover lamination facilities in the form of a Dixon film laminating machine.<sup>51</sup>

### **3.4 Composition and Typesetting**

The manual setting of type had been commonplace in book production for centuries. The mechanisation of the typesetting process was established before the end of the nineteenth century, with Monotype methods being utilised for book production in Britain by 1897.<sup>52</sup>

#### **3.4.1 Manual Methods**

Henry Wills' print works had long housed a composing department which, by 1892, had a 'varied selection of modern types'.<sup>53</sup> A photograph of the composing room, taken around 1900 (see page 19), shows men manually setting type using traditional methods. The photograph clearly shows along the edge of the room, several compositors standing at their frames setting type using composing sticks. They each have their own cases of type, both upper case and lower case. The centre of the room houses three imposing surfaces upon one of which an employee is using a shooting stick to dress the forme. At the far end of the room is situated a Columbian press

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<sup>50</sup>'Ladybird flies home', *Printing World*, 13th March, 1991, p. 23.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup>Steinberg, p. 145.

<sup>53</sup>*Loughborough 1892: Its History, Manufactures and Trade* (London and Brighton: Robinson, Son and Pike: 1892), p. 33.



(denoted by the American eagle counterweight) which would have been used for proofing.<sup>54</sup>

### 3.4.2 Mechanised Typesetting

A trade journal reported that, by 1970 the typesetting for the Ladybird books was being carried out using Monotype machines.<sup>55</sup> Whilst some hand setting of type for a small number of Ladybird books was still being undertaken in 1977, the majority was being machine set. However, this was not actually carried out on the premises as it was 'bought in'.<sup>56</sup> With the Monotype method of typesetting, compositors and their manual methods of composing text had been replaced by keyboard operators who keyed in the text comprised of each character together with justification keys to ensure the correct spacing of the text. The resulting paper ribbon was then transferred to the caster, a machine which injected molten metal into a mould for each character formed from a matrix and determined from the holes in the paper ribbon.

Whilst phototypesetting had been in use since the 1950s it was never adopted by Wills and Hepworth Ltd or, later, Ladybird Books Ltd. Up to 1970, the company had made the decision not to make use of phototypesetting because the texts were short and it was necessary for any corrections to be made cheaply and easily.<sup>57</sup> The firm were still using a 'limited amount' of hot metal as late as 1985, for what purpose is not specified.<sup>58</sup>

### 3.4.3 Foreign Text Typesetting

An article published in the mid 1980s reported that all the text for the foreign language editions of the Ladybird books, except those in Arabic, was set on the premises.<sup>59</sup> Of particular note is the setting of the Chinese version of one title which represented a unique accomplishment. One particularly popular series introduced into

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<sup>54</sup> Assistance in identifying printing technology, kindly provided by Mr John Walton on 12th February, 2009. Technical information also corroborated by Keith Dent, retired compositor with 45 years experience in the print trade and Andrew Dent, print manager, 30 years experience in the print trade.

<sup>55</sup> 'Fifteen million Ladybirds a year', *British Printer*, September, 1970, p. 92.

<sup>56</sup> Document entitled 'Production of a Ladybird Book', created for visit by Midlands Today crew from the BBC, to Ladybird Books Ltd, on 20th May, 1977. Ladybird archive DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

<sup>57</sup> 'Fifteen million Ladybirds a year', *British Printer*, September 1970, p. 92.

<sup>58</sup> 'Letterpress, lamination and binding fit to burst', *Printing World*, 23rd October, 1985, p. 12.

<sup>59</sup> 'Letterpress, lamination and binding fit to burst', *Printing World*, 23rd October, 1985, p. 13.



the publishing list in the mid 1960s was the 'How it Works' range of books. Encompassing many new subjects, the titles in this series provided an insight into the latest technological advances. The book entitled '*How it Works*': *The Computer* not only achieved high volume sales in the UK but was simultaneously produced in Chinese. The Chinese translation was keyed on a specially developed Monotype Chinese language keyboard and phototypeset on a high-speed, computer-controlled Monotype Lasercomp.<sup>60</sup> This achievement represented a worldwide 'first' for the production of Chinese text. The completed texts were bound in gold-blocked covers for presentation to Chinese political leaders and representatives from the Chinese printing industry.

### 3.4.4 Computerised Typesetting

In the spring of 1978, preparations were being made for the installation of computer typesetting.<sup>61</sup> By 1981, the typesetting of the Ladybird books was being carried out on an EditWriter® system<sup>62</sup> and by 1985 the typesetting was being carried out on 'two EditWriters®'.<sup>63</sup> This was still the case in 1991.<sup>64</sup> EditWriter® was the registered trademark of typesetting machines designed and manufactured by Compugraphic. First used in 1977, the machine combined a keyboard and photo unit in one piece of equipment. The model was actually the 7500 Editwriter® which enabled one job to be typeset while the operator simultaneously keyed in the text of another. A sales brochure for the machinery describes the EditWriter® thus, 'The EditWriter® 7500 combines entry, editing, storage and typesetting in a single unit at an unbeatable price. Exciting new options provide multilingual hyphenation and double disk storage.'<sup>65</sup> It was considered the most successful machine ever introduced within the industry, 'outselling any other model'.<sup>66</sup> The way in which it worked is thus described, 'the Mini-Disk Terminal (MDT), a self-contained stand-alone intelligent video terminal

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<sup>60</sup>'World first edition keyboarded in Chinese by 'Monotype', *The Monotype Recorder*. New Series. Number 1, December 1979.

<sup>61</sup>John Walton. From notes taken on visit in May 1978. Letter to author 12th June, 2003.

<sup>62</sup>'A million royalties for Ladybird?', *Printing World*, 18th March, 1981.

<sup>63</sup>'Letterpress, lamination and binding fit to burst', *Printing World*, 23rd October, 1985, p. 13.

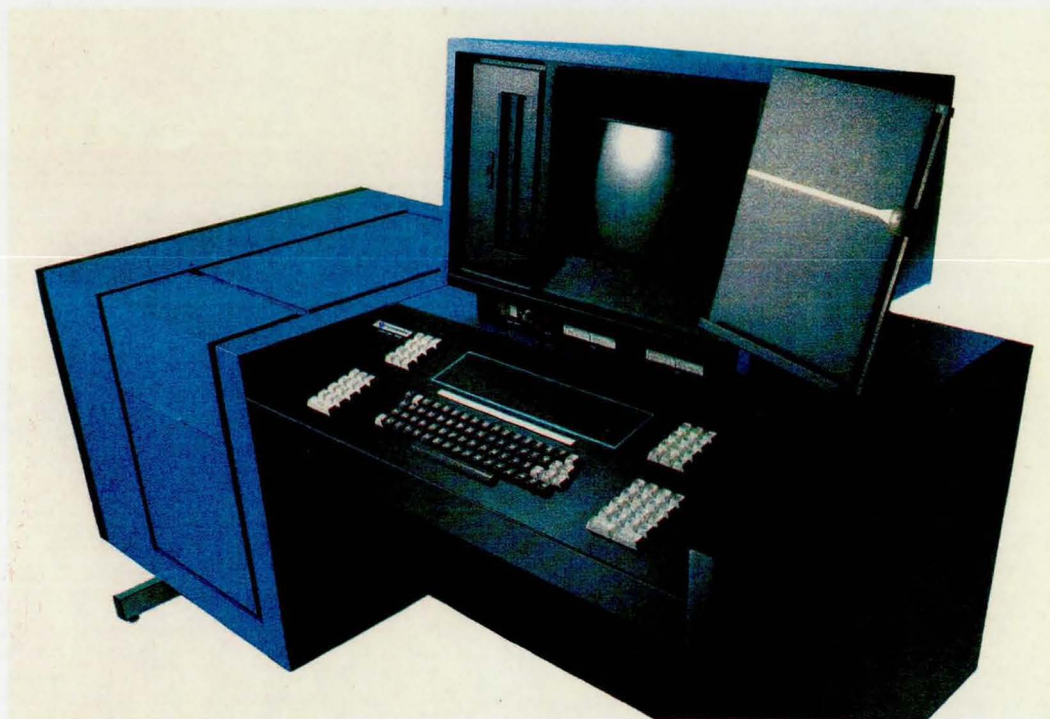
<sup>64</sup>'Ladybird flies home', *Printing World*, 13th March, 1991, p. 23.

<sup>65</sup>'Revolution..Evolution...', Compugraphic brochure, featured at IPEX (International Printing Machinery and Allied Trades Exhibition), 1980.

<sup>66</sup>Lawrence Wallis, 'End of engineering epicentre', *Printweek*, 14th February, 2008, p.17.



disk drive, appears along with the Mini-Disk Reader (MDR), which permits data on the mini-disk to be input into a phototypesetter.<sup>67</sup> (See Figure 10, below.)<sup>68</sup>



**Figure 10: EditWriter® typesetting machine by Compugraphic.**

By 1990 the firm's premises were equipped to accommodate photographs in the books with an on-site photographic studio and a film editing machine in situ.

### **3.5 The Bindery**

Whilst a photograph of Henry Wills' premises taken around 1900 (see page 18) shows a labour-intensive process, it does indicate that the bookbinding process was, in part, mechanised. Much of the equipment used by the firm for book binding was in use for many decades. At the time the book manufacturing was still being undertaken at the town centre premises, there remained a gluing department, sewing department and bindery.<sup>69</sup> On a visit in 1969 it was noted that the guillotine in use, manufactured by Greig & Sons of Edinburgh, was approximately 60 years old. The firm had, by then,

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<sup>67</sup>'The History of Agfa/Compugraphic 1960–1995', <http://www.monotypeimaging.com/aboutus/AgfaComp.aspx> [Site accessed 12th December, 2007].

<sup>68</sup>'Revolution..Evolution...', Compugraphic brochure, featured at IPEX (International Printing Machinery and Allied Trades Exhibition), 1980.

<sup>69</sup>Inventory and valuation of The Angel Press 1924. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.



purchased a case-making machine made by Martini at a cost of £11,000.<sup>70</sup> The purpose of this machine was to 'bring together the book blocks and the cases and stick them together'.<sup>71</sup> Prior to this acquisition the board covers for the books would have been put together manually by the case makers.

It is particularly important for children's books to be manufactured using appropriate methods to ensure that they can withstand sustained use by children who may not always handle the books carefully. To this end, the standard Ladybird books were always manufactured with hard covers and, prior to 1965, with dust jackets. When the company moved its enterprise from its town centre location to purpose-built premises in the early 1970s, the bindery became fully mechanised. The processes of trimming and cutting, folding, gathering, thread-sewing, back-lining, case-making and casing-in were all undertaken by up-to-date machinery. Investment by the company by 1970 included the purchase of: a machine board chopper used to cut out boards for the cases; a jogger which aligned the printed sheets in preparation for cutting by the guillotines; a backstripping machine for placing the back strip into the case between the two boards;<sup>72</sup> two East German Wohlenberg Programmatic 45-inch guillotines;<sup>73</sup> automatic sewing machines; a Wohlenberg three-knife trimmer (see Figure 11)<sup>74</sup> which 'cuts the surplus edges off the book block';<sup>75</sup> and a Dexter case-making machine.<sup>76</sup> (See Figure 12.)<sup>77</sup> Each sheet contained the pages of two complete Ladybird books which were produced in the printing department before being cut into suitable sections in the binding department. The folding process was mechanised with the folded pages compressed in the bundling machine, collated in a gathering machine and sewn together, a process which was also mechanised. The sewn sections were back-stripped with a strip of linen glued into position along the spine to hold them

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<sup>70</sup>John Walton. From notes taken on visit to Wills and Hepworth Ltd in February 1969. Letter to author 12th June, 2003.

<sup>71</sup>John Walton. From notes taken on visit to Wills and Hepworth Ltd in May 1971. Letter to author 6th February, 2008.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>John Walton. From notes taken on visit to Wills and Hepworth Ltd in May 1971. Letter to author 12th June, 2003.

<sup>74</sup>Photograph of the Wohlenberg three-knife trimmer in the bindery of Ladybird Books Ltd. *British Printer*, September, 1970, p. 93. All efforts have been made to trace the copyright holder of photograph but journal no longer exists.

<sup>75</sup>John Walton. From notes taken on visit to Wills and Hepworth Ltd in May 1971. Letter to author 6th February, 2008.

<sup>76</sup>'Fifteen million Ladybirds a year', *British Printer*, September 1970, p. 93.

<sup>77</sup>Photographs of the bindery of Ladybird Books Ltd. *British Printer*, September, 1970, p. 93. All efforts have been made to trace the copyright holder of photograph but the journal no longer exists.



firmly in place. A three-knife trimmer was used to cut the head and tail and the fore-edge of the book block to the exact size. Following this process the case-making machine glued the cover whilst, finally the casing-in machine completed the book. Completed books were then subjected to pressure from hydraulic nipping presses in order to compact them before storage in the warehouse.<sup>78</sup>



Figure 11: Wohlenberg three-knife trimmer in the bindery of Wills and Hepworth Ltd.

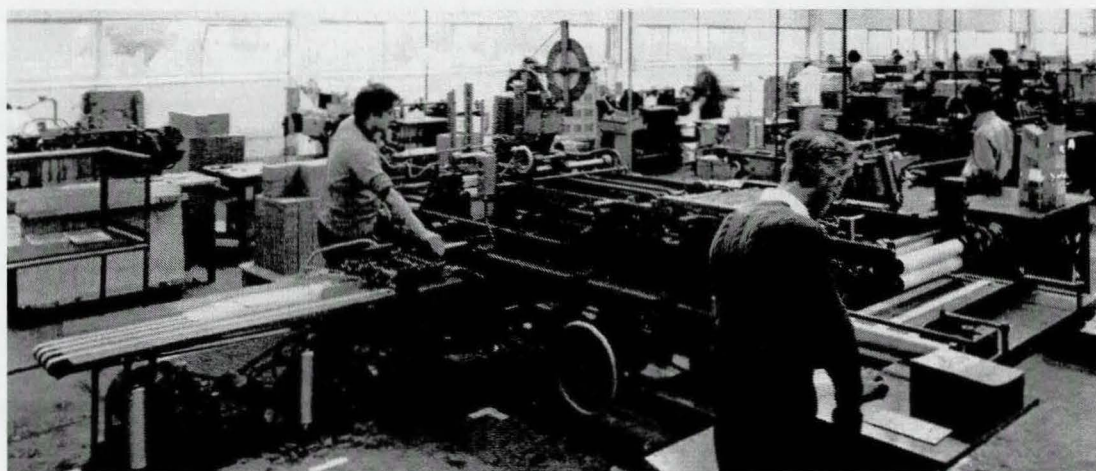


Figure 12: Dexter automatic casemaker in the bindery of Wills and Hepworth Ltd.

The firm were, however, still making use of two older guillotines, their old sewing machines<sup>79</sup> and American Smyth casing-in machines.<sup>80</sup> Packing the books into boxes was undertaken manually at this stage.<sup>81</sup> (See Figure 13.)

<sup>78</sup>John Walton. From notes taken on visit to Wills and Hepworth Ltd in May 1971. Letter to author 6th February, 2008.

<sup>79</sup>John Walton. From notes taken on visit in February 1969. Letter to author 12th June, 2003.

<sup>80</sup>John Walton. Note to author, 12th February, 2009.



**Figure 13: Ladybird books being packed into boxes.**

Directors of Ladybird Books Ltd were always keen to increase productivity and continued to look into finding alternative ways of improving the manufacturing process. Whilst the company enjoyed a positive growth in sales during the entire decade of the 1970s, it became increasingly concerned with maintaining low production costs in an attempt to beat the increasing inflation facing Britain at the time. Few economies could be made for the production process was already efficient and running economically. One area for streamlining, however, was the binding process, the most labour-intensive area of the factory.

### **3.5 Further Investment**

Thus, the examination of alternative binding methods to incorporate the current collating, stacking, sewing, lining and trimming procedures was undertaken in 1973 by the bindery manager, David Collington. Traditionally, the pages of Ladybird books had been sewn together for strength so the obvious solution was to swap the stitching method for some kind of adhesive binding. Systems investigated by David Collington

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<sup>81</sup>Photograph of Ladybird books being packed into boxes. *British Printer*, September, 1970, p. 92. All efforts have been made to trace the copyright holder of photograph but journal no longer exists.



included conventional adhesive binding but were discounted. The reasons for this were threefold: all printing plates would have had to be remade to allow for space for spine milling making the cost prohibitive; additional paper would have been required for spine milling resulting in greater costs for raw materials; and, the binding would not have been as strong as the sewn pages. Ladybird Books Ltd had prided itself on producing robust books capable of withstanding rough treatment by overzealous children and they feared that an adhesive binding would simply not be strong enough for the task.<sup>82</sup>

Many years of in-depth consultations with potential binding machinery manufacturers resulted in the chosen company, Harris Bindery Systems, successfully developing the required machinery. The new system was designed to incorporate some machinery already owned and used by Ladybird Books Ltd.<sup>83</sup> In 1980, the company arranged for the installation of a new burst binding system, claimed to be the first in Europe. This involved using an adhesive to bind the pages together as opposed to the traditional method of sewing the pages. This investment allowed for an increase in the speed of production and reduced costs, whilst still allowing the company to retain the quality of production for which Ladybird books had become renowned. The system had taken seven years of research and development to produce and cost Ladybird Books Ltd the sum of £300,000.

Another one million pounds was invested in machinery between 1984 and 1985. This included upgrading the finishing department where a Hoerauf casemaker together with a Lego CT300 high-speed thin book casing-in machine was installed. In true tradition, the acquisition of the latter, in 1985, was unique to a British company at the time. It was connected to the Harris Sheridan perfect adhesive binding line. The machine was expected to increase production from 500,000 to 600,000 books per week.<sup>84</sup> It enabled the company to produce hard-cased bound books from folded sections to finished shrink-wrapped books in a single operation. The machinery was

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<sup>82</sup>Charles Hall, Ladybird works director quoted in 'Harris, Ladybird and child's play in the bindery', *Printing World*, 20th August, 1980, p. 12.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

<sup>84</sup>'Lego makes UK debut at Ladybird', *Printing World*, 29th May, 1985.



supplied by Technograph of Vicenza, Italy.<sup>85</sup> The photograph below (Figure 14) depicts the bindery in 1991.<sup>86</sup>



**Figure 14: The bindery at Ladybird Books Ltd in 1991.**

Further investment was made in 1982 with the installation of a £13,000 pneumatic waste extraction system in the factory. The system was able to deal with up to 1,000 tons of waste paper each day. Waste collected automatically from the Harris perfect binder, two three-knife trimmers and the guillotines was conveyed to a separator through a Neu chopping fan housed in a soundproof enclosure. The waste paper then passed into a Scapa horizontal baler.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

<sup>86</sup>Photograph of the bindery at Ladybird Books Ltd, *Printing World*, 13th March, 1991. Reproduced with permission.

<sup>87</sup>'Waste Away', *Printing World*, 3rd March, 1982.



A Nova shrinkwrapper was also added in 1984 to allow for twelve books to be packaged together for transportation. By this time each shift could produce over 50,000. The company at this stage was employing 285 people and produced 27 million books per year.<sup>88</sup>

### 3.6 Warehousing

During the period when the company's premises remained at the town centre location, the increased book production, whilst welcome in terms of improving the business, did not come without its problems. More storage space was needed for paper, printed sheets, printing plates and inks as well as the printed books themselves. The creation of purpose-built premises went a long way towards solving the firm's warehousing problems, but with the growth in book production, warehousing was a continuing problem. Mike Banks explains the warehousing situation at the time, 'As the number of titles increased on a monthly basis we had to rent warehouse space fairly close to the Beeches Road site. These were the only warehouses that we had in the country.'<sup>89</sup>

When the purpose-built factory was opened it contained a new warehouse that was considered appropriate at the time. This was built large enough to accommodate the company's lorries so that stock could be loaded and unloaded without the need to go outside, thus keeping the goods dry. However, it was not long before the size of the lorries required to transport the books, became increasingly larger and would no longer fit into the building.<sup>90</sup> The new warehouse held a large number of flat printed sheets so that each title should be constantly available.

Similarly, in another storage area, completed books were stored in racks in parcels of 12 so that large orders could be efficiently assembled as and when required. For orders of quantities below 12, a live-racking system was used whereby boxes of books upon sloping roller conveyers were regularly refilled. Ladybird Books Ltd stipulated

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<sup>88</sup>'Letterpress, lamination and binding fit to burst', *Printing World*, 23rd October, 1985, p. 13.

<sup>89</sup>Mike Banks (former Production Director, Ladybird Books Ltd.), in response to question from author. E-mail sent 15th November, 2006.

<sup>90</sup>Charles Hall (former Works Director Ladybird Books Ltd.). Interview with author 30th October, 2007.



that small retailers were only obliged to place a minimum order of £5, therefore, the live-racking system was in constant use.<sup>91</sup>

A 'print-on-demand'<sup>92</sup> concept was introduced in 1990 whereby it became feasible to reduce the size of a print run. This involved printing only the necessary number of sheets depending upon sales levels, which made much more efficient use of the warehousing space. Prior to the introduction of printing to meet demand, several thousands of printed sheets had to be stored based upon predicted future sales. However, following its inception the stocks of printed sheets in the warehouse dropped from £5m to £2.3m. This vital step was taken to accommodate the company's increasing product range which had caused severe warehousing problems.

### **3.7 Raw Materials**

A printer's financial outlay consists of investment in plant, utility costs for the running of the offices and factory, employees' wages, together with the considerable costs of the raw materials necessary in book production. These comprise large quantities of paper and board, together with inks and adhesives. This will now be discussed with relation to the company.

#### **3.7.1 Paper**

Choosing suitable materials for children's book manufacture had represented a challenge for centuries. The earliest horn book's<sup>93</sup> paper had been 'protected by a slip of transparent horn and its back fortified by a slice of good English oak.'<sup>94</sup> As the very first Ladybird books were published during the First World War, they were printed on paper of an extremely low quality and those surviving examples in the British Library have deteriorated. Poor paper quality such as this is not at all suitable for a children's book which will, inevitably, encounter plenty of 'wear and tear'. However, during the 1920s Wills and Hepworth produced a few of their children's

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<sup>91</sup>'Fifteen million Ladybirds a year', *British Printer*, September 1970, p. 93.

<sup>92</sup>The digital technology available nowadays means that the 'print on demand' concept can be applied to extremely small print runs as it is economically viable to do so. When referring to 'print on demand' regarding Ladybird books in the early 1990s, it means the ability to reduce the print run numbers in line with the levels of sales achieved.

<sup>93</sup>A hornbook is 'a small book for teaching children to read that consisted of a sheet of parchment or paper protected by a sheet of transparent horn'. Definition in *Longman Dictionary of the English Language* (London: Longman Group UK Ltd, 1991, p. 762.

<sup>94</sup>E.M. Field *The Child and his Book*, 2nd edition (Wells, Gardner, Darton & Co, 1892), p. 113.



books with coloured illustrations which were printed on 'untearable' paper. More significantly, from their inception in 1940, the standard format Ladybird books were robust and able to withstand a good deal of wear and tear being produced with hard-backed covers and wrapped in protective dust jackets, a practice continued by the company up until the end of 1964.

Paper was initially supplied by two companies, John Dickinson & Co of Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire and Samuel Jones based at St Ives in Huntingdonshire. Whilst the firm remained in the town centre premises, deliveries of raw materials caused a few difficulties, recalls Charles Hall. Access to Angel Yard was restricted as the print works were surrounded by several buildings including shops and houses. Charles Hall suggested to James Clegg that the firm purchase a forklift truck in order to transport materials more easily between the delivery vans and the buildings located in Angel Yard. Despite the fact that James Clegg had previously been unaware of the existence of such a machine, the forklift truck was duly purchased. It was also used to transport boards from their storage location in stables near Loughborough railway station to the town centre premises. Charles Hall recalls that the forklift would often make the journey along the town's roads carrying the boards to and fro.<sup>95</sup>

According to Mike Banks, production director at the time, as book production increased within Ladybird Books Ltd, additional suppliers were sought including Wiggins Teape and Robert Horne.<sup>96</sup> By 1982 Ladybird Books Ltd used paper supplied by three companies: Bowater's Longbow paper; Tullis Russell, Fife; and Wiggins Teape.<sup>97</sup> The company prided itself on producing a quality product and sought to source materials with which to create their books. A 1993 brochure for the company claimed that,

'production values have also been upgraded, with the introduction of high quality coated papers that enhance colour values, improved inks and even more indestructible child-proof binding.'<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>Charles Hall (former Works Director Ladybird Books Ltd.). Interview with author 30th October, 2007.

<sup>96</sup>Mike Banks (former Production Director, Ladybird Books Ltd.). Correspondence with author by e-mail 22nd January, 2007.

<sup>97</sup>John Walton. From notes taken on visit in February 1969. Letter to author 12th June, 2003.

<sup>98</sup>Ladybird brochure (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1993).

In 1997 Ladybird books began to be printed on environmentally-friendly paper made from post-consumer waste. Having already been using UK Paper's Crossbow paper for seven years, the company decided to change to a range of paper created by UK Paper, called UK Fibre. The manufacturing process used to create the paper involved an element of recycling. The papers were of excellent quality and were reported to be, 'extremely white and bright, and print quality and runnability are particularly good for the Crossbow grade.'<sup>99</sup>

### 3.7.2 Adhesives

With the introduction of the new binding system in the early 1980s, in which the pages were glued together rather than stitched, it became necessary to source an adhesive supplier. The necessary glue for the new binding system was initially sourced from National Starch & Adhesives. This company remained as the firm's chosen suppliers as confirmed by a trade journal report in 1991.<sup>100</sup>

### 3.7.3 Inks and Litho Plates

The company purchased all of its litho ink from Edward Marsden of Hull.<sup>101</sup> It was noted during a visit to Ladybird Books Ltd in 1969, that at the time, the company paid £2.60 per kilo for black ink and £5.60 per kilo for red ink.<sup>102</sup> A local firm, Leicester Photo Litho, supplied all of Ladybird Books Ltd's plates for the printing machines from artwork supplied to them by Ladybird Books Ltd.<sup>103</sup> Directors decided to contract all the firm's reproduction and plate-making to local trade houses as it was not considered economically viable to install repro and plate-making departments on the premises. In addition, further complications such as personnel recruitment and labour relations were other factors that influenced the decision.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>'Ladybird delighted with Crossbow and Nimrod', *Printing World*, 6th October, 1997, p. 29.

<sup>100</sup>'Ladybird flies home', *Printing World*, 13th March, 1991, p. 23.

<sup>101</sup>Mike Banks (former Production Director, Ladybird Books Ltd.). From correspondence with author by e-mail 22nd January, 2007.

<sup>102</sup>John Walton. From notes taken on visit in February 1969. Letter to author 12th June, 2003.

<sup>103</sup>Mike Banks (former Production Director, Ladybird Books Ltd. From correspondence with author by e-mail 22nd January, 2007.

<sup>104</sup>'Fifteen million Ladybirds a year', *British Printer*, September 1970, p. 92.



### 3.8 Health and Safety Issues

Working with printing machinery could, obviously, be potentially dangerous. An accident book in the archive documents just two accidents: one, on 2nd November, 1959 in the lithographic department where a man was cleaning a rubber offset blanket on the Crabtree 2-colour quad crown machine and trapped his arm – it was noted that he was sent to hospital. The second occasion occurred on 17th February, 1960 in the binding department when a man trapped his hand (exactly where is not stated).<sup>105</sup> In addition, there is evidence of several inspections by government factory inspectors and subsequent reports advise on installation of safety guards to several machines.<sup>106</sup> It is doubtful that this is the full extent of the accidents within the factory and it is assumed that other accident books have been lost over time.

### 3.9 Distribution

The distribution and transportation of Ladybird books would have been considerably assisted by the firm's favourable geographical location. As has been discussed, the town of Loughborough has good rail and road links. Initially, the books were sent to retailers using the postal system. Mike Banks recalls that, 'When Ladybird Books took over from commercial printing in the mid-1950s we got our own transport. Prior to this when the books were a side-line I can remember the parcels being transported from Angel Yard to the main post-office in Loughborough by a wooden handcart.'<sup>107</sup> These parcels would then have made their way to retailers via the rail network. However, as book production increased, the company opted for road transportation and, by 1960 the company owned 'trucks and transporters' to the value of £1,088.10.0.<sup>108</sup> Once the town gained easy access to the country's road network with the opening of the M1 motorway, it would have been additionally advantageous to use this as a means of transportation for the books. Vans and lorries were purchased by the company and subsequently transformed by sign writers. Featuring the Ladybird logo and the words 'Ladybird Books', the vehicles not only provided the means of transportation for the books, they also acted as excellent marketing tools.

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<sup>105</sup> Accident book in Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

<sup>106</sup> Reports by HM Factory Inspectorate in Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Record Office.

<sup>107</sup> Mike Banks (former Production Director, Ladybird Books Ltd.), in response to question by author. E-mail dated 15th November, 2006.

<sup>108</sup> Inventory of Wills and Hepworth Ltd, 16th September, 1960. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Record Office.

Ledgers for 1970 indicate payments to companies such as Containerway and United Carriers.<sup>109</sup> These may have been for transportation abroad, for the firm were exporting many titles at this stage.

### **3.10 Plant at Closure**

Upon closure of the Loughborough factory, in 1999, the premises housed a total of five four-colour MAN Rolands, three Ultra presses, a 604 B1 press, and a Parva. The Roland presses were bought by Speedmalt, a second-hand machinery dealer in Wakefield. The twenty-eight year old Ultra 7 AO press, nine-year-old 604 B1 and fourteen-year-old Parva were sold on to foreign buyers. Ladybird requested tenders for the specialised MBO binding lines which they also expected would find their way abroad.<sup>110</sup>

Once the books had been manufactured, they had to be commercially viable and thus made available to the market. This vital role in the company's success is examined in the next chapter which details the sales, marketing and export strategies employed.

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<sup>109</sup> Accunts for 31st March, 1970. Ledger in Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Record Office.

<sup>110</sup> £2.2m factory sale as print ceases at Ladybird', *Printing World*, 22nd March, 1999.



## Chapter 4

### Marketing, Sales and Export

#### 4.1 Marketing Strategies

The Ladybird brand is one of the most easily recognisable and well known of all British brands. It has, in fact, been nominated as one of a group that are considered 'truly icons of England.'<sup>1</sup>

The company's marketing policy has been built on the strength of its reputation as a provider of a good quality product at an extremely competitive price. Its books were made widely available to the buying public, being stocked in many non-traditional outlets such as petrol stations, supermarkets, corner shops and newsagents, in addition to bookshops.

Creating sales opportunities and the development of marketing strategies have been at the forefront of the company's endeavours for decades. Minutes of a 1947 board meeting reveal that directors approved arrangements for the company to exhibit at the 1948 British Industries Fair at a cost 'not to exceed £250'.<sup>2</sup> This is a considerable budget for one exhibition when compared to wages being paid to staff at the time. For example, a lithographic artist was paid £550 for the year 1948–49 whilst a letterpress overseer was paid an annual sum of £600 for the same period.<sup>3</sup>

A potential marketing opportunity manifested itself with the launch of a new book series following the Second World War. Whilst, during the 1940s, the overwhelming majority of Ladybird books had been fiction titles, series 455, first published in 1945, launched the company's attempts at producing non-fiction. The 'Uncle Mac' series was developed when company directors first realised the potential of harnessing attributes from other media. In a particularly shrewd move they commissioned the radio presenter responsible

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.icons.org.uk/nom/nominations/ladybird-books> [site accessed 16th March, 2007].

<sup>2</sup>Minutes of the Board of Directors 17th July, 1947 in Ladybird archive ref. DE5788 Leicestershire Records Office.

<sup>3</sup>Wage payments taken from wages ledger for the year 1948/49 in Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578.



for presenting the BBC's *Children's Hour* to write several non-fiction titles, the first of which was entitled *In Green Pastures*. The 'Uncle Mac' series soon followed with Uncle Mac, real name Derek McCulloch, writing several non-fiction titles for Ladybird, namely *In the Train with Uncle Mac*, *In the Country with Uncle Mac*, *Beside the Sea with Uncle Mac*, *In the Wilderness* and *Uncle Mac's Ladybird ABC*. The illustrator, Sep E. Scott, was chosen to team up with Derek McCulloch on each title within the series. This use of a 'celebrity' to gain a high profile for their newly-launched non-fiction series lent a strong credibility to the product. Derek McCulloch, as a representative of the 'establishment' in the form of the British Broadcasting Corporation provided an air of authority and respectability to the books. His doctrine, outlined in his statement regarding the policy of the BBC, 'nothing but the best is good enough for children, who are citizens of the future'<sup>4</sup> although levelled at the radio programme would have certainly lent an air of credibility to his authorship. This first venture into non-fiction proved popular and some titles were produced in many impressions with *In Green Pastures*, for example, being printed in its fifth impression by 1948 and *In the Wilderness* on its fourth impression by 1949.

Direct marketing played an important role in the success of Ladybird books. During the 1950s, monthly listings of the company's new titles, together with a list of all previously published titles, were mailed to primary schools. It is believed by those involved in the creation of these books that much of their success was due to the standardisation of production methods and the familiarity of the resultant format. Teachers and parents knew what to expect from a Ladybird book for they were well written, each book was at a consistent comprehension level, the size and type of fount was standardised, they were illustrated with a full-page illustration on the recto with corresponding text on the opposite verso, as well as being competitively priced. The non-fiction titles were recognised far beyond the children's sphere as being extremely well-informed and reliably written on their subject matter. The rapid growth in the number of titles produced

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<sup>4</sup>Derek McCulloch quoted by Susanne Greenhaugh in 'Different Worlds? Children's Books and the Media' in Kimberley Reynolds and Nicholas Tucker (eds) *Children's Book Publishing in Britain since 1945* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1998), p. 135.



during the 1950s by Wills and Hepworth Ltd was, therefore, in large part due to their increasing popularity with parents and teachers.

The role played by the provision of state education in the continuing success of Ladybird books should not be discounted. Ladybird's initiative in directly marketing to schools coincided with a boom period in public expenditure including that within the education sector. A post-war increase in the number of births<sup>5</sup> meant that, by the 1950s there were greater numbers of children of primary school age, boosting the potential market for all children's books, including the competitively priced Ladybird books.

Wills and Hepworth Ltd were acutely aware of the need for branding and the importance of logo recognition, together with maintaining a high profile. The logo was prominent on all their products and 'point of sale' displays were used in an effort to portray the products to best effect. The early display stands were produced by local joiners in the town of Loughborough with the lettering and logos being hand-painted. The display material was produced in a range of sizes from very small window stands made of plywood large enough to only hold one title, to an impressive unit large enough to hold stocks of the entire range of books, both fiction and non-fiction. A photograph of such a point-of-sale display, taken in the mid-1950s, shows a wide range of titles attractively displayed (see Figure 15).<sup>6</sup> Ladybird was one of the first children's book publishers to have its own stand in F.W. Woolworth & Co. Ltd. Woolworth's was considered an important retail outlet for the sale of inexpensive books as there were hundreds of branches throughout the country. In addition, it was felt that those customers who would not have ventured into conventional bookshops would be far more comfortable purchasing from the less imposing Woolworth's. It was, in fact, Woolworth's to whom Allen Lane had made an initial approach in order to launch the sale of his sixpenny Penguin paperbacks.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Miriam Akhtar and Steve Humphries, *The Fifties and Sixties: A Lifestyle Revolution* (London: Boxtree, 2001), p. 13.

<sup>6</sup>Photograph from <http://www.easyontheeye.net/ladybird/items/shop.htm> [site accessed 15th October, 2007]. Permission to reproduce photograph sought from copyright holder but no response.

<sup>7</sup>Linda Lloyd Jones, *Fifty Years of Penguin Books* (London: Pearson plc, 1985), p. 17.





Figure 15: Ladybird point-of-sale display (c. 1956).

The company's point-of-sale displays evolved over the decades from the handmade wooden shelving to revolving wire racks, then to brightly coloured, highly visible, cardboard free-standing shelving and plastic 'multi-spinners'.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout the entire decade of the 1960s, the company expanded at a significant rate producing hundreds of new titles (see Figure 34 in the Appendix) and capitalising strongly on its back list. A high profile and strong brand image, together with direct marketing, had allowed Ladybird books to form a strong presence in the market not only in Britain but, increasingly around the world. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Ladybird books would have been read, if not owned, by almost every child in Britain

<sup>8</sup> Illustrated in Ladybird brochure (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1993).



during the 1960s, for access to them was extensive. The company was keen to take advantage of every possible opportunity for self-promotion. Some of their titles feature illustrations where children are reading Ladybird books themselves, or the books are featured in the window of a toy shop, whilst others depict buses with Ladybird advertising on the side of the vehicle (see Figure 16<sup>9</sup>, below).

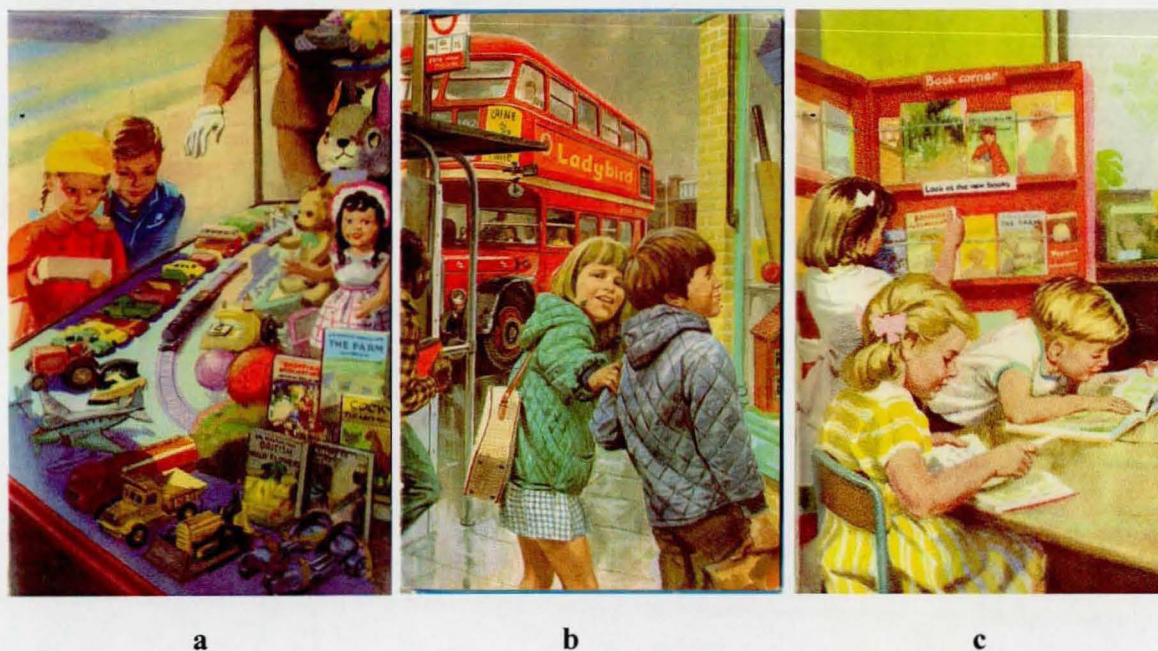


Figure 16: Examples of self promotion for Ladybird books.

In addition, many titles include listings of other books in their series printed either on the back cover or dust jacket. The broad range of topics covered by the titles made them particularly suitable for classroom use whilst Wills and Hepworth Ltd's continually competitive pricing strategy encouraged the sale of significant numbers of copies. At the beginning of the next decade, external influences began to manifest themselves when, in 1971 prices started to appear on the book covers at 12½p, alongside the 2s.6d. in preparation for the country's change to decimalisation. This continued for several months

<sup>9</sup>Image a: Illustration by J.H. Wingfield from *Shopping with Mother*. Copyright © Ladybird Books Ltd., 1958. Reproduced by permission of Ladybird Archive. Image b: Illustration by M. Aitchinson from *Things We Like*. Copyright © Ladybird Books Ltd., 1972, Reproduced by permission of Ladybird Books Ltd. Image c: Illustration by J.H. Wingfield from *Going to School*, Copyright © Ladybird Books Ltd., 1959. Reproduced by permission of Ladybird Archive.

but as with many other commodities, prices increased shortly after the adoption of the new monetary system. During this period, Wills and Hepworth Ltd regularly placed advertisements in journals and magazines aimed at parents of young children. In addition, the company held a 'Ladybird Fortnight' each spring whereby it organised 'point-of-sale' promotions in bookshops.<sup>10</sup> The company also advertised forthcoming titles in their own regularly printed catalogues.

By 1971, the company had point-of-sale displays in bookshops all over the world, whilst their sales representatives attended many international book fairs. It was reported, at the time, that exports accounted for 20 per cent of the business. All new books were circulated through the trade a month prior to their publication.<sup>11</sup>

In September 1973 Ladybird Books Ltd held an open day which was attended by over a hundred booksellers. The promotional event had been arranged to launch two new series, 'Talkabouts', large format gift books aimed at children under the age of five and 'Leaders', standard format books targeted toward young readers. These two new series were, in true tradition, aimed not only at teachers in that educational requirements had been taken into account, but also at parents, with their attractive designs. The sales and marketing director of the period, Malcolm Kelley, opened the proceedings and welcomed the guests whilst the task of describing the new series and describing the general policies of Ladybird Books Ltd was undertaken by Douglas Keen, who had become editorial director by this time. Production director, George Towers provided an historical overview of the company.<sup>12</sup>

Whilst in the mid 1970s the company did not undertake any specific market research, it did rely upon feedback from its sales representatives. It is not possible to provide any statistics on the number of sales representatives employed by the company as no relevant documentation is available in the archives. It is believed that the company received about

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<sup>10</sup>'Fifteen million Ladybirds a year', *British Printer*, September 1970, p. 90.

<sup>11</sup>'The Flight of the Ladybird', 1971. Press cutting in Ladybird archive DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

<sup>12</sup>'Open Day at Ladybird Books', *The Bookseller*, 6th October, 1973.

forty letters each day from its sales representatives. In addition, Ladybird Books Ltd attended many exhibitions throughout Britain. For example, in 1974, the company was represented at a total of 24 exhibitions around the country. The latter were important in that they allowed for a dialogue between company representatives and teachers which was particularly important with, reportedly, 25 per cent of the firm's business coming from sales to schools at the time.<sup>13</sup>

The company was an advocate of the philosophy that books were to be made widely available from a wide range of outlets, not just in traditional bookshops. Director, George Towers wrote an article in 1974, stating the case for children's books to be sold in the country's toy shops. He acknowledged that publishers had begun to realise the toy trade potential by appearances at the Harrogate and Brighton toy fairs. He strongly urged toy retailers to consider the benefits of providing space for books to provide a steady year-round income.<sup>14</sup>

On 20th May, 1977 Ladybird Books Ltd were subjected to a visit by the BBC. There is evidence in the archive of much preparation for this visit and it is documented that the aims were to 'to try to broaden the public image' and 'to help the present malaise in the factory' by publicising the next two years' publishing plans.<sup>15</sup>

In 1978, Radio Leicester broadcast a radio programme for children which investigated the process of book production. The presenter visited Ladybird books to report on how a children's book was made. In an attempt to take advantage of the medium of television, a programme involving a Ladybird title was widely broadcast on Christmas Day in 1978. Ladybird had previously published a Ladybird book in conjunction with the Scripture Union entitled *Jesus the Child*. This formed the basis upon which the television programme depicting the nativity was produced. The book's illustrations featured in the

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<sup>13</sup>Paul Medlicott, 'A 52 page package', *New Society*, 13th February, 1975, p. 400.

<sup>14</sup>George Towers, 'Books in Toyshops', August 1974.

<sup>15</sup>Memo from George Towers to other members of staff, 11th May, 1977 in Ladybird archive ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office regarding visit by the Midlands Today crew for the BBC.

programme whilst the commentary was provided by actor, Paul Copley.<sup>16</sup> This wider dissemination of information relating to Ladybird books would have helped to reinforce the Ladybird brand.

Ladybird Books Ltd also made use of trade journals for advertisements. For example, a full-page advertisement for Ladybird books was published in *The Bookseller* on 4th November, 1978. It featured the new Ladybird large format gift books measuring 315mm x 223mm. One, *Dinosaurs and Prehistoric Animals* was produced in full colour with laminated hard board covers and was priced at £1.50, and was clearly aimed at the Christmas gift market. The other produced in exactly the same format and similarly priced, entitled *My first big talkabout book* was aimed at younger children and intended to be used with a parent (the advertisement text specified mothers only) to encourage an early love of books.<sup>17</sup>

Other marketing tools included the use of a 'Ladybird' car. A Volkswagen Beetle was painted red with black spots so as to represent a ladybird and was employed for various marketing purposes. One such event was when it was used to deliver copies of the *Royal Wedding* souvenir edition to the bookseller who had placed the first order for the title. The books were delivered in the car, which attracted media coverage as well as a crowd of spectators just four days after the royal wedding had taken place.<sup>18</sup>

The company decided upon an ambitious marketing initiative in 1982. Hiring a Manchester-based advertising agency, Carterbench, they embarked upon an ambitious television campaign. The advertising agency negotiated a deal with Central Television. The cost to Ladybird was £25,000 but it was believed that without the expertise of the agency it would have cost the company nearer £40,000.<sup>19</sup> Following a trial on Tyne Tees television in 1981 they began a large-scale television advertising campaign on Central TV in the autumn of 1982 launched with authors and celebrities visiting the

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<sup>16</sup>'Ladybird pictures on television', *Leicester Mercury*, 16th December 1978.

<sup>17</sup>*The Bookseller: The organ of the book trade*, No. 3802, 4th November, 1978, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup>First copies land in giant ladybird', *Nottingham Evening News*, August 1981.

<sup>19</sup>'Ladybird's TV campaign', *The Bookseller*, 7th August, 1982.

Loughborough premises to preview the company's new range of titles. Robert Dougall, a newsreader, was amongst those authors present. His own offering, *The Ladybird Book of British Birds* featured in the campaign during the month of November.<sup>20</sup> The trial had proved successful so the major campaign covering the second largest regional television area of Central was considered to be the next logical step. Also, geographically, it was advantageous for distribution purposes as the area already had a good selection of outlets providing for a good cross-section of the public, in fact, nine million people. Four new titles were to be featured during the September of the campaign which were all part of a new science fiction series written by Sir Fred Hoyle and his son Geoffrey. Entitled *The Energy Pirate*, *The Frozen Planet of Azuron*, *The Giants of Universal Park* and *The Planet of Death* they were each priced at 60p.<sup>21</sup> The following month several fairy tale titles were featured to promote the Ladybird Well-loved Tales series. These included *Thumbelina*, *The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse* together with *Hansel and Gretel*. November saw the campaign launching into titles suitable for giving as Christmas presents. Those featured included, as well as Robert Dougall's book, Eileen Colwell's collection of illustrated *Bedtime Stories* and *The Ladybird Book of Dragons* compiled by a number of authors each priced at £2.50.<sup>22</sup> Television was not the only medium harnessed in this advertising campaign, for printed sources such as *Family Circle*, *Living*, *Woman and Home*, *Mother and Baby* and *Parents* magazines also featured advertisements for Ladybird books.<sup>23</sup>

During the 1980s high-profile advertising campaigns continued in print media aimed at trade buyers. This full-page, colour advertisement directly aimed at booksellers appeared on the back cover of *The Bookseller*:

'Tough Customers

The children's book market is a tough nut to crack. Finding books that will sell and be popular with children and adults alike isn't easy.

<sup>20</sup>'Robbie's bird book is a high-flyer!', *Leicester Trader*, 22nd July, 1982.

<sup>21</sup>'Ladybird's TV campaign', *The Bookseller*, 7th August, 1982.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*



Ladybird have been providing the perfect solution for many years and now with our range of board books, we will continue to capture a child's imagination, a parent's peace of mind and extra profits for you.

Our exciting new board books are extremely hard-wearing and all ten pages have a wipe-clean surface, making them ideal for those young sticky fingers.

They'll stand up to the roughest treatment from your toughest little customers and at only 75p, Ladybird board books are bound to sell. They're backed by national press advertising, point of sale and an attractive 24 book counter pack at only £18.00.

As always, they'll be in great demand, so place your order now to boost your sales and increase your profits.

Ladybird: Value Priced for Volume Sales<sup>24</sup>

In 1985, the new Puddle Lane reading initiative was launched. A television series, based upon the books, was aired in October of that year and the Puddle Lane brand gained a wide audience. In addition to the books and television series, a wide range of merchandise was planned including cassette tapes, activity books and a frieze. Other manufacturers were to produce clothing, stationery, toys, games and jigsaws of the Puddle Lane which Ladybird Books Ltd registered as their own brand name. (See Chapter 8 for more information on this scheme.)

Just two years later, Ladybird Books Ltd launched their 'biggest-ever publicity campaign' to back a new fantasy game book entitled *Steeleye and the Lost Magic*. The new title was published in the standard format and priced at 85p. The publicity campaign consisted of a competition with a prize of a holiday in Florida being offered to readers together with the winning retailer.<sup>25</sup>

In 1990 Ladybird Books Ltd celebrated the 50-year anniversary of its standard format books by holding an event at its premises in Loughborough. Over 10,000 visitors toured the company's various departments to see for themselves how the famous books were

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<sup>24</sup>*The Bookseller*, 22nd June, 1985, back cover.

<sup>25</sup>Featured in cutting of magazine article [source unknown] in Ladybird archive DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

produced. A 'Ladybird' hot air balloon and mini train provided for additional attractions.<sup>26</sup>

With the appointment of Anthony Forbes-Watson as managing director in 1991, a far-reaching programme of market research was instigated. Ladybird books had, for many decades, had a strong identity and represented value-for-money products whilst not compromising on the quality of either the physical product or the content. The market research identified that Ladybird books were perceived as books for young children and whilst this represented a buoyant market, the firm was keen to present a more sophisticated style to appeal to older readers aged seven years, and above. Following the market research which led the directors to believe that a radical change of image was required, an agency was brought in to update the Ladybird brand image. Marketing company, Rod Springett Associates subsequently devised a new branding that was more contemporary. Coopers and Lybrand were similarly commissioned to review the manufacturing process.<sup>27</sup>

Whilst some series were simply re-jacketed, others were completely redesigned and re-illustrated. Some of the more traditional series such as 'Read it Yourself' and 'Fairy Tales' were provided with modernised book covers in order to make them appeal to a new audience. A new Ladybird logo was adopted which comprised an upside-down ladybird within a box also containing the word Ladybird. A departure from its usual publications was a new series of books aimed at the very youngest of readers, babies. It was decided that the company would launch some new series of baby books incorporating some different formats. The new range comprised two cot book titles, two standard board books, two concertina board books, two squeaky bath books and two shake and play books. A pre-school picture storybook series was also launched in 1993.<sup>28</sup> (See Chapter 6 for more detailed descriptions of these titles). These decisions seem to be contradictory given that the market research had affirmed the company's standing amongst younger readers and that their aim was to target older readers.

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<sup>26</sup>'Ladybird takes off', *Printing World*, 26th September, 1990.

<sup>27</sup>'How Ladybird changed its spots', *The Bookseller*, 13th October, 1995, p. 50.

<sup>28</sup>'New look for Ladybird', *The Bookseller*, 3rd September, 1993.

The company had always given great consideration to the ways in which the books were to be displayed in retail outlets. Point-of-sale displays had featured highly in the marketing strategy since the 1950s. These point-of-sale displays had continually been updated to incorporate the use of available materials and to accommodate the ever-increasing book formats. In 1993, to coincide with the relaunch of the backlist, the firm produced a new range of sales material that it described as, 'highly distinctive point of sale material including a colourful multi spinner designed to display our wide range of formats, and an eye-catching dumpbin to promote Ladybird mini hardback ranges.'<sup>29</sup> Following the closure of the Ladybird premises, in 1999, and the brand's subsequent integration into the Penguin Group, an intensive marketing drive was instigated. Market research underpinned decisions as to the marketing strategies employed. Relationships were formed with other brands aimed at parents of very young children. For example, one direct marketing initiative targeted parents through the Huggies Mother & Baby Club<sup>30</sup>, a channel through which it distributed its guide to the Ladybird range of products for babies and toddlers. Closely working with magazines aimed at parents such as *Practical Parenting* and *Mother and Baby* helped to maintain the brand's authoritative profile. A major marketing activity was the publication of a 16-page colour publication entitled a *Parent Guide to Babies, Toddlers and Books* produced in partnership with the *Practical Parenting* magazine.<sup>31</sup>

As consumer demands became greater during the 1990s, children's book publishers were forced to adapt to the growing need to 'add value' to their product. Increasingly, books were manufactured with accompanying novelties or toys. Ladybird books had, since the 1960s, produced additional items to be packaged alongside the relevant printed version of their products. These items reflected the technology available throughout the decades and included film strips, slides, cassette tapes, video tapes and compact discs which accompanied the books duplicating the contents in audio-visual formats. It was relatively simple for the company to include paper-based products such as wall friezes, height

<sup>29</sup>Ladybird brochure (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1993).

<sup>30</sup>Huggies is a registered trade mark owned by Kimberley-Clark Worldwide Inc. Website address is <http://huggiesclub.co.uk> [site accessed 17th September, 2009]. The Huggies brand is associated with babies' nappies. The Huggies Mother & Baby Club offers resources and advice to parents.

<sup>31</sup>'Moving ahead with Ladybird', *The Ladybird Books Newsletter*, 19th March, 1999, p. 4.

charts, press-out nativity scenes, posters and mobiles whilst still based in Loughborough with access to its own printing facilities. However, in the new millennium competition within the children's book publishing industry and increased consumer expectations resulted in publishers including a wide variety of toys and novelties with their books. Ladybird began to package some of their titles with additional items such as crayons, finger puppets, dressing-up outfits, jewellery, jigsaws and play mats. Packaging design became increasingly important in the marketing of the goods with the book itself having to adopt a lesser role in the overall product. Whilst this move undoubtedly introduced additional 'play value' it was not a direction without its problems. Consideration has to be taken when adding accessories to a book, for the product may then become liable for Value Added Tax (VAT). In addition, booksellers are then forced to accommodate much bulkier packages in their stores which do not sit easily on bookshelves thus requiring additional display space and the ability to stock fewer titles overall. Packaging on these items is more easily damaged than for a single book and, because the target market is generally the gift market, it is important that the product does not look 'shop soiled'. Another potential minefield with the incorporation of these additional products is the safety factor. There is a whole series of safety tests that have to be undertaken and certification necessary before such products can be sold to the general public. In addition, a multitude of safety warnings have to be included on the packaging and appropriate age groups identified. All these factors increase the production costs and, as a result, the overall selling price of the product.

Whilst traditionally the Ladybird brand had been generally aimed at the mass market, the new millennium witnessed its stronger presence in trade bookshops. In 2003 the 'reintroduction of Ladybird-branded retail space to 250 booksellers'<sup>32</sup> for example, was credited with helping overall sales for the parent company. Similarly, the modernisation of many Waterstones' stores, in 2006, included the introduction of new point-of-sale material with 'zigzag' features for early reading ranges such as Ladybird and Oxford Reading Tree.<sup>33</sup> In keeping with its long-held practice of supplying non-traditional

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<sup>32</sup>'DK now Penguin's lucky star', *The Bookseller*, 7th March, 2003.

<sup>33</sup>'Waterstones to revamp kids section', *The Bookseller*, 10th March, 2006, p. 6.

outlets, a small range of Ladybird books was to comprise part of a trial scheme introducing bookselling activities for the Boots high street chain.<sup>34</sup>

In 2003, Penguin formed a television division in order to 'create programmes linked to its worldwide book publishing activities.' The children's programmes were to include non-fiction materials from Ladybird Books.<sup>35</sup> In the same year Ladybird won a seven-year publishing contract to produce books based upon a new pre-school children's television series. The series, entitled 'Boobah' was launched in April 2003 on the CiTV and GMTV stations. The contract allowed Ladybird to have 'worldwide English-speaking rights with the exception of the US'.<sup>36</sup>

A BBC press release announced, in 2004, that 'a new global publishing venture' was being undertaken by Penguin together with BBC Worldwide. A new company was formed to publish existing books, including Ladybird books, under the imprint of BBC Children's Books.<sup>37</sup> This further amalgamation of imprints underlines the continuing mergers and acquisitions issue discussed in Chapter 2.

A further marketing opportunity arose in 2005 when a booksellers' promotion to celebrate the bi-centenary of Hans Christian Andersen resulted in the Ladybird version of *The Ugly Duckling* gaining a place in the children's best-selling top ten.<sup>38</sup>

The Ladybird brand received a new image in 2006 when a creative communications company, OTM, was commissioned to create a new identity. A promotional campaign aimed at retailers comprising new display units, posters and merchandise was instigated. The brief given to the firm was to create an 'eye-catching, fun, simple identity that represented the traditional values of the 70-year-old brand'.<sup>39</sup> Ladybird UK marketing director, Rachel Partridge said, of the new logo, 'The new ladybird character is powerful

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<sup>34</sup>'Boots pilot children's books', *The Bookseller*, 9th July, 2004, p. 7.

<sup>35</sup>'Penguin turns on television', *The Bookseller*, 26th September, 2003, p. 6.

<sup>36</sup>'Teletubbies' creator launches next show', *The Bookseller*, 21st February, 2003, p. 12.

<sup>37</sup>'Penguin Books and BBC Worldwide form new venture for BBC Children's Books', BBC Worldwide Press Release, 30th April, 2004.

<sup>38</sup>'TV show gives Brown more room at the top', *The Bookseller*, 11th February, 2005, p. 16.

<sup>39</sup>'New image for Ladybird; by OTM' *In-Store*, 10th April, 2006, p. 7.

not only in its striking visual appearance, but in the fact that it's modern and engaging at the same time as feeling recognisable and familiar'.<sup>40</sup>

On of the firm's most recent marketing developments involved a decision to update and re-launch the Ladybird website.<sup>41</sup> In 2007, a Norfolk-based agency, Soup, was hired to redesign the website with the aim of reflecting a 'modern, contemporary parent-friendly approach'. The company's online marketing editor revealed the logic behind the decision saying, 'In redesigning the site, we aim to provide a fresh and simple experience for today's parents and teachers.'<sup>42</sup>

The website continues to provide a valuable marketing tool for the brand. It is used to promote new publications, competitions and offers, as well as providing downloads of video footage featuring celebrity authors reading Ladybird books, activity sheets to print out for children's usage and desktop wallpapers for use on home computers. Themed activity sheets based on the licensed characters acquired by the brand are also made available via the website. Additionally, advice for the teaching of reading is freely given on the website with the promotion of the wide array of resources produced under the Ladybird brand being fully exploited.<sup>43</sup>

#### **4.1.1 Trade Mark Devices**

The company has updated its brand image and registered trade mark devices with the Patent Office several times during its history. In addition, several other brand names for various specific series and ranges of their products, have been filed by the firm. Table 3 specifies the various brand names and the year in which they were registered.

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup><http://www.ladybird.co.uk>

<sup>42</sup>'Children's favourite to get internet revamp', *Eastern Daily Press*, 26th September, 2007.

<sup>43</sup><http://www.ladybird.co.uk>

**Table 3: Brand names registered for Ladybird Books Ltd**

<b>Brand name</b>	<b>Year registered</b>
Talkabout	1973
Ladybird Leaders	1973
Sunbird	1977
Ladybird Read it Yourself	1977
Puddle Lane	1985
Ladybird Ready to Learn	1986
Little Ladybird	1987
Ladybird Stationery	1987
Ladybird Listen & Learn	1987
Ladybird Listening at Home	1988
Ladybird Sing-a-Song	1988
Flip Flap Flop	1988
Ladybird Learning at Home	1988
Lady Bird	1990
Tiny Tales	1991
First Focus	1994
The Ladybird Nursery	1996

A publisher's mark is a very important element in the identity of its publications. In the case of the ladybird image, chosen by Wills and Hepworth in 1914, it certainly proved to be a vital ingredient in the success of the company. In fact, the books were so

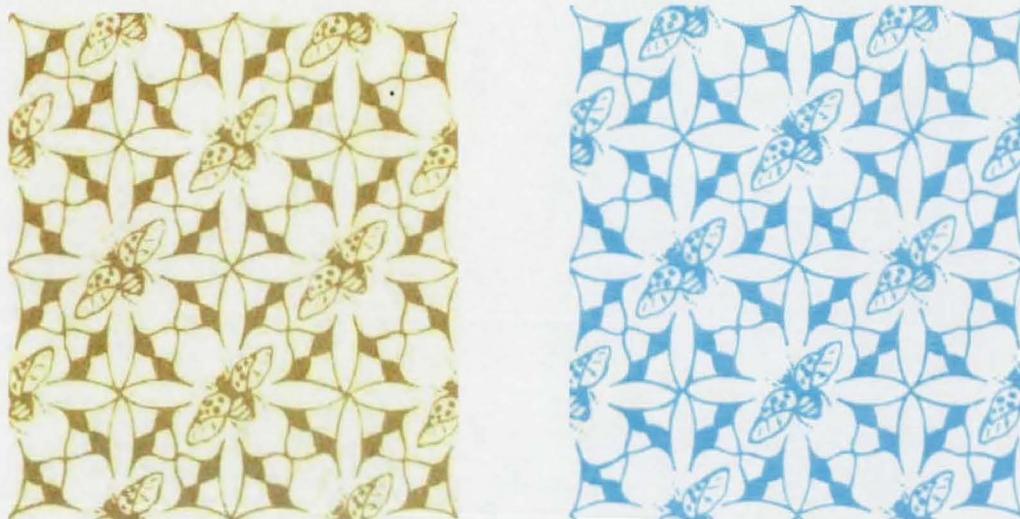
distinguishable by the choice of this tiny insect as a logo, that the company name was changed, in 1972, to Ladybird Books Ltd.

The firm's initial logo portrayed a ladybird with outstretched wings. This was printed in either black, green or pale blue when used as a single imprint mark. (See Figure 17).



**Figure 17: First Ladybird logo in use from 1914.**

The image of the outstretched winged ladybird also featured in a different guise. It was additionally printed as an overall design on the endpapers of the traditional Ladybird books in light blue (between 1956 and 1961) or light brown (between 1953 and 1960). (See Figure 18)



**Figure 18: Endpapers featured in Ladybird books from 1953 to 1961.**



The first change in the design of the logo was implemented in 1961 with the use of an image of a more readily identifiable ladybird. This logo was used from 1961 to 1965 and appeared as a black image on a transparent background allowing the colour of the book cover or the white of the title page, to show through. (See Figure 19)



**Figure 19: The more distinguishable Ladybird logo used from 1961.**

One of the most well-remembered logos was that used by the company from 1965. By incorporating colour into the image it appeared more readily visible as a ladybird and made it more recognisable, as a result. (See Figure 20)



**Figure 20: The easily recognisable Ladybird logo in use from 1965.**

With the introduction of the major new reading scheme initiative, it was necessary to define it as belonging within the Ladybird realm. Therefore, an additional logo for the Key Words Reading Scheme, was filed with the Patent Office in 1966:<sup>44</sup> Incorporating the immediately recognisable Ladybird logo within the new ‘key’ element of the image

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<sup>44</sup>The Patent Office, Trade Mark Image 900327 filing date 12th October, 1966.

enabled the company to neatly fuse the two ideas. It would appear on the back cover of the Ladybird books within the reading scheme with a transparent background so that the cover colour would show through. On the front cover of the books it was printed within a black box with the ladybird image coloured red, black and white. (See Figure 21)



**Figure 21: The fusion of the Ladybird logo with the Key Words image.**

From the early 1970s, a less static version of the company logo was introduced. (See Figure 22)



**Figure 22: The redesigned logo used from the early 1970s.**

A newly designed trade mark device was registered on 14th April, 1989.<sup>45</sup> This was the first instance of the Ladybird name being incorporated into the logo since the original one in 1914. (See Figure 23)



**Figure 23: Redesigned logo incorporating the Ladybird name used from 1989.**

<sup>45</sup>The Patent Office, Trade Mark Image 1299798 registration date 14th April, 1989. The trade mark application was registered under Class 16: Books, printed publications, articles of stationery; writing instruments and parts of writing instruments; refills for writing instruments; writing ink; all included in Class 16; but not including any such goods relating to insects.

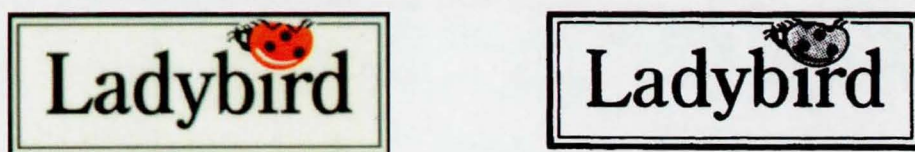


Less than a month later, an additional trade mark device was registered, on 12th May, 1989.<sup>46</sup> This radically redesigned image is a departure from the traditional ladybird illustration in that the image is much more abstract. (See Figure 24)



**Figure 24: A radically redesigned logo also registered in 1989.**

Following another complete redesign, another trade mark device was registered on 7th April, 1995.<sup>47</sup> This version returns to the use of both an image and word to reinforce the company name. The logo was registered under several classes indicating the way in which the company had begun to diversify. The firm branched out into the publication of its titles under a range of new formats with the inclusion of toys, as well as taking advantage of the changes in technology such as audio and video media. (See Figure 25)

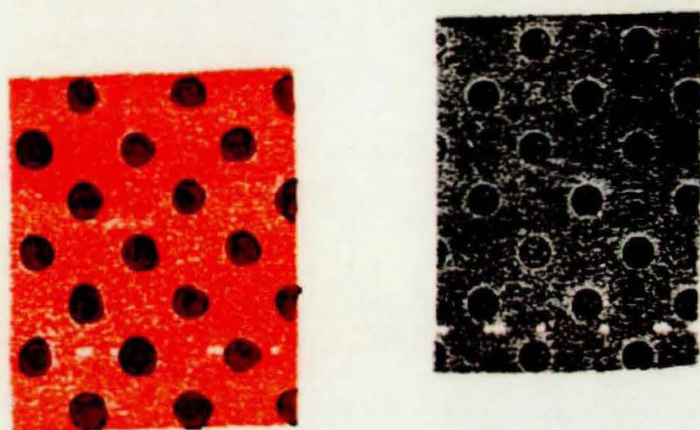


**Figure 25: Another redesign resulted in this logo registered in 1995.**

<sup>46</sup>The Patent Office, Trade Mark Image 1306242, registration date 12th May, 1989. The registration was specified under Class 16:Books and printed publications, all included in Class 16.

<sup>47</sup>The Patent Office, Trade Mark Image 1562639, registration date 7th April, 1995. This registration was specified under the following classes: Class 09:Apparatus for recording and/or reproduction of sound and/or images; magnetic data carriers; recording disks; compact discs; video apparatus; cameras; video cassettes; music cassettes; films; eyeglasses; disks; computers; computer software; video and computer game cassettes; photographic apparatus; parts and fittings for all the aforesaid; all included in Class 9. Class 16:Paper; cardboard; articles made from cardboard; books; printed matter; publications; stationery; artists materials; photographs; instructional and teaching materials; playing cards; parts and fittings for all the aforesaid goods; all included in Class 16; but not including any such goods relating to or depicting insects. Class 28: Toys; games; computer games; parts and fittings for all the aforesaid goods; all included in Class 28. Class 38: Broadcasting services; telecommunication services; transmission of sound, vision and data by electronic means; all included in Class 38. Class 41: Publications of books, magazines and printed matter; library services; education and training services for and on behalf of babies, infants and children of primary school age; entertainment services, all for babies, infants and children of primary school age; all included in Class 41. Class 42: Design of printed matter; printing services; all included in Class 42; but not including any such services relating to clothing.

In the same year these additional trade mark devices were designed and, subsequently, registered on 29th December, 1995<sup>48</sup> (see Figure 26). These images were to be printed as endpapers in a similar way to those depicting the outstretched winged ladybirds from earlier decades. In addition, the design could be used as a 'band' or 'flash' on the books themselves as well as on such items as cassettes, compact discs and stationery. The branding was also available for use on any promotional material such as point-of-sale displays.



**Figure 26: Additional images registered in 1995.**

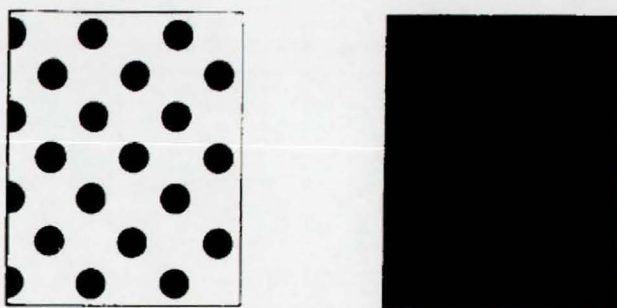
Additional trade mark devices were registered on 20th March, 1998.<sup>49</sup> Specified for use on a certain range of products this black-and-white spotted pattern and the plain black

<sup>48</sup>The Patent Office, Trade Mark Image 1533577, registration date 29th December, 1995. This registration included use in the following classes: Class 09: Apparatus for recordal or reproduction of sound or images; magnetic data carriers; recording discs, compact discs, video apparatus, cameras, video cassettes, music cassettes, films, eyeglasses, discs, computers, computer software, video games and computer games; photographic apparatus; parts and fittings for all the aforesaid goods; all included in Class 9. Class 16: Paper, cardboard; books, printed publications, stationery; artists' materials; photographs, instructional and teaching materials; playing cards; parts and fittings for all the aforesaid goods; all included in Class 16. Class 28: Toys; games; playthings; computer games; parts and fittings for the aforesaid goods; all included in Class 28.

<sup>49</sup>The Patent Office, Trade Mark Image 2131138, registration date 20th March, 1998.

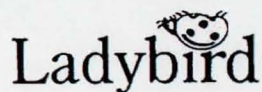
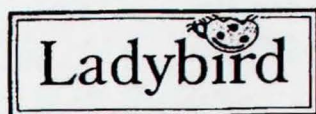


band (see Figure 27), would have appeared on a variety of Ladybird branded items including carrier bags and wrapping materials.<sup>50</sup>



**Figure 27: Additional images registered in 1998.**

An application to register the logo created in 1995, was filed with the Patent Office on 13th February, 1998.<sup>51</sup> This was for the logo to be used on other goods in addition to the concept granted originally for the new application was specified under class 16.<sup>52</sup> (See Figure 28)



**Figure 28: The same image registered for additional usage.**

<sup>50</sup>These trade mark devices were specified under the two following classes. Class 16: Wrapping and packaging materials; plastic sheets and films; bags; clingfilm; plastic shopping bags and plastic carrier bags. Class 18: Articles of luggage; brief cases and attache cases; suit cases; bags; bags for campers, bags for climbers; beach bags; game bags; hand bags; rucksacks; school bags; school satchels, shopping bags, haversacks, back-packs; wallets, purses, pouches, sling bags for carrying infants; travelling bags, vanity cases (and fitted); articles of leather and of imitation leather.

<sup>51</sup>The Patent Office, Trade Mark Image 2131562, registration date 13th February, 1998.

<sup>52</sup>These trade mark devices were specified under Class 16: Wrapping and packaging materials; plastic sheets and films; bags; clingfilm; plastic shopping bags and plastic carrier bags.

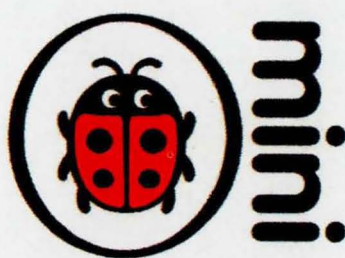


Completely revised, these modern trade mark devices were registered on 30th June, 2006.<sup>53</sup> The use of a sans serif font indicates that the brand was being defined as one associated with the market for younger children. The image, whilst still easily recognisable as a ladybird, is modern and abstract. (See Figure 29)



**Figure 29: A radically redesigned version of the ladybird image.**

A new series of smaller format books launched in 2008, featured this new logo. This is reminiscent of the way in which the ladybird logo of the 1960s was incorporated into the key image to define a particular series in terms of the wider branding concept. (See Figure 30)



**Figure 30: The new image including a series name.**

<sup>53</sup>The Patent Office, Trade Mark Image 2404781, 2404779, registration date 30th June, 2006. Class 09: Apparatus and instruments for the recording or reproduction of sound or images; magnetic data carriers; electronic games; computer hardware and software; CD ROMs; DVDs; disks; tapes and cassettes, sound and/or video recordings; electronic publications; parts and fittings for all of the aforesaid goods. Class 16: Books; printed publications; paper and paper products; card and card products; stationery; photographs; notebooks; note pads; pens; envelopes; pencils; office requisites; book binding materials; adhesives; artists' materials; paint brushes; instructional and teaching material; plastic material for packaging; parts and fittings for all of the aforesaid goods. Class 28: Toys; games; playthings; sporting apparatus and instruments, none being bags adapted to carry sporting articles; parts and fittings for all of the aforesaid goods. Class 41: Education and training services; entertainment services.

Examining the way in which the logo has changed over the period of just under a century provides an insight into the wider context of branding. The original image was used to define the brand but could be found in various colours on different titles. Nowadays, a brand image would not be treated in such a cavalier manner. The exact colouring of a logo associated with any brand is registered as part of the trade mark and the image would not appear in any other guise. It is not coincidental that the 1965 alteration to the image appeared at the beginning of the period during which the brand became much more prolific. When this image appeared upon a title or on a point-of-sale display, it was instantly recognisable as being the sign of Ladybird books. The more fluid image of the Ladybird that appeared in the early 1970s coincided with a period of great change for the brand: newly built premises, a change in ownership and a different company name. The static ladybird was now on the move in both the image and the business. The end of the 1980s saw the registration of the logo with both the name and image. A rather formal-looking logo, it contrasted significantly with the alternative image registered just one month after which showed a caricature of a smiling abstract ladybird.

By 1995 a logo comprising the name in a serif font and an upside-down ladybird, both contained within a double-ruled box was registered. This appeared more authoritative than the abstract logo, even a little more old fashioned, as though the firm were keen to portray their proud history.

With additional trade mark devices being registered for use on items such as toys, stationery, wrapping paper, bags, audio and video material, as well as computer games, it was a reflection of the period during which diversification was necessary for children's book publishers in an increasingly competitive market. The logo being used in the new millennium is modern, abstract and incorporates a sans serif font. It is a fresh look for a brand that has moved into a more corporate environment.

The company made just one patent application during its long history. A patent was applied for on 1st September, 1988 for a 'plaything: puzzle'.<sup>54</sup> It comprised a card book-type puzzle with hinged flaps.

#### 4.2 Sales Methods

During the period when the firm was primarily a commercial printer, customers often consisted of large companies such as Rover, Yardley and Austin. Sales representatives employed by the company dealt with their customer accounts on a personal basis visiting them regularly. As was often the tradition in the printing trade, customer relations were nurtured by the distribution of Christmas presents to those whose custom was valued by the firm. Ledgers indicate many seasonal gifts to both staff and customers including Fortnum & Mason hampers, boxes of chocolates, whisky, golf balls and cigarettes.<sup>55</sup> Book sales played only a small part in the company's business prior to the Second World War.

Pre-war sales of books were generally undertaken in traditional bookshops. However, once post-war rationing and restrictions had been lifted, a new consumer society was born. By the 1950s the British economy had begun to recover and the way in which goods were retailed began to change. With the introduction of the supermarket, a commercial television station and increased car ownership into the British way of life, a modern consumer-orientated retail system emerged. Wills and Hepworth Ltd made their books available to the buying public by selling them in non-traditional outlets. By the mid 1970s, Ladybird books could be found in petrol stations and supermarkets in addition to bookshops, thus opening them up to a wider range of purchasers.<sup>56</sup> Those parents intimidated by a traditional bookshop but, nevertheless, keen to encourage their children's literacy would be more likely to pick up a Ladybird book alongside the groceries or when filling up the family car with petrol. Thus, the brand became associated with the mass market and, consequently, the number of book sales flourished. There is no

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<sup>54</sup>The Patent Office, UK Patent Application 2 222 371 A, filed 1st September, 1988.

<sup>55</sup> Ledgers in Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Record Office.

<sup>56</sup>Paul Medlicott, 'A 52 page package' *New Society*, 13th February, 1975, p. 399.

evidence in the archive of direct sales to public libraries and this was not a key market for the books. Their primary markets were schools and the general buying public.

Another significant factor in reaching an audience who may not have traditionally purchased books was the policy adopted by the company to ensure that the books remained as competitively priced as possible. The standard format books remained the same price of 2s.6d. from their initial publication in 1940 until decimalisation in 1971. The first price rise in 1971 was to 15 pence. The company operated a rather strict sales policy with one discount price for retail and another for wholesale, no negotiable terms and no sale or return.<sup>57</sup>

Upon completion of the purpose-built premises, in 1972, the sales team moved to the new offices. Customer accounts for the company's books were dealt with by the sales team based in Loughborough. This continued until the closure in 1999 when, following the incorporation into the Penguin fold, Ladybird customer services were undertaken from Penguin's UK's central distribution facility at Harmondsworth. Ladybird's customer accounts were integrated into the system and the transition was complete.<sup>58</sup>

In 2002, Pearson's (owner of the Ladybird imprint) fortunes had been turned around from a substantial loss the previous year to an operating profit of £143m. This was assisted, in part by children's book sales especially from the Ladybird brand. Ladybird-branded retail space had been successfully reintroduced in 250 bookselling outlets the previous year.<sup>59</sup>

## **4.3 Export**

### **4.3.1 English Language Books**

Evidence in the archive indicates that the company was employing the services of agents in South Africa, Australia and New Zealand as early as 1923.<sup>60</sup> These appear in lists in ledgers but the exact nature of their business is not specified.

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<sup>57</sup>Medlicott, 1975, p. 400.

<sup>58</sup>'Moving ahead with Ladybird', *The Ladybird Books Newsletter*, 19th March, 1999, p. 4.

<sup>59</sup>'DK now Penguin's lucky star', *The Bookseller*, 7th March, 2003.

<sup>60</sup>Ledger in Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Record Office.

It is evident that company directors were seeking to broaden their children's book market to include exports in the 1930s. A letter from manufacturers' representatives Ashley and Radmore in Cape Town and Johannesburg, in response to an enquiry from Wills and Hepworth Ltd, indicates that the firm was keen to explore foreign markets. Directors had written to Ashley and Radmore asking about the possibility of dealing with the agents in relation to selling their children's books in South Africa. The agents replied,

'We do not imagine that any big volume of business can be done in this country with your Picture Books, but if you would forward ranges of these books in duplicate we would see what could be done.'<sup>61</sup>

Links with African markets continued throughout the decades providing an excellent export source. In 1998, following the announcement of the closure of the Loughborough print works, a particularly large export order for sales to Africa was received by the firm. An order for almost 250,000 Ladybird books was received for the export of educational books to Ghana as part of a British government aid project.<sup>62</sup>

It was reported in 1970 that exports accounted for 20 per cent of total turnover<sup>63</sup>, a figure that had risen to 38 per cent by 1991.<sup>64</sup> These comprised exports to English-speaking countries in addition to international co-editions of foreign language texts.<sup>65</sup> With the purchase of Wills and Hepworth Ltd by the Pearson Longman Group, in 1972, the new owners were especially keen to improve exports of Ladybird books. It was reported in the *Financial Times* that Longman directors expected to be able to double the overseas sales of Ladybird books in the two years following the takeover.<sup>66</sup>

English language versions of a wide variety of Ladybird titles were used in European classrooms for not only the learning of the English language itself but also for gaining knowledge about English culture. Whilst these books were not specifically aimed at

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<sup>61</sup> Letter from Ashley and Radmore, Manufacturers Representatives, Cape Town and Johannesburg to Ladybird Books dated 21st December, 1932. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578, Leicestershire Record Office.

<sup>62</sup> 'Condemned Ladybird scores in Ghana', *Printing World*, 14th December, 1998.

<sup>63</sup> 'Fifteen million Ladybirds a year', *British Printer*, September 1970, p. 90.

<sup>64</sup> 'Ladybird scoops export award', *Printing World*, 8th May, 1991.

<sup>65</sup> 'Fifteen million Ladybirds a year', *British Printer*, September 1970, p. 90.

<sup>66</sup> 'Ladybirds join Penguins, Pelicans and Puffins in the same 'nest'', *Smith's Trade News*, 1st January, 1972.



English Language Teaching, they were written in a clear and concise manner with good illustrations and were thus suitable for classroom use not just in Britain. A review of the use of Ladybird books in Germany, in 1980, for example, indicated that titles such as *Our Land in the Making* (Book 2) and *The Kings and Queens of England* (Book 2) were found to be useful in English lessons.<sup>67</sup>

In 1991 the company won the BPIF Export Achievement Award. The aim of the award, co-sponsored by paper manufacturers Wiggins Teape, was to reward and encourage printing businesses involved in export. The company's exports at this time represented 38 per cent of overall sales. In gaining the award, the company was praised for its 'high technical knowledge and production know-how.'<sup>68</sup> In addition, it was particularly praised for its 'development of an ELT programme to coincide with the introduction of English at primary level in France and Italy'.<sup>69</sup>

Towards the new millennium, publishers became aware that new markets were to be found in the emerging Asian economies, particularly in China and Russia. Following its membership of the World Trade Organisation in 2001, China became more widely accepted as a potential publisher's market. In addition, by signing the Berne Convention and Universal Copyright Convention in 1992, it indicated its recognition of intellectual property rights with the result that other countries were increasingly willing to accommodate China into the international publishing sphere.<sup>70</sup> Of significance to the Ladybird imprint was the fact that it appeared that the most promising publishing sector for foreign investment was that of children's books. Opportunities existed for both translated books and, more importantly, English language books because the teaching of English became compulsory, in China, from 2001.<sup>71</sup> Those involved with the Ladybird imprint were aware of the potential market and realised that cultural differences had to be considered in order to successfully penetrate the market. Sally Floyer, managing director

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<sup>67</sup> Elisabeth Gramsch, 'Ladybird Books' für deutsche Schüler', *Englisch*, Vol. 15, Pt. 1, 1980, pp. 11–14.

<sup>68</sup> 'Ladybird scoops export award', *Printing World*, 8th May, 1991.

<sup>69</sup> 'Ladybird Books wins export award', *The Bookseller*, 21st June, 1991.

<sup>70</sup> Eric de Bellaigue, *British Book Publishing as a Business Since the 1960s*, (London) The British Library: 2004, p. 213.

<sup>71</sup> Bellaigue, 2004, p. 214.

of Frederick Warne, Ladybird and BBC Children's Books, stated that, 'It's a very attractive market, but you can't simply look at China as a place to sell in. They want to know how they can work with you to develop their products. It's about making personal visits and building relationships'.<sup>72</sup>

Another potential market to be exploited existed in countries from the former Soviet Union. Ladybird books were already being read in Russia prior to its international festival organised for school librarians in the autumn of 2003. Keen to attract foreign publishers, the Russian government backed the international event run by the Russian Language Development Centre.<sup>73</sup> This provided the opportunity for publishers of children's books, including Ladybird books, to promote their wares in an effort at gaining a new export market.

#### 4.3.2 Translations

The decade of the 1950s witnessed the introduction of translated versions of the famous Ladybird books' brand, a trend that was to continue with great proliferation for many years. Keen to exploit the export market further, the company turned its thoughts to the translation of its texts. According to former director, Mike Banks, it was the customers who arranged for the translations to be carried out then provided this translated text to Wills and Hepworth Ltd.<sup>74</sup> In 1951 a Tasseltip tale entitled *Une Histoire de Jeannot Lapin*, was published by the company following its translation into French by Anne-Marie Menanteau.<sup>75</sup> Having tentatively explored a foreign market, their next venture into translated text was with a Swedish version of *The Child of the Temple* which was produced in 1953. Following the success of their initial, tentative steps toward broadening their horizons, the level of expansion into foreign languages was, in fact, quite remarkable. By 1954 books were being translated into Afrikaans and one other African dialect, followed in 1958 by additional titles for the French market, and

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<sup>72</sup>Sally Floyer, 'Beijing breaks out children's books', *The Bookseller*, 27th January, 2006, p. 10.

<sup>73</sup>'Curious diet for Russian kids', *The Bookseller*, 7th November, 2003, p. 24.

<sup>74</sup>Communication to author from Mike Banks, former employee of Ladybird Books Ltd (1950–1992, production director (1986–1992). E-mail response to question received 22nd January, 2007.

<sup>75</sup>*Une Histoire de Jeannot Lapin* – A Tasseltip Tale translated into French by Anne-Marie Menaneau. BL shelf mark WP9629.

translations into the Danish and Spanish languages. By 1961 Ladybird Books were being translated into 17 different languages and dialects, a figure that had risen to 25 by 1969.<sup>76</sup> A 1969 advertisement for the company in a career's exhibition brochure highlights the geographical diversity of the firm's exports,

Loughborough's LADYBIRDS SPAN THE WORLD

Ladybird Books are used in schools throughout the Commonwealth and translated editions include the following:

AFRIKAAN, BORNEO, CIBEMBA, DANISH, DUTCH, FINNISH, FRENCH, GERMAN, ICELANDIC, MALAGASY, NORWEGIAN, SANGO, SPANISH, SWEDISH, YOROBA etc  
Publishers WILLS & HEPWORTH LTD Loughborough Leicestershire<sup>77</sup>

By the time the company had relinquished its independent status in the early 1970s, the number of languages and dialects into which the books had been translated, had risen to 47. This trend was to continue even after the company had been taken over by a conglomerate, resulting in a particularly successful venture. There can be no doubt that by the early 1970s, the company had become a major children's publisher. By this period it was certainly dealing with a multitude of markets stretching across the globe, as accounts for the year dated 31st March, 1970 indicate. They reveal a list of bad debtors including bookshops and importers from Khartoum, Kampala, West Germany, Madrid, Anguilla, Nassau, Jamaica, Penang, Istanbul, Addis Ababa, Guernsey, Vancouver, Athens and Helsinki with the total outstanding sum due to them amounting to £3,535.9s.5d.<sup>78</sup> The books were being translated into almost 50 languages at this period and were being exported to every continent around the world. Expansion became inevitable as the company's business grew too large for the town centre premises in Angel Yard to cope with the increased demands placed upon it.

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<sup>76</sup>'Loughborough Industry and Careers Exhibition, Monday, 28 April – Saturday, 3 May, Loughborough Town Hall, Official Handbook' (Loughborough: Echo Press Ltd, 1969), p. 40.

<sup>77</sup>*Loughborough Industry and Careers Exhibition Official Handbook*, Monday, 28 April–Saturday, 3 May, Loughborough Town Hall, Official Handbook (Loughborough: Echo Press Ltd, 1969), p. 41.

<sup>78</sup>List of Bad and Doubtful debts in accounts for period at March 31st, 1970. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578.

During the mid 1970s a scheme was initiated whereby a significant number of titles were translated into Arabic and which, subsequently provided the company's biggest market for translated editions. In fact, 50 titles had been translated into Arabic, with 500,000 copies subsequently printed for export by 1975.<sup>79</sup>

Malcolm Kelley, Managing director of Ladybird Books Ltd wrote an insightful report for *The Bookseller* in 1975 reviewing the export situation at which the company found themselves at the time.

'When Pearson Longman Ltd. acquired Ladybird in December 1971, one obvious and immediate move was to review the Ladybird export marketing arrangements. Our new sister companies, Longman and Penguin, had many overseas subsidiary companies operating successfully with long established exclusive agents in other major markets. Clearly it would be an advantage to avail ourselves of their expertise and combine our efforts if such an amalgamation could be accomplished without difficulty.

The Middle East is one market Longman have tirelessly and successfully developed. Over 20 years ago Longman appointed Khalil Sayegh in Beirut as their Arab World agent and from small beginnings he has expanded his company, Librairie du Liban, into wholesaling, retailing and publishing with its own sub-agents in several other countries.

It followed therefore that Librairie du Liban would be asked to consider representing Ladybird and a meeting was subsequently arranged. We met Khalil Sayegh at Loughborough and after a few hours everything was settled. We now have a new agent and the meeting was just about to close when Khalil Sayegh mentioned he would like to work closely with us to publish and distribute Arabic editions of our titles. It would perhaps be true to say that those of us on the Ladybird side of the table did not take this last remark too seriously but tended to regard it more as a way for our visitor to conclude the talks on a pleasant and hopeful note for the future.

But we were wrong. A few days later we received a letter thanking us for our hospitality and confirming the various details of our new agreement. The last paragraph of only a few lines stated that Librairie du Liban would like to place an order officially for one million Ladybird books in Arabic! It was then realised that Khalil Sayegh was serious in his intention to have us publish in Arabic and we were struck particularly by his confidence in placing such a large initial order, sure in the knowledge that a market test with a smaller quantity was not necessary.

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<sup>79</sup>Letter from Khalil H. Sayegh, Librairie du Liban, Beirut to George Towers, Ladybird Books Ltd, 29th July, 1975. Provided to author by George Towers.

Considerable correspondence now flowed back and forth between Beirut and Loughborough and several more meetings took place before both parties were "ready for the off". Librairie du Liban would be responsible for the translations and distribution, Ladybird would be responsible for the printing and binding. (Incidentally Arabic books are bound in "reverse" compared to English editions. What normally would be our back cover becomes Arabic front cover with text and illustrations proceeding "backwards".)

There were of course the usual teething problems one always encounters when embarking on a large complex exercise but gradually, between us, we evolved a method of operating which now not only works smoothly but also requires little correspondence and limited administration time.

This month has seen the first shipment from Loughborough of Arabic editions totalling nearly 600,000 copies. It is too early to judge the response these books will receive in the Arab World but having some knowledge of our agent we would not be surprised to receive reprint orders for some of the first titles before we have completed printing the initial order for one million books.

The shipment is the largest single Ladybird consignment and we think probably the largest quantity of books printed in Arabic ever to be imported by any Arab country. Even if it is not we are still rather pleased by it all....<sup>80</sup>

Much of the coordination for this considerable undertaking was carried out by George Towers. He had evidently formed an excellent working relationship with Khalil Sayegh which allowed the venture to thrive. Following delivery of the first 500,000 copies, Khalil Sayegh sent a letter of thanks stating,

'Behind every great achievement there are always able men. Indeed, your achievement of producing the first 500,000 copies of Ladybird Arabic edition shows your skill, experience and efficiency. You dealt with expertise with the various difficulties of printing the 50 titles and all of us here admired your work.'<sup>81</sup>

As previously mentioned, a Chinese version of one of Ladybird's popular titles from the 'How it Works' series was produced, in 1979. The Chinese edition of *The Computer* was first keyed on a specially developed Monotype Chinese language keyboard, before being

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<sup>80</sup>Kelley, Malcolm, 'Ladybirds find a home in the Arab World', *The Bookseller*, 31st May, 1975.

<sup>81</sup>Letter from Khalil H. Sayegh, Librairie du Liban, Beirut, to George Towers, 29th July, 1975.



phototypeset. This event marked a landmark in that it was the first time that Chinese text had been produced in this manner.<sup>82</sup>

Sales of foreign-language editions continued unabated throughout the decades. The books have been translated into a reported 70<sup>83</sup> different languages and dialects including Afrikaans, Arabic, Chinese, Danish, Dutch, Esperanto, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Icelandic, Irish Gaelic, Italian, Japanese, Malay, Maltese, Norwegian, Scottish, Scots Gaelic, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish, Welsh and Zulu.

The firm's ability to competently negotiate export deals and carry out the necessary translations, printing and distribution is unquestionable. Ladybird books have penetrated the world market with great success over a period of 50 years.

Having discussed the importance of the branding and marketing of Ladybird books, as well as the sales and export strategies employed by the company, it is necessary to take a closer look at the product itself. Therefore, the next chapter looks at the actual publications in greater detail. Since the first title appeared in 1914, the chapter begins at this point and continues up to the period at which the firm ceased to be an independent company.

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<sup>82</sup>'World first edition keyboarded in Chinese by 'Monotype', *The Monotype Recorder* (1), December, 1979.

<sup>83</sup>'Ladybird – the first 50 years', *The Bookseller*, 20th July, 1990, p. 183.

## Chapter 5

### A Publishing Printer (1914 to 1972)

#### 5.1 The First World War

The First World War brought with it many hardships for British industry, and the book trade was no exception. As has been discussed (in Chapter 1), prior to the war the printing firm of Wills and Hepworth were already fulfilling contracts from publishers for the printing of different kinds of books, including those for children. In addition, with their longstanding experience as booksellers and providers of a library service, they were fully aware of the types of children's books being both borrowed and purchased. It was at the outbreak of war, however, that sole proprietor William Simpson Hepworth decided to initiate production of his own range of children's books and, in 1914, the firm began to publish and print the first titles in the 'Ladybird' series.

#### 5.1 Earliest Ladybird Books

As previously mentioned (in Chapter 2), it is generally assumed that the first Ladybird books were published in either 1915 or 1916. Indeed, Ladybird Books Ltd's own publication states that, 'the earliest Ladybird series appeared in 1915.'<sup>1</sup> In addition, it is believed by some collectors of Ladybird books that the first two titles in the Ladybird Series were *Little Stories For Little People* and *ABC Picture Book* both published in 1916. A detailed description of these two titles is provided in another publication as a guide for collectors:

'The first of these, *Little Stories For Little People*, was published in 1916 and this charming book, with its decorative boards featuring a top-hatted young boy greeting a bonneted girl on a rose- and tree-lined path, is probably the rarest and most highly-prized Ladybird Book of all. It is rare in any condition and Very Good copies can fetch upwards of £75.

Ladybird's second title, the rather jingoistic *ABC Picture Book*, is no easier to obtain, and changes hands for up to £50 in Good condition.'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Don Wix et al, *Loughborough: Past and Present* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1988), p. 36.

<sup>2</sup>Janet Whitehead, 'Collecting Ladybird Books'. *Book and Magazine Collector*, Issue 195, June 2000, pp. 40-41

However, two earlier books belonging to the 'Ladybird' series were, in fact, deposited with the British Library, on 27th August, 1914. They were entitled *Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales*<sup>3</sup> and *Tiny Tot's Travels*.<sup>4</sup>

Wills and Hepworth began to publish children's books at the very beginning of the First World War and, as far as it is possible to ascertain, published four titles over the period of the war's duration. The first two titles of the 'Ladybird' series were illustrated with black ink line drawings and comprised full-page illustrations together with those integrated within the text. Both titles had a page size of 185mm x 260mm and each was encased in a full-colour board cover. The cover of the *Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales* depicts a young Scandinavian girl facing toward the sea, her gaze following the flight of crowned geese, whilst the cover of *Tiny Tot's Travels* shows a brightly coloured steam train. A further book entitled *Nursery Tales*, a collection of popular fairy tales was, it has been claimed on a collectors' website, published in 1915.<sup>5</sup> Its cover features a comforting scene depicting a mother reading to her two young children. However, this book could not have been published in 1915 because, the copyright page features the name of Wills and Hepworth Ltd. The firm did not become a limited company until 1924 so the book must have been published after that date. In addition, the clothing and furnishings featured on the cover are more appropriate for the late 1920s or early 1930s. The only other titles in the Ladybird series to be published during the war years are the previously mentioned *Little Stories For Little People* and *ABC Picture Book*, which followed in 1916. It is acknowledged, however, that this may not represent the total number of children's book titles produced by Wills and Hepworth over the four years of the war's duration. It is certainly feasible that other titles may have existed that have now been lost, as there is no record of the firm's publishing output for the period. For despite the fact that the legal deposit system was in force in Britain at the time, the only titles that currently reside in the British Library are the first two, as previously mentioned. In any event, the firm's publishing output could not be described as prolific and the venture into children's book

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<sup>3</sup>E. Talbot, *Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales* (Loughborough: Wills and Hepworth, 1914). BL shelf mark WP9629.

<sup>4</sup>E. Burbridge, *Tiny Tot's Travels* (Loughborough: Wills and Hepworth, 1914). BL shelf mark WP9629.

<sup>5</sup>[http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/other\\_collectables.php](http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/other_collectables.php) [site accessed 29th November, 2006]

publishing remained an extremely small part of their business both during the First World War and for the following two decades.

It may seem a rather rash decision for the firm to launch its own series of children's books at such a time, particularly as general book output was declining in Britain. In addition, the production of books was hindered by the lack of paper and other raw materials necessary for their manufacture. Whilst paper supplies for the printing of school books had been secured by the Publisher's Association from the Board of Trade,<sup>6</sup> it is highly unlikely that the Ladybird books would have been considered school books as their content seems more suited to younger children. However, the first two titles were published within the first month of the war, thus it is unlikely that the firm's paper supplies would have been affected at this stage. In addition, Wills and Hepworth were classed as printers, not publishers and as such, their access to paper stocks would have been far greater than for those who were simply publishers.

Wartime book production and distribution were similarly adversely affected with a proportion of the male workforce having enlisted into the services. Publishing was not 'classified as a trade of national importance' and, thus those involved in the trades were not exempt from military service.<sup>7</sup> However, this did not deter Hepworth for he embarked upon a modest publishing scheme and his presses produced a handful of children's books during the war years. With the means of printing at the firm's disposal, it was a good way of utilising existing resources and providing additional income by means of a small-scale, risk-free venture. Indeed, it was not until 1916 that the Military Service Acts, introducing conscription for British men, came into force. Therefore, whilst it is acknowledged that many men had volunteered for military service in 1914, the shortage of skilled male labour was not as severe prior to 1916. The production of such a small number of titles from a commercial printing company was certainly feasible. The firm published and printed a few of these black and white illustrated books with coloured covers between 1914 and 1916. This range of early titles in the 'Ladybird' series was

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<sup>6</sup>John Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 162.

<sup>7</sup>Feather, 2006, p. 163.

produced in a larger format than those produced from 1940 onwards. Copies of the original two titles retained by the British Library have been printed on low-quality paper and are currently in a state of disintegration. Their pages have been severely discoloured and the paper's acidity has caused them to badly deteriorate.

The firm's Midlands location afforded it some protection from wartime damage. The town of Loughborough was a casualty of a Zeppelin attack only once during the First World War. This occurred on the night of 31st January, 1916 where bombs were dropped on the town resulting in the deaths of 10 people with 8 others sustaining injuries.<sup>8</sup> It is not believed that the business of Wills and Hepworth was adversely affected by this event.

## 5.2 Between the Wars

Wills and Hepworth produced a steady stream of new titles in the 'Ladybird' series, during the 1920s and 1930s. Whilst all of the books were illustrated, some of the titles also featured colour illustrations. Alongside the aforementioned *Nursery Tales*, other story books included: *Tales of Trains and Ships*;<sup>9</sup> *Grandfather's Stories*;<sup>10</sup> *Fairy Tales*;<sup>11</sup> *Tales of Our Pets*;<sup>12</sup> *The Steamer and the Dragon*;<sup>13</sup> *Little Chums*;<sup>14</sup> *The Fairies Book*;<sup>15</sup> *Fairy Tales*;<sup>16</sup> *The Fairy Engine*;<sup>17</sup> *Trains and Ships*;<sup>18</sup> *The Railway Train*<sup>19</sup> and *Mrs Tabby*.<sup>20</sup> The firm also produced a range of books designed to be coloured in, or painted, by children. Colouring book titles included: *Fairies and Elves Painting Book*;<sup>21</sup> *Bluebeard*;<sup>22</sup> *Fairy Tales of Olden Times*<sup>23</sup> and *Our Rover*.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Graham Kempster, *Loughborough and Shepshed* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing Ltd, 2004), p. 65.

<sup>9</sup>[http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/ladybird\\_book\\_detail.php?id=3243](http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/ladybird_book_detail.php?id=3243) [site accessed 31st January, 2008]

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup><http://www.dottybug.co.uk/pre1940.html> [site accessed 29th November, 2006]

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup>[http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/ladybird\\_book\\_detail.php?id=3243](http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/ladybird_book_detail.php?id=3243) [site accessed 31st January, 2008]

<sup>22</sup><http://www.dottybug.co.uk/pre1940.html> [site accessed 29th November, 2006]



As printers and bookbinders, company directors were obviously aware of the importance of the manufacturing considerations necessary in the production of books specifically aimed at children. They published and printed a range of 'untearable' books particularly suitable for withstanding rough treatment from children. Such books included the following titles: *The Train Book*<sup>25</sup>; *ABC of Trains and Motors*<sup>26</sup>; *Ten Little Nigger Boys*<sup>27</sup> and *Nursery Rhyme and ABC Book*.<sup>28</sup> Experimentation with additional formats resulted in the publication of a small volume entitled *Farmyard Panorama*.<sup>29</sup> The pages of this book unfolded in a concertina-like fashion to reveal illustrations of animals.

Unlike those produced from the Second World War onwards, the books published by Wills and Hepworth in this era all differ from one another. They were produced in a wide variety of formats and with several differences in the quality of paper and binding chosen for their manufacture. The firm's publishing output spanned the whole spectrum from the very cheapest books printed on poor quality paper to substantial volumes with endpapers, decorated spines and full-page colour illustrations printed on high quality paper, thus catering for a wide range of customers. Whilst there were several titles published over the two decades, it is noticeable that they dealt with recurrent themes. In particular, it is evident that the range of books included a number of titles associated with fairies. This was not uncommon at the time. When reviewing publishing output during the period from 1900 to 1929, Frank Eyre observed that, 'a significant development was an immense increase in popular interest in fairies.'<sup>30</sup> The production of the title *Ten Little Nigger Boys* was based on a song that had been popular for decades and frequently published by others. Similarly, various modes of transport and animals have been enduringly popular themes in children's books. Therefore, whilst not setting trends

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>[http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/ladybird\\_book\\_detail.php?id=3243](http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/ladybird_book_detail.php?id=3243) [site accessed 31st January, 2008]

<sup>26</sup><http://www.dottybug.co.uk/pre1940.html> [site accessed 29th November, 2006]

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>[http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/ladybird\\_book\\_detail.php?id=3243](http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/ladybird_book_detail.php?id=3243) [site accessed 31st January, 2008]

<sup>30</sup>Frank Eyre, *British Children's Books in the Twentieth Century*, Longman Group Ltd (London) 1971, p. 19.

themselves at this stage, directors at Wills and Hepworth Ltd were obviously aware of the kinds of children's books that had become popular and published accordingly. Book publishing was certainly not the main focus of the business at this stage but it is evident that directors knew of the potential attributes this facet of the business could bring to the firm. In addition, there is evidence that they were exploring the possibility of exporting their books from the early 1920s. (See Chapter 4 for detailed information of export markets).

It is not possible to verify the full extent of titles published between the wars as no documentation exists in the archive or, indeed, elsewhere. The titles mentioned are those that are known to have been published during this period but it is acknowledged that others may have existed of which all copies have possibly been lost.

The beginning of the twentieth century was a period of growth in children's book publishing. New firms specialising in the publishing of children's books had been set up to join those companies that had already become well established in the field. Those long-standing firms included George Routledge & Sons, Cassell & Co. Ltd., Frederick Warne & Co., A & C Black, Hodder & Stoughton, Collins Publishers, MacMillan & Co, Chatto & Windus, Raphael Tuck & Sons, Ward & Lock and Dean & Son Ltd, who were particularly well known for their pop-up books, having produced around 50 of these paper-engineered titles during the 50 years prior to 1900.<sup>31</sup>

### **5.3 The Second World War**

During the years of conflict from 1939 to 1945 Britain experienced immense social, cultural, political and industrial upheaval. This inevitably impacted upon the British printing and publishing trades and, whilst initially devastating in terms of physical damage caused to the properties of many publishers, printers and book warehouses, many publishers not only remained in business but were often strengthened by the events of the war years.

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<sup>31</sup><http://www.broward.org/library/bienes/iii13903.htm> [site accessed 19h September, 2009]

From 1940, in addition to their commercial printing enterprise, Wills and Hepworth Ltd began to publish their own range of children's books in a standardised format, and it is this crucial factor that was to play a most significant part in the company's future development. Wills and Hepworth Ltd seem to have been particularly fortunate, not only in surviving the war years intact but, by seizing opportunities and embracing diversification the firm thrived during this period. At the outset of the Second World War, the company's directors decided to begin production of their own standardised range of children's books to provide additional income. They had the foresight to realise that their commercial printing activities could possibly be lessened during a period of hostility and made the decision to expand and adapt the company's children's publishing venture in order to keep the presses running. There is no doubt that the onset of war was the catalyst for the revitalised publishing programme of children's books. George Towers, who joined the company as a lithographic artist and who was appointed production director in 1963, spent the war years helping to train others to draw maps for the forces. He testifies to the importance of the publishing project and the war's effect upon the production of Ladybird books,

'The brilliant idea of starting up the books enabled the firm to flourish rather than succumb and the only clue to this, for those of us in the Services, was an annual bonus payment... Had it not been for the war it is unlikely that the Ladybird project would have survived.'<sup>32</sup>

Those employees returning from their war service found that book production was sharing the manufacturing capacity with the still valuable commercial contracts and that the firm, by this time, was enjoying a national reputation for the high quality of its work. Minutes from the board of directors indicate the firm's financial success during the period. Members of staff, including those away from the town on war service, were paid bonuses by the company at the end of each financial year for 1942, 1943, 1944 and 1945.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>George Towers, former director of Ladybird Books, in a letter to the author March, 2003.

<sup>33</sup>Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors, 31st March, 1942 to 1945. Ladybird archive ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

One important factor was their fortunate geographical location. Whilst the majority of publishers were based in London where the printing and publishing trade had traditionally been centred, Wills and Hepworth Ltd had the distinct advantage of being away from the areas most affected by direct enemy action. During the years of the Second World War, London sustained severe bomb damage caused by multiple raids. One of the most devastating occasions of destruction as far as the book trade was concerned occurred on the night of 29th–30th December, 1940 when highly explosive and incendiary bombs laid waste to the area around Paternoster Row where several large publishers and booksellers were located. A total of 27 publishing firms had their offices and warehouses in this vicinity and the premises of Longmans, Hutchinsons, Collins, Nelsons and Eyre & Spottiswoode were completely demolished during this period of bombing as well as the book wholesalers, Simpkin Marshall. Following Simpkin Marshall's loss of stock and records, the Publisher's Association took over the firm and ran it as a co-operative.<sup>34</sup>

Concentrated attacks on London throughout the war meant that large numbers of publishing houses were badly affected and 'with them went over 20 million books.'<sup>35</sup> For many publishers the loss of stock occurred when their books were either at the printers, binders or when being warehoused. However, not all publishers had the misfortune of losing stock. Penguin, for example, managed to avoid the destruction of any of its books during the duration of the war. Similarly, Wills and Hepworth Ltd managed to survive the war years without losing any stock as their books were stored in Loughborough before being posted out to their retailers. The advantage gained by Wills and Hepworth Ltd was that the books were printed, bound and warehoused, together with their precious paper stock, on their own premises in the comparatively safe environment of a market town in the Midlands.

Whilst some companies remained in London throughout the Blitz, others moved away from the capital, either wholly, or partially. The decision on whether to stay in the capital

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<sup>34</sup>Robert Hewison, *Under Siege: Literary Life in London, 1939–1945* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1977), p. 35.

<sup>35</sup>Steinberg, p. 199.

or to evacuate the workforce to those areas deemed safer seems to have been made fairly swiftly by many publishers. Clearly, Wills and Hepworth Ltd had a distinct advantage over many other publishers in that they did not have to incur the expense or upheaval experienced by those who had to move their entire operations to safer locations.

### 5.3.1 Paper Shortages

There was a severe shortage of paper throughout the war years, and for a considerable time after, resulting in its consequent rationing. The reason for this was because imported raw materials, from which paper was traditionally made, as well as paper supplies themselves, were being prevented from reaching Britain's shores by enemy action. In addition, the British economy could afford less and less imported goods as the war progressed. On 12th February, 1940 the government introduced paper rationing for publishers based upon 60 per cent of the amount each company had used from September 1938 to August 1939, and by December 1941 the amount of paper allocated to each company had dropped to under 40 per cent.<sup>36</sup>

Paper rationing continued until 1949 and irregular supplies were not uncommon even after this. The paper rationing allocation was considered rather unfortunate by many book publishers; the figures for paper allocation in 1944 indicate that the book trade as a whole was awarded a less substantial amount than related trades.<sup>37</sup>

**Table 4: Paper Allocation in 1944**

Source of usage	Paper allocation
Newspapers	250,000 tons
The Stationery Office	100,000 tons
Periodicals	50,000 tons
The War Office	25,000 tons
The book trade	22,000 tons

<sup>36</sup>Linda Lloyd J. Jones, *Fifty Years of Penguin Books* (London: Pearson plc, 1985), p. 31.

<sup>37</sup>Hewison, p. 77.



As a consequence of paper shortages, publishers were forced to keep their print runs down and to find the best way of utilising the paper that was available to them. Thinner paper, smaller type size and narrower margins were measures taken by publishers to conserve their rationed stocks and, in fact, these economies were enforced by the introduction of the Book Production War Economy Agreement.<sup>38</sup> This agreement, initiated by the Publishers Association,<sup>39</sup> prescribed the permissible size of type, width of margins, words per square inch, weight and quality of paper and radically affected book design.<sup>40</sup> Publishers were obliged to print a note within the book stating the conditions under which the book was produced worded thus, 'The typography and binding of this book conform to the authorized economy standard.'<sup>41</sup>

Necessity is the mother of invention, and with a shortage of paper, cloth and boards, publishers were compelled to devise different bindings and eliminate endpapers to accommodate for the shortages, thus the percentage of paper-backed books increased. With hard-backed book bindings in short supply, paper-backed books proliferated and became 'an increasingly more important economic necessity to publishers if they were to survive the war.'<sup>42</sup>

Wills and Hepworth Ltd do not seem to have been adversely affected by these measures, however, and produced only hard-backed books throughout the entire period of war. In fact, not only did they have hard-backed covers, the 52-page books were issued with dust jackets and illustrated endpapers, as well as a coloured illustration pasted to the front cover, or a full-colour pictorial board.

The distinctive format of the books did, however, emerge from the practicalities made necessary by wartime conditions and the need to conserve raw materials. As stated earlier, the consequences of the paper shortages forced the majority of publishers to keep

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<sup>38</sup>Jones, p. 32.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Steinberg, p. 199.

<sup>41</sup>Printed on endpapers of: Virginia Woolf, *The Death of the Moth and other essays* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1942), p. 4.

<sup>42</sup>Steve Holland, *The Mushroom Jungle: A History of Postwar Paperback Publishing* (Zeon Books, 1993), p. 12.

print runs to a minimum and to find ways of best utilising the paper that was available to them. Whilst many publishers found themselves constrained by the Book Production War Economy Agreement, those books consisting mainly of illustrations were exempt from the agreement.<sup>43</sup> Wills and Hepworth Ltd's newly published children's books would have been unaffected by the regulations over the permitted size of type for books for those aimed at children aged below eleven years of age had no regulation.<sup>44</sup> This explains why the company's books featured plenty of white space around the text, adequate font size and generous spacing between the lines of text. The relatively small amount of text in the books would have been beneficial in as much as it would have required less input from compositors. However, the same cannot be said for lithographic artists as each book contained full-colour illustrations on every recto. However, as the majority of Wills and Hepworth Ltd's Ladybird books produced during the war were published in 1940 and 1941, the workforce of artists necessary for these illustrations would not have been as depleted as it would have been in the latter years when they did publish far fewer titles.

Although paper rationing came into force in 1940 and lasted until 1949, this does not appear to have significantly affected the publishing decisions made by Wills and Hepworth Ltd. The firm published three titles in 1940 and seven in 1941 and it is certainly feasible that pre-war paper stocks stored by the firm may have been used for these. Paper allocation was reduced even more significantly from December 1941 and it is acknowledged that this may have contributed to Hepworth's decision not to produce any new titles in 1942 and 1943. However, an additional title appeared in 1944, two in 1945, three in 1946, four in 1947, seven in 1948 and six in 1949. Each title was subject to many reprints, thus, by 1949 some books were on their 10th impression. No evidence exists relating to the number of copies for each print run so it is not possible to calculate from evidence in the archive how much paper was actually used on the books. However, Douglas Keen alleged that sales of the standard format books had reached 23,000 by

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<sup>43</sup>Valerie Holman, *Print for Victory: Book Publishing in England 1939–1945* (London: The British Library), 2008, p. 73.

<sup>44</sup>The Book Production War Economy Agreement in Valerie Holman, *Print for Victory: Book Publishing in England 1939–1945* (London: The British Library), 2008, appendix 11, p. 268.

1946.<sup>45</sup> The firm's publishing list comprised 16 titles by 1946, many of which had been subject to reprinting. Since each book represented a single sheet of paper, it can be assumed that approximately 23,000 sheets of paper would have been used in their production. When asked about paper allocation during the period of rationing, George Towers, former company director, said that,

'At the outbreak of the war the publishing status allowed for a better allocation of materials than those allowed to a normal printer but I don't think there was any control over usage.'<sup>46</sup>

This seems unlikely, however, and it seems more feasible that, because the firm were not strictly publishers, but primarily printers, their paper allocation would not have been so restricted. It is improbable that the allocation of paper used for the printing of children's books based on Wills and Hepworth Ltd's pre-war publishing was sufficient to sustain the number of copies it actually printed throughout the war years as its pre-war publishing programme was minimal. It is not inconceivable, therefore, that stocks of paper previously destined for the commercial contracts found their way into the pages of the books. According to Douglas Keen, who had spent the war years in the Royal Air Force, part of the company's paper allocation was used 'for the production of servicing booklets and charts for suppliers of military vehicles.'<sup>47</sup>

The company was able to make good economic use of the largest sheet of paper available to printers at the time which measured 40" x 30" and this, together with the colour printing technology already in situ for the commercial side of the business, enabled the full-colour books to be produced easily and cheaply. The company's production department devised a format that enabled a 52-page book with a page size of 7" x 4<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" plus the endpapers and cover to be produced from a single sheet of paper. This created a book of a shape and size that was perfect in that it could be easily manipulated by the small hands of young children. The imposition was arranged in such a way that the whole

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<sup>45</sup>Douglas Keen in an interview. *Ladybird, Ladybird*, BBC Radio 4 programme broadcast 28th December, 2001.

<sup>46</sup>George Towers, former director of Ladybird Books, in a letter to the author March 2003.

<sup>47</sup>Interview with Douglas Keen, [http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/douglas\\_keen.php](http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/douglas_keen.php) [site accessed 24th April, 2007].

process could be suitably automated. This highly mechanised approach made possible by maintaining a single format enabled the books to be produced efficiently and, most importantly, cheaply. The key to the ease of manufacture was that, because of the standard format, once the machinery had been set up, little manual intervention was required and, whatever the title, the presses could continue to roll unhindered, producing a large number of copies at low cost. Each of the books, including a few non-fiction titles, followed the same layout, comprising a full-colour plate on the recto pages with corresponding text on the opposite verso.

Whilst the lack of paper may explain the ingenious solution undertaken by Wills and Hepworth Ltd, the firm was not the only children's book publisher tackling the problems created by paper shortages. The Brockhampton Press, for example, a subsidiary of Hodder & Stoughton who themselves were reluctant to forfeit any of their precious rationed paper allocation for Brockhampton's use, came up with a similarly good idea. Directors of the Brockhampton Press were keen to develop children's publishing and because they had close links with local printers in Leicester, were able to utilise the paper offcuts from colour magazine printing for use in their children's books. The first author to be commissioned for the venture was Enid Blyton whose books had become very popular in the previous fifteen years. These little books, measuring just 3"x 6" and produced with two-colour illustrations, were immensely popular contributing to a significant financial boost for the parent company.<sup>48</sup>

The shortage of paper also affected the amount of space available to publishers for their print-based advertising. To fully utilise this diminished space, publishers were forced to become innovative and creative in the design of their advertisements to ensure they caught the public eye. Wills and Hepworth continued to publish their almanac in 1940 and 1941 with no obvious changes to the design of advertising space. From comparing the advertisements to those featured in several of the previous almanacs, it is evident that they used plates which had already been set up for the annual publication prior to the

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<sup>48</sup>John Attenborough, *A Living Memory: Hodder and Stoughton Publishers 1868-1975* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), p. 143.

war. However, printing of these almanacs appears to have ceased after 1941 indicating that they were not wholly unaffected by the more difficult trading conditions caused by the war.

The Ministry of Supply launched an initiative to collect pre-war books to be pulped in order to alleviate the severe shortage of paper. In the event they collected 56 million volumes; 50 million of those were pulped whilst a million replaced damaged library stocks and the remaining five million were sent to Forces' personnel.<sup>49</sup> Attempts to redress the shortage of paper resulted in a downgrading of its quality and paper had, 'by 1943 had become rough, yellow and thin from being pulped and repulped so often.'<sup>50</sup> Straw produced in Britain began to be used in paper production as a substitute for the esparto grass usually imported from North Africa and Spain in pre-war times. However, straw produced a far poorer quality product. It took substantially longer to cook, requiring half as much again caustic liquor, yielding 33 per cent compared to up to 42 per cent on grass, resulting in lower output and a lighter quality paper.<sup>51</sup> *Wills' Almanac*, produced by Wills and Hepworth Ltd during the early years of the Second World War is printed on a poor quality paper demonstrating that the company clearly resorted to using it for some of its other commercial printing work.

### 5.3.2 Book Shortages

The evidence regarding book shortages is contradictory. Some evidence suggests that for those in state education, the provision of books was extremely poor. Publishers Edward Arnold, for example, recalled that after the war, when marking up the educational list, they found that 'an extraordinarily large number of titles were unavailable. No doubt school books, so dependent on regular reprints, suffered worse than other sections of the list.'<sup>52</sup> However, the experiences of Blackwell booksellers differ, since less composing labour was required for reprints, they state that more copies of fewer books were

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<sup>49</sup>Hewison, p. 89.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup>Lorna Weathergill, *One Hundred Years of Papermaking: An Illustrated History of the Guard Bridge Paper Company Ltd 1873–1973* (Guard Bridge Paper Company, 1974), p. 98.

<sup>52</sup>Bryan Bennett and Anthony Hamilton, *Edward Arnold: 100 Years of Publishing* (London: Edward Arnold, 1990), p. 68.



produced with reprinting being more viable.<sup>53</sup> A Publisher's Association survey, released in January 1942 revealed that the total number of books rendered unavailable as a result of the war was 37,085 of which children's books comprised 6,264.<sup>54</sup> However, it is clear that, overall, there was a genuine shortage of books caused by the shortage of paper and the destruction of stock. Demand seems to have outstripped supply and the prices of second-hand copies of some essential titles soared. Despite the difficulties encountered, many publishers seem to have managed to produce a multitude of titles. Penguin, for example, even managed, at the height of paper rationing, to introduce a range of children's books under the Puffin imprint at a rate of ten titles a year. Evidence suggests that all companies suffered a drop in their volume output by the end of the war as compared to the years preceding it. This was due only to a shortage of paper and subsequent restrictions. However, forced into diversity, utilising a depleted but willing labour force, and with new titles and genres, most publishing companies seemed to have weathered the storm triumphantly. The bookseller's perspective is a little different as they faced the difficulties of having to satisfy a growing market with fewer books available. However, many booksellers also remained in business at the end of the war with a ready-made market of readers awaiting a more prolific production after restrictions were eventually lifted.

Wills and Hepworth Ltd, as commercial printers, publishers, stationers and booksellers, were able to take advantage of all the opportunities afforded them because they offered a diverse range of services and adapted to the circumstances in which they were forced to operate the business. By producing a range of children's books at a time when books were extremely sought after, the company was able to take advantage of this increased demand. The firm introduced four new series of books, all of which sold extremely well during the war years. Each of the titles was reprinted several times, not only during the war years but for many subsequent years.

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<sup>53</sup> A.L.P. Norrington, *Blackwell's 1879–1979: The History of a Family Firm* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p. 131.

<sup>54</sup> Valerie Holman, *Print for Victory: Book Publishing in England 1939–1945* (London: The British Library: 2008), p. 61.

### 5.3.3 Staffing Problems

One of the most obvious problems for publishers during the war was the loss of many male members of staff as they entered the military services for the war effort. As with all sectors of industry in this period, publishing companies simply adapted their labour force by using women, youngsters and those who were not able to take up active duty. Staffing problems were more prevalent within the printing and composing workers who became victims of their own long-standing and misguided approach to the inclusion of women into their trade. It had been a long-established policy to resist change, 'the Typographical Association adopted an uncompromising policy of non-recognition towards, and exclusion of, female labour from the skilled printing trades.'<sup>55</sup> Therefore, the long period of training required for such a trade meant that few females were skilled in the trade resulting in a shortage of labour when those men engaged in the printing profession were called upon to serve their country by joining the services. There were similar problems in the bookbinding end of the trade as skilled men left to serve their country overseas. In fact, 20 of the 70 pre-war firms had closed and the remaining firms were working with only 50 per cent of their staff. To further increase the problem, printers were commandeered by the government for priority printing thus forcing many publishers to search for new printers. Additionally many skilled printers were serving in the forces and those inexperienced operatives filling the gap often lacked the knowledge usually acquired during the long printing apprenticeships. Blackwell's booksellers experienced problems in obtaining copies of books which became increasingly scarce because, 'the labour force of printers and binders was depleted by the needs of the war.'<sup>56</sup> However, thread-sewing had traditionally employed women and paper-backed books were thread-sewn thus creating another factor in their proliferation.

Wills and Hepworth Ltd were in an unusual position in that, unlike most publishers, they actually printed their own books on the premises. Their printing capability gave them a distinct advantage over all other publishers inasmuch as they were able to print their own books in addition to taking on a wide variety of commercial contracts. Skilled labour

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<sup>55</sup>Patrick Duffy, *The Skilled Compositor, 1850-1914: An aristocrat among working men* (Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2000), p. 126

<sup>56</sup>Norrington, p. 131.

would, however, have been required for the printing and production of the Ladybird books. Nevertheless, by producing a limited range of titles but reprinting them frequently, Wills and Hepworth Ltd were able to gain the maximum advantage from the labour that had been spent on producing the lithographic plates early in the war before the loss of staff to the war effort. The relative ease of production allowed by standardisation and mechanisation meant that the books could be reprinted with the minimum amount of manual input.

#### **5.3.4 Supply and Demand**

During the years of the Second World War, 'demand for reading-matter exceeded all previous records.'<sup>57</sup> There was increased production of books but the output could not keep up with this unprecedented demand. According to Feather, 'The trade found itself able to sell anything it could produce; the problem was how to produce enough.'<sup>58</sup>

There are a multitude of reasons for the increase in book reading as a direct consequence of the wartime conditions. The blackout restrictions ensured that many families stayed at home in the evenings and turned to the pages of a book as a form of entertainment. There was no television to provide such a diversion as all television broadcasting had ceased at the outbreak of war. Rail journeys were long and slow with disrupted services common, thus books helped to pass those hours. There was a huge increase in demand for books and, by May 1940, there emerged a definite wartime boom.<sup>59</sup> Also service personnel during long periods standing by required a great deal of reading matter to alleviate the boredom as well as to dispel their fears by providing a mental diversion from what could be their fate. Unprecedented long periods of inactivity featured heavily in the lives of many involved in the war effort, soldiers on battlefields between skirmishes, sailors on long voyages, air personnel between sorties, the injured recovering in hospital, conscientious objectors imprisoned, women, the elderly and children during many hours of waiting in shelters until air raids were over. This led to great demand for reading

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<sup>57</sup>Steinberg, p. 199.

<sup>58</sup>Feather, p. 195.

<sup>59</sup>Hewison, p. 24.

material and, 'inculcated the habit of reading to millions of newcomers.'<sup>60</sup> In the first year of the war there was a drop in sales but by the end of the second year there was a growing demand significant enough for the chairman of Blackwell's publishers to comment that, 'demand which is outstripping supplies and must lead presently to a book famine'.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, this demand continued to grow and by the end of the war the annual sales for Blackwell's were more than double those of 1939.<sup>62</sup>

It was recognised that those personnel in the armed forces would require additional reading materials and newspapers printed appeals for members of the public to donate their books for this purpose. Penguin recognised the new market and began publishing series of books specifically for members<sup>63</sup> of the services even receiving an additional allocation of paper especially for their production. Hodder & Stoughton flourished, they sold out of their total printing of each title acknowledging that 'men and women read voraciously and read anything they could get... sold out its pre-war stock, including all that was left of the Yellow Jackets... and devoted most of its paper quota to new book publication for those authors who could deliver new typescripts.'<sup>64</sup>

An additional positive factor was that the shortage of books coincided with the increased consumer demand and readers were reading anything they could get hold of, thus making the advertising of books much less necessary than had been the case before the war. Wills and Hepworth Ltd gained from this increased demand as booksellers and publishers but perhaps even more significantly, as a commercial printing company.

### 5.3.5 Trading Conditions

Between 1939 and 1945, national expenditure on books rose from £9 million to £23 million<sup>65</sup> a sum boosted by government purchases of books for service personnel. The introduction of an Excess Profits Tax meant that publishers could not be seen to be

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<sup>60</sup>Steinberg, p. 199.

<sup>61</sup>Norrington, p. 130.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Jones, p. 34.

<sup>64</sup>Attenborough, p. 141.

<sup>65</sup>Hewison, p. 86.

profiteering from the artificial wartime trading conditions. Despite this, most publishers prospered during the war years as books were in great demand and their income grew accordingly. After a vigorous campaign by the Publishers' Association, publishers were exempt from Purchase Tax on their paper which, in theory, allowed them to keep prices of their books relatively low.<sup>66</sup> Allen and Unwin acknowledge that for them, the war was financially beneficial and 'we had brought through the war a thriving and secure firm.'<sup>67</sup> Heinemann prospered, financially, during the Second World War. Their turnover and net profit figures for the period preceding the war, and during, clearly indicate that the war did not have a detrimental effect upon income and that, in fact, turnover increased quite considerably.<sup>68</sup>

Hepworth's decision to venture into children's book publishing during the period of the war was made with remarkable foresight. A shortage of books coincided with increased consumer demand with the reading public buying or borrowing any printed material they were able to obtain. Reading activities increased dramatically because of the conditions endured throughout the hostilities. Children forced to spend hours in air raid shelters often found comfort in reading and, no doubt, Ladybird's colourful, pocket-sized books found their way into the hands of many young wartime readers. Their attractive layout and the use of beautifully drawn, coloured illustrations would have seemed particularly appealing when viewed against the austerity of other utilitarian wartime products and indeed, some other British books that were being produced under the strict regulations. Ladybird books remained popular throughout the war years and, by 1946, some titles were enjoying their sixth reprint with annual sales of Ladybird books reaching a total of 23,000 with some new titles emerging throughout the years of the Second World War.<sup>69</sup> The company had suffered no ill-effects from a long period of war and indeed, it could be said that the war had proved to be most beneficial to them in terms of their enforced diversification into children's book publishing. Wills and Hepworth Ltd's brave decision

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<sup>66</sup>Sheila Hodges, *Gollancz: The Story of a Publishing House 1928–1978* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1978), pp. 146–147.

<sup>67</sup>Philip Unwin, *The Publishing Unwins* (London: Heinemann, 1972), p. 134.

<sup>68</sup>John St. John, *William Heinemann: A Century of Publishing 1890–1990* (London: Heinemann, 1990), pp. 296–297

<sup>69</sup>Douglas Keen in an interview. *Ladybird, Ladybird*, BBC Radio 4 programme broadcast 28th December, 2001.

to begin producing children's titles during the war certainly bucked the trend for, in general, the period spanning the Second World War saw much fluctuation and a subsequent fall in the number of new titles produced within the children's publishing industry in Britain. The total number of new titles of children's books in 1940 was 973, which fell dramatically to a total of just 520 in 1941, rising a little in 1942 to 595 and climbing to a total of 671 in 1943 rallying at a figure of 785 new titles by 1944.<sup>70</sup>

Financially, the company had fared well throughout the war years. Following the end of the war a valuation of the company was commissioned. The post-war value of the firm was £53,333.2s.3d. before depreciation and £34,882.19s.5d. after depreciation.<sup>71</sup> (See Chapter 10 for a full financial analysis of the firm.) The Second World War had, for this particular printing firm, allowed them to flourish and to diversify into the role of children's book publisher.

According to Kimberley Reynolds, by the end of the Second World War 'there was not a single specialist publisher for children'.<sup>72</sup> Obviously, Wills and Hepworth Ltd were publishing a range of children's books by this time but would probably have been considered commercial printers rather than publishers. The majority of children's books was being produced by major publishing houses with small children's divisions. For example, the series of Beatrix Potter books, published by Frederick Warne, was providing a substantial part of the company's income by this stage.<sup>73</sup>

#### 5.4 The Traditional Ladybird Book

The standard format by which Ladybird books are more commonly known appeared at the beginning of the Second World War. Each book was produced at a standard size of 7" x 4<sup>5</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" and comprised 52 pages. All titles, whether fiction or non-fiction featured text and, in some cases a single-coloured line drawing on each verso and a full-colour, full-

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<sup>70</sup> Alec Ellis, *A History of Children's Reading and Literature* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1969), p.170.

<sup>71</sup> Inventory and Valuation document dated 10th December, 1945. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578.

<sup>72</sup> Kimberley Reynolds 'Publishing Practices and the Practicalities of Publishing' in Kimberley Reynolds and Nicholas Tucker (eds) *Children's Book Publishing in Britain Since 1945* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1998), p. 22.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.



page illustration on each recto. This specific design allowed for a careful and deliberate interaction between the text and corresponding illustrations. Constructed to maximise their educational impact, the text and illustrations were mutually complementary and suited various learning techniques. It was this factor that widened their appeal, making them popular with teachers and parents as well as the children themselves. According to Douglas Keen, the books were produced to a 'formula that couldn't miss'.<sup>74</sup> Each book published before 1965 was manufactured with a dust jacket and all standard format titles had a hardback cover. The covers of some series featured a full-colour illustration replicating the dust jacket, whilst others had a plain cover with a hand-pasted picture on the front. Later, plain buff covers with a single-colour line drawing and title were introduced. On earlier titles the text on the books' spines read from the tail of the book to the head but on later books, from around 1959 onwards, it was changed to read from the head to tail.

The first title of the new format, published in 1940, was *Bunnikin's Picnic Party* written and illustrated by Anguisine Jeanne Macgregor with verses by W. Perring. This launched the 401 series of fiction titles in verse and was the first of many in the series, the majority of which were both written and illustrated by A.J. Macgregor. The series' second book entitled *First Day of the Holidays*, followed in the same year. The books featured animals in roles as humanised characters upon which charming, and often amusing, tales were based and were aimed at younger children with the rhyming verse being particularly suitable for parents to read aloud to their children. This first series of books was extremely appealing boasting full-colour illustrations for a child to focus upon whilst listening to the well-written verse, which had been produced to a remarkably high standard especially in consideration of wartime restrictions. The tone of the stories in these early books is highly moralistic with the carefully crafted verse warning children of such dangers as playing truant, stepping onto frozen ponds, venturing out in boats unaccompanied and the folly of avarice, for example. The protagonists of such escapades

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<sup>74</sup>Douglas Keen in an interview. *Ladybird, Ladybird*, BBC Radio 4 programme broadcast 28th December, 2001.

suffer the dire consequences of their actions. Having learned their lesson, they are always reunited with their families for a traditional happy ending.

The numerical system used by the firm to denote a particular series generally consisted of a three-digit number with the first two digits representing the year in which the series was first published. Hence 401 signifying that the initial series publication was in 1940. There is some speculation as to what the third digit is representative of but its purpose remains uncertain. Whilst it has been assumed that it may have been the month of publication this is unlikely as all of the series were only represented by three digits and with twelve months of the year any month beyond September would not have been included. It has also been suggested that the third number may have represented the number of the series within the year. For example, in series 401, then the 1 may have indicated the first series of that year. This cannot be the case, as many series do not have a 1 at the end. For example, series 522 is the only one for 1952, there is no series 521. The first of these new format Ladybird books were placed within Wills and Hepworth Ltd's shop, in Loughborough town centre, to test the market and they sold very well. The following year of 1941 saw publication of similarly themed volumes entitled *Smoke and Fluff*, *Jeremy's Day in the Country* and *Bob Bushtail's Adventure* all under the umbrella of the 401 series, together with reprints of the first two books of the series. Producing this particular kind of children's book represented a fairly safe bet for the firm as a similarly themed range of titles, created by Beatrix Potter and published by Frederick Warne had, since 1902, enjoyed a high volume of sales. In fact, books featuring anthropomorphic creatures, such as Kenneth Grahame's *Wind in the Willows*, which had been published in 1908,<sup>75</sup> became increasingly popular during subsequent decades.

An inventory of the company taken on 10th December, 1945 listed all plant, materials, stock and titles in production amongst which it specifies lithographic plates of the following titles produced by the company: *Bunnikin's Picnic Party*, *Ginger's Adventures*, *First Day of the Holidays*, *Jeremy's Day in the Country*, *Bob Bushtail's Adventures*,

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<sup>75</sup>Owen Dudley Edwards, *British Children's Fiction in the Second World War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

*Smoke and Fluff, Bunny's First Birthday, Piggly Plays Truant, Downy Duckling, The Runaway, Rescue, Moving Day and Lost at the Fair.*

Throughout the 1940s Wills and Hepworth Ltd launched several new series following the success of the initial titles in the 401 series.<sup>76</sup> Series 413 included various adaptations of traditional tales together with books on nursery rhymes and bedtime stories, whilst series 417, entitled the 'Adventures of Wonk', written by Muriel Levy and illustrated by Joan Kiddell-Monroe, comprised several stories featuring a koala bear as the main character. Whilst the post-war inventory of the premises detailed lithographic plates for series 401, there is no mention in the inventory of the four titles from the 'Adventures of Wonk' series published during the war years, nor of the two titles from series 413. Although the overwhelming majority of their titles published during the 1940s comprised fiction, series 455 (the 'Uncle Mac' series), first published in 1945, launched their attempts at producing non-fiction material. (See Chapter 4 regarding this series of books.)

### **5.5 Post-war Output**

Following the considerable success of the titles produced by Wills and Hepworth Ltd throughout the war years, the firm's book production continued following the end of the war. Throughout the remainder of the 1940s and into the 1950s, a steady stream of titles was published and produced from their works in Loughborough town centre.

During this period, the market for children's books was considerable as the post-war baby boom had increased the number of potential readers. Whilst television had been reintroduced to the country following the war, few people could afford to purchase their own set, thus competition from this medium was yet to come to the fore. In addition to a rise in the number of children's books available, children's comics also began to proliferate which did provide some form of competition. However, the role of comics was to provide a form of light entertainment for child readers and their content was very different to that of the Ladybird books being published at the time. The fiction titles

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<sup>76</sup>The accompanying database provides details of all Ladybird books (as far as it has been possible to discover).

produced by the firm were stories to be read to young children by their parents, whilst the non-fiction titles were generally educational in nature. Ladybird books were keenly priced and this, together with the firm's ploy of marketing them in non-traditional outlets, meant that they were targeted toward working class families. Their depiction of a safe, optimistic and wholesome environment, although subsequently criticised by some as being too middle class, was typical of the ethos of 1950's Britain. Having lived through wartime austerity for years, many British people embraced the new wave of optimism and seized better opportunities in housing, employment and education. The war years had blurred the edges of class distinction to some degree and many of the so-called working classes began to have social aspirations that would not have seemed possible before the war. The suburban middle-class world began to beckon and many aspired to join it.<sup>77</sup> The introduction of labour-saving devices, together with the fact that women were encouraged into fulfilling a more domestic role following the reinstatement of a male workforce, meant that children had fewer household chores to undertake. They were encouraged therefore, to spend their increased leisure time learning about the world around them, taking up new hobbies and to become generally more creative.<sup>78</sup> The idea of moral education and self improvement embodied the era and the producers of the Ladybird books aimed to provide the necessary tools. Ladybird books were created to be educational with the text written in an authoritative manner. Many of the stories featured in the books are uplifting in their tone and aimed at providing a modicum of moral guidance. Other titles portrayed a vision of family life to which many wished to aspire. The importance of the decision for Wills and Hepworth Ltd to continue with and, indeed expand its children's book production at this time cannot be underestimated. Each book followed the standard format that had, by then, been tried and tested and this too, is significant for it meant that each Ladybird title could be relied upon.

A single exception to this decision to stick to a standard format is represented by the production of series 478, with a lone title, *The Tinker's Wig*. Published in 1947, the book was almost double the size of the standard format books and comprised a total of 93

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<sup>77</sup>Miriam Akthar and Steve Humphries, *The Fifties and Sixties: A Lifestyle Revolution* (London: Boxtree, 2001), p. 74.

<sup>78</sup>Akthar and Humphries, p. 22.

pages. It featured fewer illustrations than those in the standard books and text was printed on both pages of the spread. It has been surmised that, in view of the format and the rather outdated illustrations, this may have been conceived prior to the war but remained unpublished until 1947.<sup>79</sup> This is a feasible explanation, for having successfully published all of its books in a standard format for the previous seven years it is inconsistent to produce just one odd title that does not fit at all with anything on the current publishing list. However, the author's daughter believes that the illustrations were done at the time of publication and that her father had disliked them, dismissing them as old-fashioned, thus citing this as the cause of the book's failure.<sup>80</sup> The book's success was limited to just two print runs. No further attempts were made to create any books other than those of the standard format until the 1970s.

Story books aimed at very young children continued to be the main output of the company's publication programme for the initial years following the war. Series 474, comprising engaging stories under the umbrella of 'Tasseltip Tales,' achieved sustained success and continued until 1957. Written by Dorothy Richards and illustrated by Ernest E. Aris, it included such titles as *A Little Silk Apron*, *Mr Mole's House Warming*, *The Flickerdick*, *Clatter! Clatter! Bang!!*, *The First Day of Spring* and *The Flower Show* with *Mr Mole's House Warming*, for example, in its fifth reprint by 1950.

Toward the latter end of the 1940s, a further series was launched, named 497 which also featured animals as the main characters. The first two titles, *The Inquisitive Harvest Mouse* and *Tiptoes: the Mischievous Kitten* were published in 1949 with several others following in the early 1950s including *The Wise Robin*, *Beaky the Greedy Duck*, *The Conceited Lamb*, *The Discontented Pony*, *Mick the Disobedient Puppy* and *Ned the Lonely Donkey* all written by Noel Barr and illustrated by P.B. Hickling. Indeed, it appears to have been a common editorial decision to pair certain authors and illustrators in an attempt to create a specific look for a series. Although published several years after the war's end, these tales are rather representative of the pre-war era. For example, in *The*

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<sup>79</sup>[http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/ladybird\\_format.php](http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/ladybird_format.php) [site accessed 8th January, 2008].

<sup>80</sup>[http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/public/ladybird\\_authors.php?id=445](http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/public/ladybird_authors.php?id=445) [site accessed 31st January, 2008].

*Wise Robin* the household featured in the story has a nursery for the children, employs a maid and gardener and a Christmas tree is adorned with real candles, a tradition that had become outmoded with the advent of electric lights for Christmas trees.

Throughout the following decade, the company's output of books continued. Series 522 comprised religious tales such as *The Child of the Temple*, *The Shepherd Boy of Bethlehem*, *The Little Lord Jesus*, *Moses*, *Prince and Shepherd* and *The Story of Joseph* each written by Lucy Diamond, a local primary school teacher, and illustrated by Kenneth Inns. This series subsequently proved to be very popular, particularly in Sunday schools, producing, in fact, some of the company's best-selling titles following the initial launch. These titles were, as with all other series, highly illustrated in full colour and incorporated maps of the Holy Land in the end papers. Directors at Wills and Hepworth Ltd would have been able to gauge the viability of producing religious books having been involved with printing children's books for the SPCK for many years.

It was during the 1950s that the production of Ladybird titles began to grow significantly. Douglas Keen, who had been made editorial director in 1957,<sup>81</sup> was particularly interested in providing books for both the retail and educational markets. His educational background had included studying both art and marketing and these skills paid dividends in his role with Wills and Hepworth Ltd.<sup>82</sup> He began to plan non-fiction series to cater for both needs. A wide range of authors and illustrators was employed on a freelance basis to provide the text and illustrations for a diverse range of both fiction and, increasingly, non-fiction titles. At this stage it was Keen who was responsible for finding, commissioning and managing the authors and illustrators of the Ladybird books. In an interview, Keen describes his task of finding suitable authors,

'They all had to be specialists in their field so this involved quite a bit of research, finding suitable people, especially for the Nature series – people like *CF Tunnicliffe*. And they had to be able to make technical things look interesting for children.

I used many artists who also worked for 'Eagle' – *Robert Ayton*, *Martin Aitchison*, *Frank*

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<sup>81</sup>Obituary: Douglas Keen: driving force behind Ladybird books, *The Times*, 17th December, 2008.

<sup>82</sup>Cressida Connolly, Obituary: Douglas Keen, *The Guardian*, 29th November, 2008.



*Hampson* and *Frank Humphris*. Robert was wonderful at making historical events and people come alive. *Frank Humphreys* [sic] was a great expert on all things to do with the American West – he had a wonderful collection of authentic cowboy gear, and was an honorary member of an American Indian tribe. He could use guns and lassoes, and all his drawings were absolutely accurate.

People loved to find mistakes in the books, they'd write and complain if we got anything wrong, so I had to have artists who really knew their stuff; our reputation depended on it. *Frank Hampson*, who invented *Dan Dare*, of course wasn't famous then, he was finding it difficult to make a living when I took him on, and was working as a technician at Epsom Art School.

*John Berry* did the 'People at Work' series – he was a portrait artist as well, but he was used to working from photographs and could work very accurately. *Harry Wingfield* did the *Junior Science* series: he was another one who could paint people – children, especially – very sympathetically, but got all the other detail right as well. Many of the artists became really good friends – I worked a lot from home, and we really enjoyed their company. We kept in touch for many years, but they're all gone now, apart from John and Martin.<sup>83</sup>

It was Douglas Keen's total commitment to the projects and to the people he commissioned to write and illustrate the books that allowed the company to maintain a high quality product.

By producing a large number of non-fiction titles, the company could capture both the schools' market as well as the growing consumer market. With the increasing popularity of non-fiction books such as a competitor's range of I-Spy books created and self-published, by Charles Warrell<sup>84</sup>, it was evident that non-fiction could, and would sell in large numbers. Therefore, the bias of publishing output from Wills and Hepworth Ltd began to veer toward non-fiction. Series 536 covered many topics about the natural world and included titles such as *British Birds*, *British Wild Flowers*, *British Wild Animals*, *Book of Pets*, *What to look for in Summer*, *Your Body* and *The Night Sky* to name but a few. These books were not only written with great authority, the text being thoroughly

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<sup>83</sup>Interview with Douglas Keen. [http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/douglas\\_keen.php](http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/douglas_keen.php) [site accessed 3rd March, 2008].

<sup>84</sup>Akthar and Humphries, p. 22.

researched, but were also competently and accurately illustrated. This series of books was also written with gentle moral overtones, for example, readers were warned of the cruelty of taking birds' eggs from their nests and that should children wish to keep pets they must look after them properly,

Some of the contributing authors of the Ladybird non-fiction books were chosen because of their expertise in a specific field. *The Night Sky*, for example, was written by Dr Mary Brück from the Royal Observatory in Edinburgh; *The Ladybird book of Handwriting* was written by Tom Gourdie who had been awarded an MBE for his services to calligraphy having been 'engaged for many years in the study of handwriting';<sup>85</sup> and the RoSPA approved road safety book, *Road Sense*, was written by R. Collingridge AM Inst RS.<sup>86</sup>

The firm continued to produce various fiction titles alongside the growing range of non-fiction. A one-book series, 538, launched with *The Impatient Horse*, ceased in 1957 having never grown beyond its initial title whilst a two-book series, numbered 549, featured the adventures of the legendary Robin Hood and subsequently became very popular.

One particularly successful range of books, launched in the 1950s, was the 'Adventure from History' series which featured famous historical characters. This series, numbered 561, began in 1956 with *King Alfred the Great*, closely followed by *William the Conqueror*, *Sir Walter Raleigh*, *The Story of Nelson*, *Captain Scott*, *David Livingstone* and *Oliver Cromwell* with many more such titles being commissioned throughout the decade and beyond. Several of the titles within this series were written by Lawrence du Garde Peach and illustrated by John Kenney, a combination that was to provide the series with a very distinctive look as demonstrated in Figure 31<sup>87</sup>, below. The illustrations of

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<sup>85</sup>Biography of author in Foreword, *The Ladybird book of Handwriting* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1968).

<sup>86</sup>Title page, *Road Sense* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1977).

<sup>87</sup>Image a: Illustration by John Kenney from *King Alfred the Great*, Copyright © Ladybird Books Ltd., 1956. Reproduced by permission of Ladybird Archive. Image b: Illustration by John Kenney from *Robert the Bruce*. Copyright © Ladybird Books Ltd., 1964. Reproduced by permission of Ladybird Archive. Image c: Illustration by John Kenney from *The Story of the First Queen Elizabeth*, Copyright © Ladybird Books Ltd., 1958. Reproduced by permission of Ladybird Archive.

King Alfred the Great, Robert the Bruce and Queen Elizabeth I are typical of each book in the series. This range of books was both attractive and informative bringing history to life for a whole generation of young readers and inspiring a lifetime love of the subject for many.



a

b

c

**Figure 31: Illustrations from the Ladybird 'Adventure from History' series.**

Each of the series followed the standard format and adults purchasing a Ladybird book remained confident that it could be depended upon to be both informative and stimulating. Douglas Keen took the greatest care with whoever he chose to work on each title giving much consideration to the commissioning of both text and illustration. He forged strong relationships with some of the illustrators and authors often considering them amongst his personal friends. Mainly working from his home, as opposed to the offices in Loughborough, he invited them to visit him and his wife to informal meetings over a cup of tea and piece of cake as a particularly civilised working practice. The quality of the text and illustrations never diminished and, having established themselves with the company, the services of reliable authors and illustrators were utilised for many

titles, thereafter. The editorial high standards were thus maintained by strong partnerships formed between author and illustrator across several titles within various series. Each of the authors and illustrators was paid a flat fee for their manuscripts or artwork; the company never paid royalties for any of the contributors to the books.

In the latter half of the decade more series emerged to boost the total number of titles available. Series 563 aimed at younger children comprised early learning titles such as *Puppies and Kittens*, *The Farm*, *Going to School*, *Telling the Time* and *Shopping with Mother* amongst others. These books were aimed at parents as preschool educators and aimed to capitalise on the firm's reputation as providers of texts that were authoritative and of high quality. The introductory text of *Shopping with Mother*, for example, states, 'Here is another Ladybird book which has been specially designed by an expert to help YOUR child with the beginning of reading. Here again the words have been carefully chosen and the delightful pictures skilfully matched with the text. The whole book is planned to capture your child's interest, assist in the memorizing and recognition of words, and create enthusiasm for reading.'<sup>88</sup>

In 1958 series 584 rolled off the presses and covered various topics around a technological theme including *Motor Cars*, *Aircraft*, *Commercial Vehicles* and *Merchant Ships*. These titles were subsequently revised to take into account changes in technology. In fact, the *Motor Cars* title was revised three times prior to 1972 following its initial publication in 1960. This provides a good indication of the rapidly paced improvements in automobile design and technology. Similarly, the Ladybird book of *Aircraft*, first published in 1964 was on its second revised edition by 1972. The decision to publish a range of titles based on aeroplane journeys to various countries was made with justifiable business sense with the rise in the number of passengers choosing air travel. Series 587, first published in 1958, sought to teach geography via story-based texts. The 'Flight' books featured tales of various journeys undertaken by children accompanying their parents. Titles included *Australia*, *Canada*, *USA*, *India*, *Africa* and the *Holy Land*.

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<sup>88</sup>M.E. Gagg, *Shopping with Mother* (Loughborough: Wills and Hepworth Ltd, 1958).

It was during this period that the firm began to consider publication of their non-fiction material in alternative forms of media. Keen to fully exploit the educational market, Wills and Hepworth Ltd became involved in the production of film strips during the 1950s. Although not a major part of the business, their sales did provide a contribution to the overall income of the firm and accounts ledgers indicate that they were sold to many customers. Many of the film strips are likely to have been religious in their content for a majority of customers were church groups or publishers involved in the production of religious books. Sales ledgers identify that customers for the film strips included: SPCK, Evangelical Christian Literature, Religious Films Ltd, Church Army Bookshop, the Sabbath School for Ireland and Methodist Youth Department amongst others.<sup>89</sup>

It was around this time of burgeoning titles that Douglas Keen renewed contact with an old associate, Harry Wingfield who was an experienced artist. Keen had known Wingfield when based in the Birmingham sales office where he worked as a sales representative. They had met as young advertising agency workers in Birmingham prior to the war.<sup>90</sup> Keen approached Harry Wingfield regarding the possibility of providing the artwork for some titles within the Ladybird series, a challenge which he rose to. He was to become one of the most prolific illustrators of the Ladybird books over a period of more than 20 years.

Wingfield was first commissioned in 1958 to provide illustrations for a handful of titles including *Shopping with Mother*, *Red Riding Hood* and *Goldilocks*. He eventually became one of the company's most prolific illustrators receiving £13 for each painting during the early years, a figure which rose to £100 by the time he had completed provision of illustrations for Ladybird books in 1980. During his long association with Ladybird books he provided the pictures for over 65 titles in collaboration with his wife.<sup>91</sup> Largely self-taught, he specialised in watercolour and is credited with defining the style for the highly successful Key Words Reading Scheme. His depiction of a middle-class,

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<sup>89</sup>Sales ledger for late 1950s. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578.

<sup>90</sup>Interview with Harry Wingfield. [http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/harry\\_wingfield\\_interview.php](http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/harry_wingfield_interview.php) [site accessed 24th February, 2009].

<sup>91</sup>'Harry Wingfield: Artist who illustrated more than 65 Ladybird books, including the Key Words series featuring Peter and Jane.' Obituary *The Daily Telegraph*, 23rd March, 2002, p. 29.

overtly wholesome world has been criticised as being unrealistic, solely depicting the lives of middle-class families and not representative of the British population at the time. However, he modelled the characters upon children known to him and defended his illustrations by insisting that the children he drew were 'the sons and daughters of respectable workers and they *were* well dressed.' In fact, the models for the Peter and Jane characters featured in the Key Word Reading Scheme titles were neighbours' children whom Wingfield photographed whilst in the process of carrying out such simple tasks as raking leaves or washing up.<sup>92</sup>

With full employment in Britain in the 1950s, many families became more affluent having more disposable income than they had prior to the Second World War. This allowed for the more generous celebration of Christmas and birthdays with children increasingly receiving gifts on these occasions. With the price of Ladybird books remaining at the original level determined in 1940, they were ideal for giving as gifts. In fact, the gift market was one at which the company deliberately aimed. A photograph of a Ladybird point-of-sale display, taken in the 1950s features the words,

'Here are the delightful Ladybird books  
The children's favourite choice  
Beautifully illustrated in full colour throughout  
The ideal birthday or party gift'

It is no surprise, therefore, that the books continued to sell so well during the 1950s. They remained competitively priced and were perfectly suited to the mass market at which they were aimed. Several of the titles produced during the previous two decades had been translated and exported around the world during the 1950s further increasing sales. (See Chapter 4 for export information.)

## 5.6 Post-war Employer

Wills and Hepworth Ltd flourished following the end of the Second World War and provided substantial employment in the town of Loughborough. The firm was to provide

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<sup>92</sup>'Ladybird artist sells 'Peter and Jane' pictures', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 2nd December, 2001, p. 13.



a wide range of jobs for a good number of the town's inhabitants for many subsequent decades. The company, in return, was rewarded with a high level of staff loyalty with many employees spending their entire working lives with the firm. Fred Smith, for example, retired from his position as composing and letterpress manager, in 1982. He had worked for the company for 51 years having started as a composing apprentice in 1931.<sup>93</sup> James Shields Clegg first joined Wills and Hepworth in 1934 as an accountant and, subsequently became managing director in 1961. He retained this position until his retirement in 1974.<sup>94</sup> Douglas Keen joined in 1936 and retired in 1974 having moved from his initial role as a sales representative to that of a particularly influential editorial director. He had been invited to the board of directors following the success of his Key Word Reading Scheme. Similarly, another employee, George Towers, worked for the firm for over 40 years up until his retirement, having joined Wills and Hepworth Ltd in 1938 as a lithographic artist. He was appointed to the board of directors in 1963. Charles Hall joined the firm in 1947 to set up a print estimating and costing system. He then became works director and deputy managing director up until his retirement in 1986. He was awarded an MBE for his services to the print industry.<sup>95</sup> Another longstanding employee, Fred Woolley became manager of the lithography department having worked for the company for 40 years.<sup>96</sup> Mike Banks joined the company in 1950 and stayed with the firm for 42 years. His working life with the firm began as a 16-year-old cost clerk and ended up as production director from 1986 to 1992.<sup>97</sup> Mr R. Ashmore started work at Wills and Hepworth Ltd, in 1954 as a lithographer and continued with the company until its closure in 1999.<sup>98</sup> These are just a few examples of long service to the firm. There are many more people in the town of Loughborough who spent decades with the company each one providing a valuable contribution to the successful implementation of the Ladybird books publishing venture. The workforce was an extremely important factor in the company's success. The combined years of experience in skilled printing and

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<sup>93</sup>'Retirements', *Printing World*, 2nd June, 1982.

<sup>94</sup>'Obituary: Mr James Clegg, Pioneer of Ladybird books', *The Times*, 30th September, 1976.

<sup>95</sup>Charles Hall (former Works Director Ladybird Books Ltd.). Interview with author 30th October, 2007.

<sup>96</sup>'Fred Woolley', *Printing World*, 7th September, 1978.

<sup>97</sup>Mike Banks in e-mail to author dated 24th October, 2006.

<sup>98</sup>R. Ashmore, former employee of Ladybird Books Ltd. Letter to author 2003.

production techniques were considerable and, because of a consistent workforce, personnel training expenditure was kept to a minimum.

A snapshot of the types of occupation being undertaken at Wills and Hepworth Ltd and the sums they were paid can be seen in the table below. The company's wage records provide an indication of the annual sums being paid for various occupations within the firm a few years following the end of the war (individual names have been omitted to protect their privacy).<sup>99</sup>

<b>Table 5: Annual wages paid for various occupations</b> <b>Wills and Hepworth Ltd 1948-1949</b>	
<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Amount per annum</b>
Director	£2,200
Director and Secretary	£1,900
Director	£875
Director	£800
Overseer	£700
Artist	£700
Overseer	£675
Letterpress Overseer	£600
Lithographic Artist	£550
Sales Representative	£525
Artist	£520
Shorthand Typist/Secretary	£450
Cost Clerk	£425

During the 1950s the company retained a significant presence within the town of Loughborough employing many local people. One former employee, Mary Wain recalls the working conditions within the company during the 1950s and early 1960s, having

<sup>99</sup>Wage payments taken from wages ledger for the year 1948/49 in Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578.

joined the company as a fifteen-year-old in 1953. 'I started work at 7.30 a.m. and, I was in one of the large noisy factory [sic] with: glueing, sewing, book binding and folding machines and two guillotines and many benches for us girls to sit and work at. At the end of the room was the packing department.'<sup>100</sup> Another former company worker, Joyce Williams, who started her employment with the firm in the 1950s, recalled that, 'It was a nice company to work for and I have many happy memories.'<sup>101</sup> The working atmosphere within each department was pleasant and, in addition, members of staff were provided with facilities for social interaction out of work hours. For example, many social activities were arranged by the company for their staff during this period. Events included sporting occasions such as works' cricket matches.<sup>102</sup> The firm of Wills and Hepworth Ltd, and later Ladybird Books Ltd, was considered a good employer by many of its staff allowing for positive working relationships between them.

### 5.7 Growth and Diversity

By 1960 there was a greatly increased ownership of television sets in Britain. The BBC had been joined by the introduction of the commercial station, ITV in 1955 and television had become an integral part of the lives of the majority of British families. Programmes specifically targeted at children aimed to both entertain and educate. However, the airing of children's programmes was restricted to very few hours each day and, at this stage, posed little threat to the publishing industry.

The 1960s saw a proliferation in both fiction and non-fiction Ladybird titles and the decade witnessed the launch of a multitude of new series. A total of seven new series had been launched during the 1940s, and eight in the 1950s, but the company greatly exceeded this number by introducing 28 new series during the 1960s. In fact, the rate at which the firm produced new titles during this decade was remarkable. Whereas, in the whole decade of the 1950s the number of new titles had almost doubled those produced in the previous decade, the following ten years saw that number increase almost four-fold. The shift in emphasis toward non-fiction remained, as the company concentrated

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<sup>100</sup>Letter from Mary Wain (employee of Wills & Hepworth 1953–1966) to author dated 14th February, 2003.

<sup>101</sup>Joyce Williams, 'Working at Wills and Hepworth's', *The Echo* 17th November, 2006, p. 22.

<sup>102</sup>'Working at Wills and Hepworth's', *The Echo* 17th November, 2006, p. 22.

upon the production of educational material, the provision of books to stimulate learning and those to encourage children to gain an understanding of the world around them. Series 601, for example, comprised several non-fiction titles covering a diverse range of topics from the *Story of Bicycles* and the *Story of Metals* to the *Story of Clothes and Costume*. By the end of the 1970s this series had amassed a total of 27 titles.

Following the success of their first series of religious story books, the company launched an additional set of similarly themed books. Based upon stories from the New Testament, series 606a formed another set of books with religious content. The series included *Jesus the Helper*, *Jesus the Friend*, *Baby Jesus* and *A First Book of Saints* amongst others reinforcing the company's commitment to religious education.

In 1961 John Berry was commissioned as an illustrator for Ladybird books following his work as an official war artist during the Second World War. He illustrated many titles for the company and was the sole illustrator for the 'People at Work' series of which there were 20 titles as well as such other books as *The Ladybird Book of London* published in 1961. The 'People at Work' (606b) series, titles of which included *The Airman in the Royal Air Force*, *The Car Makers*, *The Fisherman*, *The Nurse* and *The Policeman*, was another highly successful venture which today provides us with a documented social history of working life of the era. John Berry would invariably visit various places of employment sketching and taking photographs of people in their day to day occupations such as miners, farmers, railway workers and ship builders. These sketches and photographs would be accurately reproduced as illustrations in the appropriate books of the series. This range of books provides an interesting insight into many industries such as mining, ship building and pottery manufacturing that formed the backbone of the British economy and that have now largely disappeared. These books form sound social documents depicting working practices such as the policeman using a telephone in a blue box to report to the police station and the nurse wearing her starched white apron which have long since been abandoned.

Additional series comprising a mere handful of titles also emerged in the early 1960s. A two-title series numbered 606c comprised *The Story of Cricket* and *The Story of Football*. This short-lived series provided a source of knowledge for those children keen to follow more outdoor kinds of activity. It is particularly noticeable that the cover of *The Story of Football* shows the two team captains shaking hands prior to the match kick-off. This is just one example of the typical moral undertone that permeates the Ladybird books of the period where courteous behaviour and respect for others is constantly portrayed throughout many titles.

Wills and Hepworth Ltd also launched an additional fiction series featuring the retelling of traditional tales. Entitled 'Well Loved Tales', series 606d consisted of a large number of titles including *The Elves and the Shoemaker*, *Three Little Pigs*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Princess and the Pea*, *Cinderella* and *The Emperor's New Clothes*. The last had to be re-illustrated when translated into Arabic for export in later years for the recipient countries in the Middle-East would not allow an unclothed emperor to appear in their books.<sup>103</sup> This series was particularly successful both in Britain and abroad as several of its titles were subsequently translated for export.

Titles belonging to the series 606e provided junior readers with an overview of Britain's utilities in the form of three books namely, *Electricity*, *Gas* and *Water Supply*. Wills and Hepworth Ltd also produced a special edition of the latter for the Yorkshire Water Authority. This differed from the original book inasmuch as the cover text featured the words, 'Issued by Yorkshire Water Authority for schools programme'. A two-book series 606f provided information on the historical perspective of common themes, *Through the Ages: Food* and *Through the Ages: Transport*. Building upon earlier success with geography-oriented titles, series 606g featured *Come to Denmark*, *Come to Holland* and *Come to France*.

First published in 1961, series 612 comprised hymn, carol and prayer books. A single title formed series 618: entitled *London* it was translated into Esperanto a decade after its first

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<sup>103</sup>'Clothes for the emperor', *Printing World*, 23rd October, 1985, p. 13.

publication. A 'junior science' series (621) followed in 1962 and introduced older children to various scientific principles namely, *Air, Wind and Flight, Light, Mirrors and Lenses, Magnets, Bulbs and Batteries, Levers, Pulleys and Engines* amongst others. These books encouraged children to find various household articles with which to undertake interesting experiments. Children were directed to the local ironmongers for such items as copper sulphate and iron filings. The books offer a real insight into what was acceptable prior to increased health and safety legislation and publishers' fear of litigation. For example, one experiment involves children using pliers to tear away the zinc casing from a battery cell to expose the 'white jelly and black powder'. The publication of such instructions in children's books nowadays would be unthinkable.

Younger readers were equally catered for with series 622 aimed at teaching the fundamental skills of reading and writing with such titles as, *Sounds and Pictures Books 1-6*, and *The Ladybird ABC*. Ladybird books were created with the intention of providing a positive learning experience and series 633 was no exception including many hobby-based titles encouraging children to be creative in their spare time. *Toys and Games to Make*, for example, provided instructions for manufacturing a telephone from tin cans and string whilst *Tricks and Magic* taught various magicians' tactics for children to master and perform. Again, these books encourage children to handle matches, wire, penknives, hammer and nails, candles and cigarette packets, none of which would be permitted in books aimed at children nowadays. Series 634 encouraged older children to become interested in more challenging hobbies such as *Learnabout Heraldry, Simple Electronics, Making and Decorating Cakes, Chess and Stamp Collecting*.

Having produced many titles aimed at educating young readers on every conceivable subject, the firm moved its thoughts to the actual teaching of reading. Ladybird books were well established in schools by this time so it made sound commercial sense to initiate a range of books to improve the nation's literacy. This decision led to the company's single most successful series, the innovative Key Words Reading Scheme (series 641) which was launched in 1964. (See Chapter 7 for a more in-depth discussion of the scheme). Millions of copies of the books from the scheme were sold with the titles



being continuously reprinted up until the present. By assisting in the teaching of reading for generations, the firm was instrumental in perpetuating its own market. It was with the publication of this series of books that Wills and Hepworth Ltd decided to incorporate audio tapes when, as early as 1964, recorded material formed part of the Key Word Reading Scheme. This was not a common occurrence, however, and appears to be the only instance where this form of media was utilised by Wills and Hepworth Ltd at the time.

By 1964, the company's publishing venture had proved to be extremely successful. With such a large number of books being produced, the printing capacity of the town centre works was becoming increasingly taken up with their manufacture. Thus, the decision was made to cease the commercial printing side of the business in order to concentrate solely upon the publishing and printing of the Ladybird books.

Throughout the entire decade of the 1960s, Wills and Hepworth Ltd continued to produce an increasingly comprehensive range of titles covering a wealth of subjects. By the mid 1960s further series expanded the Ladybird range: series 644 told of *The Story of our Christmas Customs* and *Stories of Special Days and Customs*; series 649 comprised practical books based upon religion including, *What to Look for Inside a Church* and *The History of Our Bible*; series 651 was based upon natural history with such titles as *Life of the Honey-Bee*, *The Story of the Spider*, *Prehistoric Animals and Fossils* and *Plants and How They Grow*.

Series 654, 'How it Works', was intended to appeal to those children with a practical nature and a desire to investigate the inner workings of various technological innovations such as cameras, motor cars, rockets and hovercraft. Several of the titles in this series were subsequently produced in revised editions to take into account changes in technology. The 'How it Works' series was first published by the company during the 1960s and, although intended for children, became renowned for its authoritative representation of many topics. The *How it Works: The Computer*, for example was bought by universities for their students and by the Ministry of Defence for civil servants to

enlighten them on the technicalities of computer operation.<sup>104</sup> The Ladybird book, *How it Works: The Motor Car*, was used for many years to teach driving instructors the rudimentary workings of their vehicles.<sup>105</sup> The technical advisor for the later updated title was Alan Wilding, a lecturer at Loughborough University of Technology.<sup>106</sup> The books within this series were well-researched and carefully written, as usual, and were accurately illustrated and included such topics as *The Rocket*, *The Aeroplane*, *The Television*, *The Locomotive*, *The Camera* and *The Hovercraft*.

‘Words for Number’ was another range of books aimed at teaching young children rudimentary arithmetic. It appeared as series 661 and included such titles as *Understanding Numbers*, *Everyday Words for Numbers* etc. For those youngsters with an interest in arts, series 662 featured topics such as *Musical Instruments*, *The Story of Music*, *Ballet*, and *The Story of Theatre* amongst many more. Two more non-starters, each comprising only a single title were series 663 with *Our Land in the Making* and series 671 *Understanding Maps*.

Mathematics for older children was featured in series 678, *Subtraction*, *Practice your Tables*, *Fun with Tables* and *Multiplication* and others. Series 682 comprised two animal-themed books namely, *Dogs* and *Horses*. *The Ladybird Book of Handwriting* was the only title in series 684 and was aimed at ‘teachers for class use, by College of Education students and parents wishing to help their children.’<sup>107</sup> The last new series of the decade, 691 aimed to provide children with knowledge of animals they were very unlikely to have ever encountered such as, *African Mammals*, *Australian Mammals*, *Asian Mammals* and more titles that covered the whole spectrum of global wildlife.

In 1963, Martin Aitchison, another artist who was to play a significant part in Ladybird’s history, began illustrating books for the company on a freelance basis. A technical artist,

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<sup>104</sup><http://dswindell.members.beeb.net/aFame.htm> [site accessed 18th January, 2008]

<sup>105</sup>Pat Bell, editorial administrator, in an interview. *Ladybird, Ladybird*, BBC Radio 4 programme broadcast 28th December, 2001.

<sup>106</sup>Brenda Wilding, widow of Alan Wilding in letter to *Saga Magazine*, March 2008, p. 60.

<sup>107</sup>Tom Gourdie, *The Ladybird Book of Handwriting* (Loughborough: Wills and Hepworth Ltd, 1968), endpapers.

he had previously worked for Vickers Armstrong, the company responsible for designing the dam-busting bouncing bomb during the years of the Second World War. His first commission for Wills and Hepworth Ltd was to illustrate *A First Book of Saints* written by Hilda Rostron. Aitchison, together with Wingfield, was largely responsible for the pictures in the Key Word Reading Scheme titles. He provided the illustrations for approximately 70 Ladybird books during the 1960s and 1970s.

Similarly, Frank Hampson began working as an illustrator for the company during the 1960s. Having previously been illustrator in chief for the popular *Eagle* comic, Hampson would have been suitably qualified for producing children's illustrations before he began working for Wills and Hepworth Ltd. He provided the illustrations for 11 Ladybird titles from 1964 to 1970 covering such diverse titles as *The Story of Our Christmas Customs*, *Lives of the Great Scientists: Marie Curie*, three *Ladybird Book of Nursery Rhymes* titles and even contributed to some books within the Key Word Reading Scheme.<sup>108</sup>

More new series continued in 1970: series 701 consisted of three books each entitled *Great Artists* (books 1, 2 and 3) written and illustrated by Dorothy and Martin Aitchison. Series 702 and 704 were written by Ethel Wingfield and illustrated by her husband, Harry Wingfield. This range of preschool learning books was aimed at mothers with many of the titles actually incorporating the words *Learning with Mother*. Series 706 comprised four self-explanatory titles: *Scouts*, *Cub Scouts*, *Guides* and *Brownie Guides*, the most recently produced titles of which featured photographs instead of the illustrations of the earlier books. Series 707 featured books about pirates, cowboys and Indians; whilst series 708 comprised three books based on the lives of famous scientists namely *Michael Faraday*, *Madame Curie* and *Charles Darwin*.

As discussed in Chapter 1, at the beginning of the 1970s it became obvious to directors at Wills and Hepworth Ltd that the enterprise had finally outgrown its town centre location. During the last few years of the 1960s and the first years of the 1970s the firm began the building of more modern, larger, purpose-built premises. This was an obvious necessity

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<sup>108</sup><http://www.spotted.net/hampson.htm> [site accessed 9th January, 2008].

for the company that had reportedly, produced 15 million books in the year prior to March 1970.<sup>109</sup> This was achieved prior to the presses being moved from the town centre location to the new factory. The earlier decision to cease commercial printing to focus attention solely to the production of children's books had ensured the firm's future success. Exports for the period represented 20 per cent of turnover with books being translated in thirty languages.<sup>110</sup>

In 1972, Wills and Hepworth Ltd ceased its independent publishing status when it was purchased by the Pearson Holdings Group. The firm had grown from a provincial commercial printing company to a major player in the world of children's book publishing. The rapid growth in the annual number of titles produced by the firm from 1940 to 1972 is illustrated in Figure 34 in the Appendix.

### **5.8 Major External Influences of the Era**

Whilst both world wars had been influential upon the development of Ladybird books, it was the Second World War that proved to be a major external factor. Hepworth had decided to begin his children's book publishing venture at the outset of the First World War and it had provided additional income for its duration. Following its success he continued with a modest children's book publishing programme for the following two decades. Thus, it could be said that had it not been for the First World War, Hepworth may not have introduced publishing to his printing business. More significant external influences on the company, however, were the trading conditions under which businesses were forced to operate during the Second World War. The diversification undertaken by the firm that had been made necessary by changes in the amount of commercial printing work available was the main cause of the initiation of the children's book publishing venture. In addition, it was the innovative use of paper and the standardisation made possible by the resulting format that had been most significant. The increased demand for books caused by the war was also a determining factor in the firm's initial publishing success. The company's fortuitous location was of additional benefit, not only because of

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<sup>109</sup>'Fifteen million Ladybirds a year' *British Printer*, September 1970, p. 90.

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*

excellent transport links but also because it remained far less affected by enemy action during the war years.

Following the end of the war, the firm had been able to take advantage of the post-war baby boom that had produced a larger market for their books. Increased leisure time together with the fact that households were more comfortable, less overcrowded and well-equipped with electric lighting and central heating, meant that children were more likely to have the time and environment in which to read books. In addition, increased leisure time allowed children to pursue hobbies, sporting activities and become more creative thus fuelling a wide array of potential subject matter which Ladybird books provided. A more consumer-driven society arose from full employment and subsequent wage increases, thus Ladybird books were targeted toward the mass market. This influenced not only the kinds of books the firm produced but also dictated the pricing strategy and the marketing decisions. In addition, increased funding to schools and public libraries also proved to be positive external influences upon the production of Ladybird books with the firm fully exploiting the educational market. (See Chapter 7 for discussion of the firm's educational publishing.)

Advances in technology provided the firm with additional subject matter for their non-fiction publishing programme as well as the opportunity to publish material in alternatives to print media. Increased passenger air travel, growing car ownership, the widespread purchase of television sets and space exploration each provided publishing opportunities for Ladybird books' expanding readership.

It can be seen that the growth in production of Ladybird books had been largely dependent upon the firm's diversification during the war, its favourable geographical location, directors' abilities to take advantage of an increased potential market and consumer-driven society and their embracement of new technologies. The success was due in large part to the personnel behind the crucial decisions. James Clegg, for example, in his role as managing director had presided over the firm for the decades in which it had grown from a provincial printer to a world renowned children's book publisher. Douglas

Keen had played an important part in the company's progression in his role both before and after his appointment as editorial director. His determination to champion the role of the Ladybird books over the commercial printing together with his hard work and skill in determining suitable titles then finding authors and illustrators to create the books had played a substantial part in the firm's success during the 1950s and 1960s. George Towers pays tribute to these two individuals, whose participation in the creation of Ladybird books was vital,

'James Clegg the managing director, who described himself as a benevolent dictator, knew how to recognise talent and Keen became involved editorially. The final decisions were always with Clegg and the board but it was mainly Keen who would seek out the external talent, both writers and illustrators. Many of these were well known through other publications.'<sup>111</sup>

By employing freelance illustrators and authors and paying a fixed fee with no royalties, the firm were able to keep control of some of the creative costs whilst the loyal, willing and experienced production workforce who did work on site also played a vital role in the company's enduring success. The provincial nature of the firm's location assisted in a stable workforce inasmuch as there were no competitors vying for their skilled personnel. The firm could be described as modern in their working practices during the period, in an industry where many publishers firmly retained traditional methods of running their businesses.

The following chapter documents the period in the history of Ladybird books from which the firm changed ownership, its name and the premises from which it operated.

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<sup>111</sup>George Towers in letter to author in response to specific questions, October 2006.



## Chapter 6

### A Printing Publisher (1972 to 1999)

#### 6.1 New Beginnings

As a new decade dawned, the firm faced a multitude of different challenges and was forced to adapt to an ever-changing world. There was potentially greater competition in the children's book publishing industry for, according to Frank Eyre commentating at the time, 'In 1970 there are some sixty publishers actively engaged in children's books.'<sup>1</sup> However, Ladybird books remained competitively priced and, with their standard format published and printed on the same premises, still represented a unique product. The publisher's strong brand image was increasingly important as the firm successfully fought to retain a strong presence in the children's book market.

Having moved to purpose-built premises and under new ownership, the company adopted the name of Ladybird Books Ltd in September 1972.<sup>2</sup> Prior to Britain's official entry into the Common Market in 1973, the introduction of decimalisation had been implemented nationwide from February 1971. This external factor had implications for the price of Ladybird books for this precipitated the first rise in price for more than 30 years. Television ownership had become widespread throughout the country with coloured television first making an appearance in 1967. It was during the 1970s that television finally provided potential competition to the book publishing industry.

Whilst the decade had begun with a Conservative government, an election in 1974 resulted in a hung parliament over which a Labour prime minister presided. A Labour government continued for the rest of the decade and was faced with a country that was in economic and industrial turmoil. Britain experienced a degree of financial difficulty during the 1970s and by the middle of the decade the 'inflation rate had accelerated to beyond twenty-five per cent per annum.'<sup>3</sup> This began to manifest itself in the business of Ladybird Books Ltd with the firm forced to implement price rises to its books. Whilst the price had been held at 2s. 6d. (12½p) for over 30 years, prices

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<sup>1</sup>Frank Eyre, *British Children's Books in the Twentieth Century*, Longman Group Ltd (London) 1971, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup>Legal deed of transfer. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

<sup>3</sup>Norman Shrapnell, *The Seventies: Britain's Inward March* (London: Constable, 1980), p. 29.

rose rapidly during the 1970s. (Figure 37, in the Appendix, illustrates the rising cost of a standard format Ladybird book between 1971 and 1999.) However, this did not deter purchasers and, crucially, sales continued to grow from 15 million copies in 1970<sup>4</sup> to 24 million by 1980.<sup>5</sup> Prices rose significantly throughout the next two decades and, by 1999, the cost of a standard formatted Ladybird book had increased to £1.99.

With the setting up of the Equal Opportunities Commission there was increased awareness of gender and race issues resulting in legislation to guard against discrimination, by the middle of the 1970s. This affected the publishing trade not only in their role as employers but also inasmuch as it had consequences for the books' contents in terms of their depiction of female characters and non-white characters. (See Chapter 9 for an in-depth discussion of the implications for Ladybird Books Ltd.)

Whilst many staff members remained with Ladybird Books Ltd for many subsequent decades after its new owners took possession, it is notable that it was not long before some of the most senior staff retired. Both James Clegg and Douglas Keen who had nurtured the business through its relentless expansion, retired in 1974 followed by George Towers a few years later. With new board members controlling the publishing decisions, changes to the Ladybird books were inevitable.

However, the company's production of its eclectic range of books comprising fiction, non-fiction, educational titles, ELT titles, religious books and books for preschool children continued unabated. Whilst the 1960s had seen the greatest number of new series, the firm's output during the 1970s comprised a total of 20 new series covering a wide range of genres. In addition, a number of previous titles from earlier series were still in print and new titles were constantly being added to these earlier series during the period. Thus, the cumulative output of books for the company at this time was considerable and by 1976, there were over 400 titles in print.<sup>6</sup> Many of the older titles were simply reprinted with minor updates to the book covers, such as the

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<sup>4</sup>'Fifteen million Ladybirds a year' *British Printer*, September 1970, p. 90.

<sup>5</sup>Harris, Ladybird and child's play in the bindery', *Printing World*, 20th August, 1980, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup>Obituary: Mr James Clegg: Pioneer of Ladybird books', *The Times*, 30th September, 1976.

introduction of an updated logo and decimalised prices. However, changes in book design began to be effected on the new titles with a wider usage of sans serif fonts and a more modern feel to the illustrations. In fact, some of the artwork on the older series that remained popular, such as the Key Words Reading Scheme, was updated to reflect changing fashions. (See Chapter 8 for more information on the Key Words Reading Scheme). In addition, artwork was changed to include the depiction of females in more active roles as well as the introduction of people from ethnic minorities. (See Chapter 9 for more in-depth discussion of gender and race issues.)

At the beginning of the decade new series continued to be created in the same way as previously.<sup>7</sup> A single title comprised series 724. Entitled *Making a Transistor Radio*, it was written by George Dobbs and illustrated by B.H. Robinson. The book was subsequently incorporated into the 'Learnabout' series as were several other hobby-themed titles that had first been published within other series. With a growing awareness of environmental issues during the 1970s, directors seized another publishing opportunity with series 727. Comprising such titles as *What on Earth are we Doing?*, *Disappearing Mammals* and *Nature's Roundabout: an Introduction to Ecology*, this series of books covered a whole range of natural science topics aimed at increasing older children's awareness of the importance of preservation of the planet. Craftsmanship was the focus of the *Woodwork* and *Metalwork* titles that comprised series 731. These would have been relevant to practical subjects taught in secondary modern schools of the era and these standard format books provided an excellent source of basic knowledge of the subjects. The texts provided comprehensive guides to the topics accompanied by detailed illustrations. Series 733 was represented by a single book entitled *Stars and Their Legends*.

## 6.2 Titled Series

As previously mentioned (in Chapter 2), Wills and Hepworth Ltd, together with its famous Ladybird imprint, was sold to a conglomerate, on 3rd January, 1972.<sup>8</sup> It became evident that, for the parent company, exploitation and protection of the Ladybird brand was paramount. The following year, brand names for book series

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<sup>7</sup>The accompanying database provides details of all Ladybird books (as far as it has been possible to discover).

<sup>8</sup>'Ladybirds join Penguins, Pelicans and Puffins in same 'nest'.' *Smith's Trade News* (London) 1st January, 1972.

produced by the company were registered with the Patent Office. From the middle of 1973, the long-standing tradition of numbering the book series was changed inasmuch as a copyright-protected name was also added to many of the series. (See Chapter 4 for a list of registered trade marks.) Whilst series numbering continued until the late 1990s, this practice was gradually reduced until all new series featured names only.

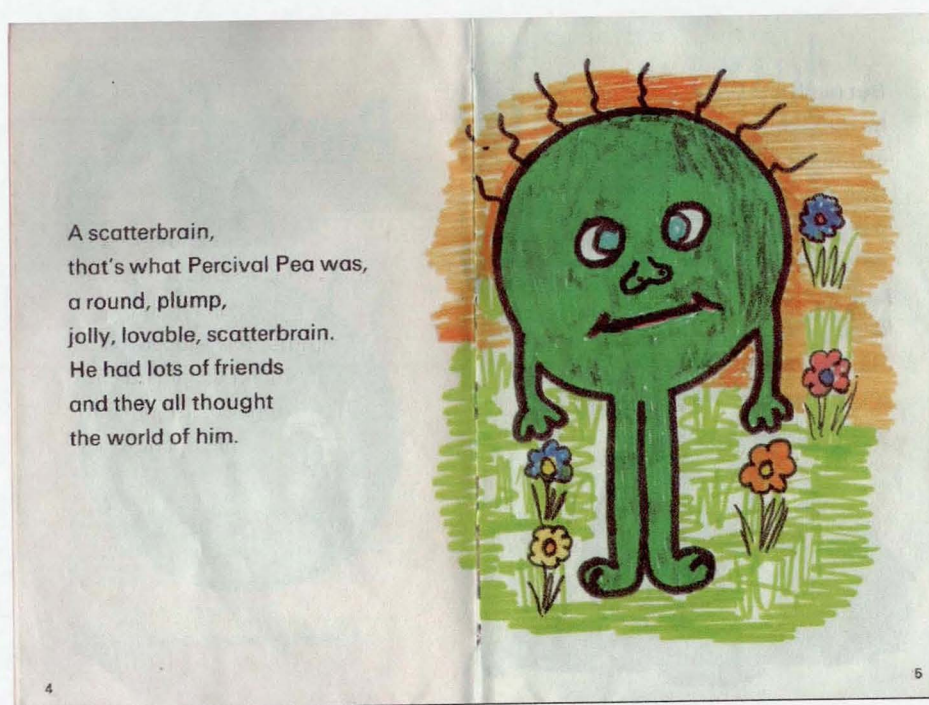
Deliberately targeted at those children not old enough for formal education, the 'Talkabout' series (735) was a range of books aimed at toddlers. The purpose of the books was to encourage parents to share time with the young child talking about such topics as shopping, baby, the beach and animals, amongst others. The 'Ladybird Leaders' series (737) featured a multitude of non-fiction titles for slightly older children and covered such diverse topics as chocolate and cocoa to seals and whales. Series 740 entitled 'Children's Classics', as the name suggests featured a wide range of 'retold' children's classic tales such as *Oliver Twist*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *Little Women* and *The Railway Children* with many traditional stories joining the series throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

Series 777 entitled 'Read it Yourself' contained a wide variety of titles initially fiction titles only but later this series included non-fiction titles. This series remained popular for decades and revised editions of several of its titles appeared post-2000 when they were produced with accompanying CD-ROMs. (See Chapter 8 for more detailed information on this educational series.)

Capitalising on the success of their previous religious books, the firm published series 781 which comprised religiously themed titles retold by Jenny Robertson and illustrated by Alan Parry. These were produced in non-traditional formats and published for the Scripture Union. Series 792 incorporated a range of preschool titles under the name of 'Sunbird books'. The books were designed to be educational and featured modern sans serif fonts and brightly coloured illustrations. For use by either parents or primary school teachers, their purpose was thus described, 'This series of books has been designed to stimulate talking and language development in young children... ..If an adult looks at the books with the child and talks about the pictures,

the value of the books will be increased.’<sup>9</sup> The company claimed that the series had been prepared specifically for the African market but was apparently, ‘invaluable within any multi-racial society.’<sup>10</sup>

In 1979, Ladybird Books Ltd took the rather unusual step of publishing a range of books written and illustrated by a child. Series 793, featured stories of the ‘Garden Gang’ comprising characters based upon fruit and vegetables. For example, *Colin Cucumber and Patrick Pear* formed one title whilst *Avril Apricot and Simon Swede* another. With 17 titles to her name, Jayne Fisher became Ladybird’s youngest author and illustrator at nine years old. Her illustrations were hand-drawn using felt-tipped pens in bold colours (see Figure 32<sup>11</sup>, below).



**Figure 32: Illustration of Percival Pea created by Jayne Fisher.**

<sup>9</sup> Angela Greenwood, *out of town* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1979), p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Leaflet listing all Ladybird titles in print (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1982).

<sup>11</sup> Sample page from, Jayne Fisher, *Percival Pea and Polly Pomegranate* (Loughborough, Ladybird Books Ltd, 1979) pp. 4–5. Ladybird Books Ltd do not own the copyright to The Garden Gang series. It is believed that the rights belong to Lunesdale Publishing Group Limited, Lunesdale House, Hornby, Lancaster. Whilst every effort has been made to trace the copyright holder it has not been possible to do so.

### 6.3 Non-traditional Formats

With an increasing number of potential competitors within the children's book market each producing books in a wide variety of formats, decisions had to be made at Ladybird Books Ltd as to whether to extend the range of books included in the publishing list. Whilst the traditional Ladybird book had managed to form a unique place in the market for over 30 years, times had changed and the children's book trade was becoming increasingly competitive. Therefore, during the 1970s, after more than 30 years of publishing books almost exclusively in the standard format, a few series of Ladybird books were published in different shapes and sizes and with increased pagination. The firm's catalogue refers to these as 'Large Format Gift Books' and the first range of such titles featured considerably larger page sizes and additional numbers of pages to the traditional format. Titles included *Gulliver's Travels*, *Aesop's Fables* and *The Ladybird Book of Rhymes*, as the larger format allowed for a collection of stories or rhymes to be produced in one volume. In 1978, the firm published two more substantial volumes: *My First Big Talkabout Book* and *Dinosaurs and Prehistoric Animals*. These hardback books were produced in the size of 315mm x 223mm, each priced at £1.50 and were marketed as gift purchases by specific advertising. In the same year the company published a series of colouring books. Series S779 comprised six large-format books each entitled *The Ladybird Colouring Book of...*, followed by the book's particular topic. These few titles were the first of a whole range of books in different formats published by the company in subsequent years. Another range of books that did not conform to the standard Ladybird format was series S791, published in 1979. The books featured a series of adventures undertaken by a character called 'Mojo Swoptops', a four-wheeled vehicle with a big smile and interchangeable bodies. Written by Cindy Black and illustrated by Rich Ward, the books were square in shape (190mm x 190mm) and were published in both hardback and paperback versions.

Ladybird Books Ltd further developed their differing formats during the following decade. A range of colourful teaching wall friezes and information charts comprised series 802 and 803, early learning books in a square format formed series 808 and series 811 was made up of square story books. Fairytales followed in a square format by 1985 with series 852. For the remainder of the decade and, indeed up to the present day, the number of books published in the standard format began to be outnumbered



by those published in many different forms. No longer was a Ladybird book familiar by its mere shape, size, pagination and layout. In fact, not content with producing books only, further developments included the introduction of preschool materials comprising friezes, mobiles and several self-assembly packs such as *The Ladybird Christmas Crib*, which was a nativity scene for children to put together for themselves. Over the next three decades, Ladybird books were produced in increasingly elaborate guises as competition in the children's book trade grew more intense. In an attempt to provide greater novelty appeal, Ladybird books became available in an increasingly wide variety of shapes and sizes, with hardback and paperback covers, as board books, as plastic bath books, as boxed sets, in slip-cases, as cloth books and padded cloth books, lift-the-flap books, pop-up books, press-out books, shaped board books and even textured board books.

#### **6.4 Photographic Illustration**

The company began to produce a few books with photographic illustrations from 1979 onwards. The first of these included a series on how to make things: *How to Make Dolls*, *How to Make Toys and Games*, *How to Make Wooden Toys*; a cookery book simply entitled *Cooking* and updated versions of *British Wild Flowers* and *Steam Locomotives of the World*. Ladybird books continued to be published mainly with illustrations but an increasing number of titles were created using photographs. The entire series entitled 'Famous People' (816) was published with full photographic illustration which was a particularly appropriate approach since it included such titles as *The Queen*, *The Royal Wedding: Charles and Diana*, *Pope John Paul II* and *The Queen Mother*. Series 822, entitled 'People Who Help Us', included such occupations as *The Postal Service*, *The Fire Service*, *The Nurse* and *The Police Force*, all of which featured photographs.

The decision to illustrate such titles with photographs made good economic sense as, in the past illustrators of this kind of non-fiction had photographed people in action before meticulously preparing the illustration manually, a particularly time-consuming and expensive task. One particular instance where photographic illustration was a crucial factor in its creation was the aforementioned *The Royal Wedding: Charles and Diana*. Ladybird Books Ltd published that book, in 1981, celebrating the marriage of HRH the Prince of Wales to Lady Diana Spencer. A total

of 500,000 copies of the book were produced in the particularly short timescale of just four days. The company remained confident that it would be the first book published and on sale covering the event of the royal wedding which took place on Wednesday July 29th, 1981 at St. Paul's Cathedral in London. The process of the book's creation was planned with military precision with the book's editor, Audrey Daly, travelling to London to meet the royal photographer on the eve of the wedding. She took notes of the event as it unfolded whilst John Scott, royal photographer, directed 30 photographers to gather relevant shots. These were then collated and sorted through to make the choice of sixty photographs which were to feature in the book. The text was written on the drive back from London to Loughborough, an all-night task for the deadline was 5.00 a.m. the next day when the text was immediately typeset using a computerised typesetting system. The photographs were processed at 6.00 a.m. whilst the first photographic plates began to arrive for the artists and designers to work on the book layout by 7.00 a.m. By the Saturday rough proofs were ready for checking. The cover had been prepared beforehand with a blank oval space in which the wedding photograph was to be placed. The printing presses and binding machines churned out copies at a rate of 10,000 per hour and the final book was completed in record time. Priced at 50p it sold rapidly and sales soon exceeded 1,750,000 copies. By 1985 this title had sold over 2 million copies.<sup>12</sup>

Forever mindful of the necessity of maintaining a high profile and taking full advantage of an excellent marketing opportunity, the first order for the new title was delivered to a Nottingham bookseller by the firm's Volkswagen Beetle car painted to represent a ladybird, before it journeyed to London's Fleet Street. The book was reported to have been selling very rapidly in the Nottingham book shop and the local librarian immediately bought copies for the library.<sup>13</sup> Previously, in March 1981 a standard format Ladybird book featuring HRH Prince Charles had been published by the company. The first print run totalled 100,000 copies and with a price of 50p per copy a large number of sales were anticipated with plans for a total of a million copies in the pipeline. It was planned that copies would be exported to Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>'Royal Wedding Scoop', *Leicester Trader*, 23rd July, 1981, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup>'First copies land in giant Ladybird', *Nottingham Evening News*, 2nd August, 1981.

<sup>14</sup>'A million royalties for Ladybird?', *Printing World*, 18th March, 1981.

## 6.5 The Eighties

Whilst concern had been voiced about the adverse impact of television upon the publishing industry over previous decades, by the 1980s these fears appeared to be unfounded. It transpired that this particular medium was not posing a threat to the book industry for it was, in fact, providing additional publishing opportunities. As with many other industries during the 1980s, the book trade flourished with the overall number of new titles soaring.<sup>15</sup> Ladybird Books Ltd grasped these new opportunities and adapted its publishing output to accommodate these changes in society. In fact, the overriding feature of the company's publishing output during the 1980s was a considerable increase in the number of books it produced that were specifically related to television programmes or the film industry. Not only did the company produce new titles related to television characters, it also harnessed television to market its books in an advertising campaign on Central Television. (See Chapter 4 for more details on the marketing campaign.)

The ways in which books were sold underwent radical changes throughout the decade, with retailers such as WH Smith and Waterstones providing formidable competition to independent booksellers. However, Ladybird books had long been sold in non-traditional retail outlets as well as bookshops so this had less impact than could have been the case for other publishers. Book prices were still being protected by the Net Book Agreement but calls for its abolition were growing louder and it was dispensed with in 1995. Ladybird books continued to be sold at net price, prior to its abandonment.

As in previous decades, Ladybird Books Ltd continued to introduce a whole range of new series as well as adding new titles to existing ones during the 1980s. In addition, the number of new titles soared and sales continued unabated. In fact, by 1990 annual sales had, it was reported, topped 30 million copies.<sup>16</sup> The physical appearance of the Ladybird book had, since the middle of the 1970s, radically changed. Whereas the main design priority had previously been about creating a specific, easily recognised format, the opposite had, in fact, become the case. The Ladybird book catalogue for

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<sup>15</sup>John Sutherland, *Reading the Decades: Fifty Years of the Nation's Bestselling Books* (London: BBC Worldwide, 2002), p. 113.

<sup>16</sup>'Ladybird – the first 50 years', *The Bookseller*, 20th July, 1990, p. 183.

1981 reveals a range of brightly coloured book covers in a multitude of shapes and sizes. A much greater variety of founts was being used for the cover texts, made possible by the installation of the computerised typesetting system. These new titles coexisted with the traditional standard-sized books which continued to provide the staple publishing list. However, even these familiar-sized books were, by this time, also being designed with a much wider variety of styles, founts and colours so that they were only recognisable as Ladybird books by their size and the prominent use of the logo on the front cover. A similar metamorphosis had occurred with the Penguin titles whose own format, designed to be uniform and instantly recognisable, had also undergone a radical overhaul of cover design.<sup>17</sup>

Whilst still aiming at the mass market with its competitively priced books, the company did experiment with more expensive formats. One such publication, for example, created in 1981 in a joint venture with the Scripture Union was *The Ladybird New Testament*. The book's size was 250mm x 180mm comparable with the very first formats used in 1914. The volume comprised 158 pages with 140 colour illustrations and was one of the most expensive books produced by the company having a retail price of £3.95. It was produced with a dust jacket and a gold-blocked cover.<sup>18</sup> The firm's description of this particular volume in its catalogue indicates their hope of potential long-term sales,

*'The Ladybird New Testament is quite simply the most beautiful children's edition of the New Testament yet produced. Superbly written and magnificently illustrated, it is destined to become a classic publication.'*<sup>19</sup>

Series 814 featured several fiction books highlighting the space adventures of 'Major Tom', the sporting prowess of 'Sport Billy' and stories about mushroom-based characters in the 'Fun Guys' range. The 'Storyboard' series (815) was a collection of story books with a diverse range of characters from spacemen to animals. Series 819 comprised a handful of non-fiction titles based upon safety themes such as *First Steps in First Aid*, *Road Sense*, *Water Safety* and *Home Safety*. Series 823 featured four titles from the science fiction genre written by Fred and Geoffrey Hoyle and

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<sup>17</sup>Lloyd Jones, 1985.

<sup>18</sup>'Ladybird – the first 50 years', *The Bookseller*, 20th July, 1990, p. 183.

<sup>19</sup>Ladybird Catalogue (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1981).

illustrated by the prolific artist Martin Aitchison who had already contributed to several of the Ladybird book series since the 1960s. Series 824 was a range of children's cookery books which were each illustrated with photographs.

In February 1982 Ladybird Books published a 50-page book to celebrate the forthcoming birth of the Prince and Princess of Wales' first child. As with the earlier published titles in the 'Famous People' series, this book featured photographs and information tracing the life of its titular subject, the Princess of Wales. Whilst the royal couple were on holiday in the Bahamas, the company forwarded 500 copies to the island upon its publication. The initial print run for this book about the Princess of Wales was 425,000 copies. By this time the previous book covering the royal wedding just a few months earlier, had already sold over 2,500,000 copies. Another royal title, planned to coincide with her 82nd birthday, featured the Queen Mother and was published in the summer of 1982.<sup>20</sup>

A range of poetry collections featured in series 831 whilst the two following series (832 and 833) were aimed at younger children and comprised simple picture books. Series 841 featured such fiction titles as *Frankenstein*, *The Mummy* and *Dracula*.

Series 861 was named 'Discovering' and featured several non-fiction titles on such disparate subjects as *The Spanish Armada* which became a subsequent best-seller<sup>21</sup> and *Alton Towers*. Another series with a religious theme was that of 8610 'Easy Bible Stories'. Two scary storybooks made up series 872. Another range of Christmas-themed books formed series 8818. Some early learning titles formed the 8820 'Ready to Read' range. (See Chapter 8 for more information.) Series 8821 featured four basic books: *Numbers*, *Opposites*, *Colours* and *ABC*. Younger readers were, once again, the target market for series 886 with picture books comprising this range. Series 887 grouped stories into relevant age-themed books to assist the purchaser when choosing appropriate books for their children. Series 8911, aimed at older children, comprised a range of non-fiction books on standard topics from dinosaurs to vehicles.

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<sup>20</sup>'Royal Book is bound for the Bahamas', *Leicester Mercury*, 23rd February, 1982.

<sup>21</sup>'Ladybird – low profile, high sales', *The Bookseller*, 10th March, 1989.

By the mid 1980s the traditional format of printing the text on the verso and a full-page illustration on the recto was undergoing a radical change. Even the standard-sized Ladybird books, whose format had been familiar to readers for over 40 years, began to be printed with illustrations integrated into the text. Having long since dispensed with dust jackets on its books, the company were still concerned with making their books durable. Therefore, from the 1980s onwards Ladybird book covers were laminated for extra protection against the robust treatment from young children.

### **6.6 Seasonal Publishing**

The majority of publishers, especially those with children's book lists, recognise the crucial marketing opportunity afforded them by gift purchases. Seasonal publishing features tremendously in publishing decisions, none more so than the Christmas season. Most publishers decide their lists a year in advance and a major focus is usually upon those books to be published for delivery into shops by September for Christmas gift purchases. Not only will the number of titles for publication at that time be far greater than for any other time of year, specific Christmas-themed titles can also proliferate. This trend for seasonal publishing became more dominant from the 1980s due to an increasingly consumer-orientated society. Like other publishers Ladybird Books Ltd seized this opportunity and published a wide variety of Christmas titles during the decade. The range of products created by the company specifically aimed at the Christmas market increased as the decade advanced. Publishing output included storybooks such as *Santa Claus has a Busy Night* and *The Christmas Robin*, advent calendars and press-out nativity scenes; non-fiction titles including *Getting Ready for Christmas*, *Well-loved Carols* and *Christmas Songs*, packs and games such as *Christmas Fun and Games Book* and *Merry Christmas Card Games*. The practice of seasonal publishing continued throughout the 1990s and is still a major feature of publishing decisions carried out to the present day.

### **6.7 Licensed Characters**

During the mid-1980s the company turned increasingly to links with other media in order to compete for a share of the market. In a move to capitalise on the popular television cartoon series which had been launched in 1983, Ladybird Books Ltd's series 840 featured several books based upon the 'Masters of the Universe'. A prolific



series (numbered 848) comprised a multitude of 'Thomas the Tank Engine' titles. Written by the Reverend W. Awdry, the books had initially been published by Edmund Ward in the 1940s and had grown to be particularly popular. Ladybird Books Ltd published their version of this range of books to coincide with the television broadcasting of the stories.

Series 835 was another based upon characters that had first found popularity in a different medium. The 'Transformers', another animated series, featured robots in disguise and it was these that formed the range of books published in the mid-1980s. Younger children were catered for with series 865's books based on animated movie characters the 'Glo Friends'®. Girls of a slightly older age group were targeted with series 869 which featured Mattel Inc.'s 'Barbie'® with Palitoy's 'Action Force'® providing a more masculine counterpart for series 8710. The company had decided to take advantage of the marketing opportunities afforded by the popularity of such toys.

Other licensed characters include the popular Beatrix Potter tales, the first of which was entitled *The Tales of Peter Rabbit*, that had initially been published by Frederick Warne in 1902. These books were subsequently encapsulated in the famous Ladybird format with series 876. Series 877 'Edward and Friends' was another featuring animated characters that had originated in a television series and which had links to licensed manufactured toys. The characters lived in 'Fabuland'® which was created using LEGO® figures. Animated space western stories, featuring Marshall Bravestarr, formed the basis of the books in series 879. Series 880 featured the character of Henry Hound.

During this period, books featuring animated film and television characters dominated the firm's publishing output. Ranges featured well known characters such as those found in series 8914 the 'Flintstones', 8916 'Bangers and Mash', 8918 'Batman', 8920 'David the Gnome', 893 'Teddy Ruxpin', 894 'Superman' and 896 'Rupert the Bear', for example. In a blatant attempt at capitalising on the film industry, series 8612 was entitled 'Book of the Film' and featured such titles as *Chicken Run*, *Truckers* and *Piglet's Big Movie* amongst others. At the end of the decade, the firm's

best-selling titles included *The Snowman* by Raymond Briggs based upon the popular animated film, priced at 90p.<sup>22</sup>

In 1989, the firm introduced a range of paperback books aptly entitled 'Paperbird'. This imprint comprised a series of 16 books aimed at children over 8 years old. Although still containing full-colour illustrations, as in all other Ladybird titles, the fiction titles featured more substantial stories than previously published books and were aimed at children who may have 'grown out of Ladybirds'.<sup>23</sup> In a departure from tradition, previously well-known authors had been commissioned for the fiction books. The imprint additionally featured some non-fiction titles including history volumes such as *The Georgians* and *On the Trail of The Tudors in Britain*. With an average print run of 20,000, these paperback books were printed under contract for Ladybird Books Ltd, by Bemrose.<sup>24</sup> The reason for these not being printed on the premises is unclear. However, the entire printing and production operation was highly automated, including the case making, and it was probably more cost effective to pay another printer specialising in the production of paperback books to manufacture them.

A major change in book publishing throughout the decade had been the move toward purchasing rights to publish books associated with popular branded commodities in order to capitalise on new opportunities. By gaining specific rights in specific markets to the exclusive use of a brand, competition is eliminated and profits are protected. Ladybird Books Ltd sought to follow this route from the 1980s onwards, a trend that continues to the present day. The brand now encompasses a wide range of such licences. (See Chapter 7 for more information on these.)

## 6.8 The Nineties

The nineties proved to be a rather difficult decade for the British printing industry. The Middle Eastern export markets had been hit by unrest in the Persian Gulf, changing technology had led to the demise of those who had failed to invest in new equipment, and recession had resulted in late payments by creditors of many firms

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<sup>22</sup>'Ladybird – low profile, high sales', *The Bookseller*, 10th March, 1989.

<sup>23</sup>'Ladybird – the first 50 years', *The Bookseller*, 20th July, 1990, p. 183.

<sup>24</sup>'Ladybird flies home', *Printing World*, 13th March, 1991, p. 22.

forcing them into liquidation.<sup>25</sup> Printing was increasingly being undertaken abroad, particularly in South-East Asia, where labour costs were far cheaper than in Britain.

The decade began well for Ladybird Books Ltd as annual book sales had, reportedly, reached 30 million copies and the company's annual turnover was £16m.<sup>26</sup> A visit to the company by HRH The Princess of Wales, in 1990, gave staff a positive morale boost and provided a good marketing opportunity for the brand. The occasion was planned to coincide with celebrations marking the fiftieth anniversary of the standard format Ladybird book. However, during the next year as the global economy slowed, the period became increasingly difficult for such companies as Ladybird Books Ltd. The printing industry was particularly affected and as both publisher and printer, the firm did not remain unaffected by these external factors and was forced into making cutbacks. This resulted in staff redundancies at the beginning of 1991 when 54 of the 300 staff lost their jobs.<sup>27</sup> Despite this, they were hailed as a good example of a company able to adapt to the situation. Referring to the firm's recent export initiative W. Pincus Jaspert wrote of the firm, 'An example of market exploitation and the ability to remain flexible and responsive is Ladybird Book publisher's response to a crisis.'<sup>28</sup>

Ladybird Books Ltd continued to publish hundreds of titles covering a diverse range of genres, as in previous decades. Sales figures were helped by the large numbers of books being exported (for which they won an award) which provided additional income alongside sales to UK retailers. (See Chapter 4 for export information.)

In 1991, managing director Malcolm Kelley was replaced by Anthony Forbes Watson who made sweeping changes to the appointment of key personnel (see Chapter 2).

The new management team instigated a market research project to find ways in which to move the brand forward. Keen to build upon the firm foundations of a brand that had endured for generations, directors stated, in a brochure produced in 1993, that,

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<sup>25</sup>'The lowdown on European markets', *American Printer*, Vol. 207, Issue No. 5, p. 94.

<sup>26</sup>'Ladybird – the first 50 years', *The Bookseller*, 20th July, 1990, p. 183.

<sup>27</sup>'54 book workers lose jobs', *Leicester Mercury*, 13th March, 1991.

<sup>28</sup>W. Pincus Jaspert, 'The lowdown on European markets', *American Printer*, Vol. 207, Issue No. 5, p. 94.

'For children and parents, Ladybird books are an intrinsic part of growing up. Sales in the last 25 years, exceeding 450 million copies, have developed an unparalleled level of consumer awareness and affection for the brand.'<sup>29</sup>

For the company, the rest of the decade was spent in much the same way as the previous one in that books were produced in a wide variety of formats, upon a wide range of subjects, aimed at babies up to children of primary school age. In addition, educational publishing formed an important part of the business and this was expanded during the decade. (See Chapter 8 for more information regarding educational publishing.) However, the brand image was modernised and new markets were sought with the extension of licensing deals.

A major feature of the decade was the acquisition of the prestigious Disney licence in 1991. Books associated with Walt Disney have long had the capacity to produce high sales. Allen Lane had published a sixpenny edition of Walt Disney's *Three Little Pigs* in 1934 for Woolworth's which had sold over 130,000 copies in a year.<sup>30</sup> This was an extremely important coup for the company as the initial deal provided for the sole UK rights to publish Disney books for young children, up to a retail price of £3.<sup>31</sup> The deal was subsequently revised to include books up to a ceiling price of £10.<sup>32</sup> The Disney multimedia corporation produced films, videos and a wide range of associated merchandise with multimillion pounds of worldwide sales. It was considered the biggest children's brand in the world and, therefore, the deal provided potential for mass market publishing to an established audience. From 1991 until 2006 when the deal ended, millions of copies of Ladybird books featuring Disney characters were published and sold, taking full advantage of the lucrative Disney licensing contract. This was a significant step towards the sales success that the firm enjoyed throughout the 1990s.

Alongside the books produced under the Disney deal, the company continued to publish the kinds of books for which they had become well known. Following the market research, the company had concluded that the brand was associated with

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<sup>29</sup>Ladybird brochure (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1993).

<sup>30</sup>Linda Lloyd Jones, *Fifty Years of Penguin Books* (Penguin Books Ltd, 1985), p. 17.

<sup>31</sup>'Ladybird books a place with Disney', *Leicester Mercury*, 2nd June, 1992.

<sup>32</sup>'Ladybird on the wing', *The Bookseller*, 13th November, 1992, p. 1498.

'quality, reliability, trust and friendliness'.<sup>33</sup> In order to capitalise on this, the firm re-launched its core bestselling backlist which had been the subject of a thorough redesign in an attempt to firmly re-establish the brand. The rebranding exercise extended to all subsequent new series which were to feature the redesigned logo (see Chapter 4 for the logo design). New book series were continually being created to add to the list, including many titles for the younger reader such as series 901 which were simply new editions of traditional best-selling titles such as *Telling the Time*, *ABC* and *Counting*. Series 921, again, involved simple books for younger children such as *A is for Apple* and *Shapes and Colours*. Series 922 entitled 'Stories for Under Fives' was similarly targeted at the younger reader as was series 928. Series 916, for preschool children featured simple picture word books. The 'Toddlers' series 941 catered similarly for the younger market as did 9417 'Two Minute Tales' and 980 'Animal Funtime'. Traditional tales featured in series 9312 'Favourite Tales' and also in series 9420 'Ladybird Classics'.

The main feature of the publishing output of the decade was one of creating books that took full advantage of the strong branding force of television and film characters together with other licensed characters. For example, series 904 LEGO® 'Pirates' comprised books based on characters from the popular range of toys, whilst series 906 'Spiderman', series 908 'What-a-Mess', series 917 'Snoopy', 918 'Garfield' and 'Dennis the Menace' series 9333 all featured well known characters that had gained their popularity from non-book forms of media.

By the mid-1990s the publishing output was being created by four distinct editorial teams, each responsible for the different genres of books. One team dealt with the licensed characters including Disney, another produced the non-fiction titles, a further team created all the books aimed at babies and toddlers, whilst the largest team was dedicated to books aimed at teaching children to read. Freelance authors and illustrators would provide the relevant texts and illustrations based on a synopsis created by the editorial teams. The artwork would then be scanned and placed by designers into the book template created on computers using a Windows operating system with Quark XPress software. Editors would work on the text placed into the

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<sup>33</sup>Ladybird brochure (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1993).

book template, proofs were printed and, once all had been approved, the books would be printed and bound on the premises as had been the case for decades.<sup>34</sup> Desktop publishing had revolutionised the book publishing industry for much time was saved in the whole process, especially on the typesetting and proofreading tasks.

## **6.9 Alternative Media**

Although primarily producing printed books, the company did venture into the production of other forms of media. Keen to capitalise on all market opportunities, decisions were taken throughout the decades to produce material using the emergent technologies.

Since the 1950s, Wills and Hepworth Ltd had explored the use of additional forms of media. Having achieved a modicum of success with their film strips, company directors sought to include new forms of technology in order to expand their potential audience. Keen to capitalise on opportunities for selling to the education sector, Ladybird Books Ltd diversified into using other forms of presenting their material. In the early 1970s, in collaboration with the Slide Company of London, they reproduced the illustrations from a selection of their books using a 35mm slide format. The package included a ring binder with a copy of the actual book placed in a flap at the end together with the slides in transparent plastic wallets.<sup>35</sup> By the early 1980s a great number of titles continued to be produced in film strip format. These included a few fiction titles alongside the majority of the non-fiction standard format books in print at the time.

During the mid-1980s Ladybird books were packaged with corresponding audio tapes produced in collaboration with Pickwick International Ltd which was also owned by the Pearson Group. The 'Puddle Lane' reading scheme launched in 1985 included audio cassette tapes in addition to the more traditional printed format. It was not until the 1990s, however, that Ladybird Books Ltd began to produce an integrated product whereby packs including the book in printed form as well as the audio version were published. Several titles, including those for use as ELT materials, emerged in audio

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<sup>34</sup>Observations by author as employee of Ladybird Books Ltd, 1995–1996.

<sup>35</sup>A description of the slides appears on the collectors' website:

<http://www.easyontheeye.net/ladybird/items/slides.htm> [site accessed 25th April 2007]



format with cassette tapes being used until 2003 by which time the medium was becoming outmoded and replaced with CD-ROMs.

Ladybird Books produced a small number of titles on video tape. As with the audio tapes, these were produced in collaboration with Pickwick International Ltd. In the 1980s video tapes were packaged alongside their corresponding books in order to maximise sales. A handful of titles were packaged with corresponding sign language videos. Chase Video Productions reproduced the texts using British Sign Language and the books were sold as an integral part of the package.

With the introduction of CD-ROM technology, cassettes were replaced with CD-ROMs. From 2003 onwards a number of titles were produced in a format that included a book with corresponding CD-ROM. Series chosen for the inclusion of CD-ROMs tended to be either those that were used to teach children how to read such as, series 777 'Read it Yourself' and 'Phonics', or those with longer stories for children to listen to, 'Ladybird Classics' and 'Ladybird Tales'.

### **6.10 Closure**

The decade ended on a much less positive note than it had begun for the Ladybird brand. It was announced in the summer of 1998 that Penguin UK was to take over the management of Ladybird Books Ltd. Having already been moved into the Penguin Group following Pearson's disassembly of Longman, this was the next step in its integration. By autumn of the same year, a separate announcement revealed the news that the Loughborough premises were to be closed down. This was finally put into effect on 1st April, 1999 much to the distress of its 210 employees and those living in the local area.

As an employer throughout many decades, the company had provided local people not only with employment but also a way of life. Staff had continued to enjoy the benefits of the firm's social club up until its closure. Sporting events and facilities including a netball club, aerobics sessions and snooker had been provided by the firm.<sup>36</sup> Other social activities had included trips to France, charity fun days and

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<sup>36</sup>Lucy Cole, 'Great to work in the book trade', *The Loughborough Echo*, 3rd November, 2006, p. 20.

Christmas nights out.<sup>37</sup> Staff had also benefited from the firm's acquisition of the Disney licence for private screenings of the Disney films had been shown at the town's local cinema for employees and their families to attend.<sup>38</sup>

The company was well regarded as an employer and many former staff members remember their working days with happiness. For example, Wendy Hallam, who worked in the trade office from 1977 to 1989 says that 'she had some of the best times of her life' at Ladybird Books.<sup>39</sup> Lesley White, who was employed by the firm for a decade, spent the majority of her time working in the bindery before moving on to the despatch area. She describes her positive experience stating, 'My time at Ladybird was one of the most memorable work places that I have ever worked in.'<sup>40</sup> Many of the firm's employees had spent their whole working lives with the company.

With staff made redundant, the plant and premises were sold off and the remnants of the business that had endured for over a century were finally gone. The brand had been acquired and was to carry on into the future but the home of the Ladybird book was no longer in existence.

The following chapter charts the company's progress from the point at which the operation moved out of Loughborough. As an imprint owned alongside many other publishing brands, its future was to enter a different realm.

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<sup>37</sup>Lucy Cole, 'Another chapter in Ladybird Books', *The Loughborough Echo*, 20th October, 2006, p. 21.

<sup>38</sup>Observations by author as employee of Ladybird Books Ltd, 1995–1996.

<sup>39</sup>Wendy Hallam in: 'Great to work in the book trade', *Loughborough Echo*, 3rd November, 2006, p. 20.

<sup>40</sup>Lesley White in: 'Another chapter in Ladybird Books', *Loughborough Echo*, 20th October, 2006, p. 21.

## Chapter 7

### The Ladybird Brand (1999 to 2009)

#### 7.1 Change of Address

With the closure of the company's Loughborough premises in April 1999, the printing publisher called Ladybird Books Ltd ceased to exist. The new name of Ladybird Books was registered with Companies House on 9th April, 1999 and the registered address was filed as 39, Stoney Street, Lace Market, Nottingham. Whilst a small editorial team was retained by Penguin and based in the Nottingham offices, the books were published and marketed from the company's headquarters in London, and printing was contracted out to alternative printers.<sup>1</sup> The valuable Ladybird brand had been moved from its Loughborough roots and placed into the much more corporate environment of its new cosmopolitan address at 80, Strand, London.

With the incorporation of Ladybird into the Penguin Group, there emerged two distinct publishing groups within the famous Ladybird brand. The 'home learning team' was to build upon the brand's strengths as a reliable educational publisher, whilst the 'popular culture team' focused upon the growing trend for publishing books based upon the licensed characters that had already formed a major part of the Ladybird library of titles.<sup>2</sup> From this point onwards the long-standing tradition of providing each series with a number alongside its name ceased completely. Publication of several new series followed the decision to subdivide the publishing responsibilities. These included, 'Animal Allsorts', 'First Favourite Tales', 'Learn with Barney Fun Books' and 'Let's Play'. These series were created by the former team whilst members of the latter team were to concentrate their efforts on titles relating to Disney's 'Tarzan', 'Winnie the Pooh' and 'A Bug's Life'. Many of these books were created and published in order to capitalise upon the release of Disney films at cinemas around the UK.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Harry Martin, 'New plan for Ladybird site', *Leicester Mercury*, 12th July, 1999.

<sup>2</sup>'Moving ahead with Ladybird', *The Ladybird Books Newsletter*, 19th March, 1999, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

## 7.2 The New Millennium

With the celebration of 60 years of the famous Ladybird book in the year 2000, there emerged an increased subsequent surge of interest in the earlier titles. At the turn of the millennium, prices of certain titles doubled and collectors' websites, together with online auction sites have within the last few years continually pushed up prices. Exhibitions of the original illustrations from some of the earlier books have been undertaken in recent years resulting in successful sales of some of the artwork. In 2001, for example, Harry Wingfield held an exhibition of his original artworks from Ladybird books. The featured watercolour paintings sold for between £500 and £1000 each.<sup>4</sup> Another touring exhibition of Ladybird art was organised in 2002. This featured the original artworks from Martin Aitchison, John Berry and Harry Wingfield that had formed the distinctive illustrations of various Ladybird series over several decades.<sup>5</sup> By 2004, prices of original artwork had soared. It was reported prior to an additional exhibition of work by John Berry and Martin Aitchison, held in London in the spring of 2004, that prices were 'starting somewhere in the region of £1,500 per illustration.'<sup>6</sup>

A multitude of new series capitalising on the Ladybird brand continued to be created during the early years of the new millennium. Following the two distinctive paths, books for 'home learning' and those based on 'popular culture', new titles emerged in many different formats.<sup>7</sup> Most series within the home learning genre were aimed at the baby, toddler and preschool children's market. However, the new generation of school children have become increasingly brand conscious. Thus, once their horizons have been broadened beyond their immediate home environment after the age of five years, they become targeted as consumers. Therefore, any published material for those children of school age is becoming increasingly based on high profile characters from popular culture.

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<sup>4</sup>Catherine Milner, 'Ladybird artist sells 'Peter and Jane' pictures', *Daily Telegraph*, 2nd December, 2001, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup>Cressida Connolly and Mathew Connolly, *The art of Ladybird Books* (Cheltenham: Cheltenham Borough Council, 2002).

<sup>6</sup>'Nuclear family: a Ladybird book illustration by Martin Aitchison', *The Guardian*, 28th February, 2004.

<sup>7</sup>Michael Herridge, 'Moving ahead with Ladybird', *The Ladybird Books Newsletter*, 19th March, 1999, p. 1.

Publishing output to emerge under the Ladybird brand following the new millennium included many books for the very young including series such as, 'My First Board Book', 'A Story to Share', 'Little Workmates', 'Baby Board Books', 'Animal Stories', 'Snuggle-up Stories', 'Baby's Picture Word Books', 'First Skills', 'Big Sticker Activity', 'First Picture Words', 'First Fairytale Boards', 'Rhythm and Rhyme', 'Baby Touch', 'I Can...', 'Busy Town', 'Start Nursery', 'Touch and Feel', 'Touch and Sing', 'Touch and Learn', 'Touch and Trace', 'Toddler Talk', 'Sounds and Pictures' and 'Little Red Tractor'. Fiction for older children was the focus of 'Ladybird Tales' and 'Indian Classic Tales' series. Educational books included the 'Help for Homework', 'Success at School', 'Start School' and 'So Smart' series. Licensed character titles such as 'Angelina Ballerina', 'Wallace and Gromit', 'Lil Bratz', 'Scooby Doo', 'Play-Doh', 'Peppa Pig', 'Meg and Mog', 'Koala Brothers' and 'Sunny Patch' continued to play a major role in the brand's output.

With the amalgamation of the Frederick Warne and Ladybird lists in 2002 (see Chapter 2 for more information about the creation of this new publishing division), each list gained access to shared rights and marketing resources. A new range of non-fiction learning titles was launched and some core categories such as 'Ladybird Classics' and 'Topsy and Tim' titles were reinvented. Other new formats for activity and novelty books including such items as chalk boards and jigsaw puzzle books were introduced. The simultaneous launch of a new phonics reading scheme, 'Rhythm and Rhyme' aimed at children aged three to seven years together with a 'Start School' series comprising interactive titles to teach basic skills such as tying shoe laces, ensured that most subject areas were covered.<sup>8</sup>

The traditional Ladybird format was deliberately chosen for the newest addition to the 'How it Works' series. Incorporating traditional watercolour illustrations, *Shopping on the Internet* was published in 2000 under the Ladybird brand. The book's contents include an historical look at trading practices and the technological advances used to create computers, before introducing practical instructions to demonstrate how to set up a computer and use the internet in order to make purchases.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>'Ladybird and Warne link up', *The Bookseller*, 19th July, 2002.

<sup>9</sup>Ben Russell, 'Ladybird books join digital age with guide to shopping on Net', *The Independent*, 28th October, 2000.

In an attempt to further develop international sales, the company published a book plus CD phonics package under the Ladybird brand for the teaching of English to the overseas market. The series comprised 30 titles aimed at both UK and international buyers.<sup>10</sup>

In 2003, it was reported that a successful bid had been made for a seven-year publishing contract for Ladybird titles to tie in with a new preschool television series. Launched in April, 2003, the 'Boobah' series was produced by the same company that had already enjoyed considerable success with its 'Teletubbies' series. The deal gave the Ladybird brand the rights to publish in English-speaking countries except for the United States of America. Ladybird's publicity officer revealed that, 'A science and learning element will be reflected in Ladybird's board and activity books.'<sup>11</sup>

Having gained the exclusive contract to publish Disney books for the UK market in 1991, the deal came to an end after fifteen years. In 2004 it was announced that another children's book publisher, Parragon based in Bath, was to succeed Penguin as its main publishing partner when the contract came to an end in 2006. This was a considerable loss to the Ladybird imprint as it was said at the time that 'Disney books now form the backbone of its Ladybird list.'<sup>12</sup>

The 2005 catalogue indicates that the Ladybird brand was still going strong with hundreds of titles in print. Featured publications were grouped into relevant genres: books for babies and toddlers, story books, 'Topsy and Tim' and 'Spot' titles, activity books, 'Learn to Read', 'Learn at Home' and licensing.

The beginning of 2008 marked the appointment of a new leader for the Ladybird brand. Stephanie Barton, a long-standing Ladybird employee, had remained loyal to the brand for several years having worked for Ladybird Books Ltd at the Loughborough premises for many years.<sup>13</sup> The chief executive officer of the UK

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<sup>10</sup>'Ladybird unveils plans for growth', *The Bookseller*, 27th December, 2002.

<sup>11</sup>'Teletubbies' creator launches next show', *The Bookseller*, 21st February, 2003, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup>'Parragon to Partner Disney', *The Bookseller*, 5th November, 2004, p. 5.

<sup>13</sup>'Sally Floyer announces her retirement', Press release, London 30th November, 2007, <http://pressoffice.penguin.co.uk/static/cs/uk/3/downloads/releases2007/SALLYFLOYERANNOUNCE-SHERRETIREMENT.pdf> [site accessed 18th September, 2008].



division of the Penguin Group said, of Ms Barton, 'In Stephanie Barton, we have a wonderful new leader to take over and drive the business towards future success.'<sup>14</sup>

A major rebranding exercise was undertaken at the beginning of 2008. The traditional hardback format for which the company had become renowned was completely overhauled. Named Ladybird minis, the books featured revamped covers and content whilst the price point was dropped 20 per cent. A new logo incorporating the word 'mini' and featuring the current ladybird creature was introduced to the series of books (see Figure 29 in Chapter 4 for an illustration of the logo). This marketing and public relations exercise followed a three-year decline in sales. The first sixteen titles were published in March 2008 with another 56 titles joining the range in June and September.<sup>15</sup>

An extensive marketing initiative included a nationwide competition to win a Mini Cooper car with independent retailers being offered branded backpacks for those customers purchasing two, or more, titles at one time. Advertisements were created to target consumers via parenting magazines whilst additional promotions with other companies were also planned.<sup>16</sup>

It was announced in the spring of 2008 that the Ladybird brand was amongst others owned by the parent company considered for inclusion in the publishing programme of titles associated with the 'Star Wars' brand. Five titles, associated with the *The Clone Wars* were to be published in August.<sup>17</sup> The acquisition of new licensing deals was immensely important to the company since losing the Disney licensing deal in order to retain a lucrative part of the children's book market.

The summer of 2008 saw the launch of a new Ladybird initiative: a website<sup>18</sup> aimed directly at fathers. Its purpose is to encourage fathers to share the reading experience with their children. Launched, significantly, on Father's Day, the website features reading tips, recommends a 'book of the week' and encourages fathers to spend ten

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Alison Flood, 'Mini adventure for Ladybird', *The Bookseller*, 25th January, 2008.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Anna Richardson, 'Penguin in Star Wars plans', *The Bookseller*, 7th May, 2008.

<sup>18</sup><http://readingdads.campaignserver.co.uk/site> [site accessed 21st September, 2009]

minutes each day engaged in reading to their children.<sup>19</sup> This much more up-to-date approach contrasts with an advertisement from 1978 (See Chapter 6), which specified the mother only as the parent likely to be the participant in a shared reading activity.

In 2008, it was reported in a trade journal that, 'From autumn the majority of new children's fiction titles will carry a design near the bar code specifying whether the title is suitable for 5+, 7+, 9+, 11+ or 13+teens, with the scheme being introduced to reprints from April'.<sup>20</sup> It had long been argued that consumers need guidance when buying children's books in order to assess their suitability for a particular age of child. Others, however, argue that children's reading ability differs greatly and that the guidance may not be relevant at best and may prove restrictive at worst. This debate has raged for several years with Ladybird Books Ltd reacting to customer feedback by featuring appropriate age group information on some of its educational books in 1998. (See Chapter 8 for a more in-depth discussion.) Whilst not employing specific age branding such as in the 2008 initiative, a similar form of guidance had appeared on some of the Ladybird non-fiction books since the early 1950s. For example, one such non-fiction title first published in 1953 states on the front inside flap of the dust jacket, 'A book for children of 8 years of age and younger.'<sup>21</sup> Printed on the front inside flap of the dust jacket on another non-fiction book first published in 1956 are the words, 'A book for children up to the age of ten.'<sup>22</sup> Many subsequent non-fiction publications, especially educational titles, featured age guidance information. However, this initiative has been less prevalent on fiction titles. There have been fewer instances where Ladybird fiction titles have been published where the specific age of the target reader has been clearly defined. In the late 1980s, a series of books with seven titles from *Storytime for 1 year olds* to *Storytime for 7 year olds* were published by the company with a similar range of titles published in 1994. In the late 1990s another range of story books including *Duck Stories for 2 Year Olds*, *Dinosaur Stories for 5 Year Olds* and *Lion Stories for 4 Year Olds* were produced whilst more recently, in 2008, more such books were published including *Stories for Two Year Olds* to *Stories for Five Year Olds*.

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<sup>19</sup>'Getting fathers reading', *The Bookseller*, 20th June, 2008, p.12.

<sup>20</sup>'Guiding children's choices', *The Bookseller*, 25th April, 2008, p. 23.

<sup>21</sup>Lucy Diamond, *The Shepherd Boy of Bethlehem* (Loughborough: Wills & Hepworth Ltd, 1953), front inside flap of dust jacket.

<sup>22</sup>L. Du Garde Peach, *King Alfred the Great* (Loughborough: Wills & Hepworth Ltd, 1956), front inside flap of dust jacket.

The Ladybird brand, long known for innovation and the embracement of new technologies, moved into the digital era in 2008. It formed a partnership with a French pioneering digital company, Violet in order to bring some of its traditional tales to a whole new generation. The device, called the Nabaztag Rabbit, is connected to the internet and transmits data to users by reading the books' content aloud. Ladybird Tales were chosen for the partnership with such titles being made available for downloading from the internet.<sup>23</sup> The Rabbit is 'WiFi-enabled' and identifies the book by way of a 'Ztamp' attached to the book under its cover. This allows the Rabbit to retrieve the story from the Violet server and to subsequently read the story aloud. Children can move through the chapters by moving the Rabbit's ears. The initial purchase of the device costs £115 and includes three Ladybird Tales. Other stories can be purchased individually online.<sup>24</sup>

Recent innovations include A Ladybird MySpace<sup>25</sup> page which has been set up together with an online blog<sup>26</sup> for fans of the books to communicate with each other. These provide links to several other websites in order that users may access a wide range of Ladybird-related information.

### 7.3 Nostalgia Publishing

As Ladybird books have been published for many decades, they have been read by several generations. Having assisted many primary school children in the acquisition of their early literacy skills, the company's books have helped to create many lifelong book lovers. Those readers were keen to pass on their positive experiences to their offspring and the Ladybird book began to take on an evocative role. Even as early as the 1970s the company received letters from mothers requesting 'copies of books they had known and loved as children, to pass on to their own.'<sup>27</sup>

Whilst Ladybird books were being published in their distinctive standard format, they were simply reprinted for years, sometimes decades, often with little or no change to

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<sup>23</sup>'Ladybird and Violet to tell digital stories', *The Bookseller*, 15th August, 2008, p.8.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>[www.myspace.com/ladybird\\_books](http://www.myspace.com/ladybird_books) [site accessed 15th January, 2009].

<sup>26</sup><http://vintageladybirdbooks.blogspot.com> [site accessed 23rd September, 2009].

<sup>27</sup>Paul Medlicott, 'A 52 page package', *New Society*, 13th February, 1975, p. 399.

their content and the same books remained in print for the different generations to share. However, as trends and formats became more transient, reprints became fewer.

It was not until recently that the firm had shown any desire to take advantage of the growing nostalgic interest in the books. However, a new range of books aimed at adults, began to exploit this growing mood for reminiscing about childhood experiences. The first of these, published in 2007 was a hardback book entitled *Boys and Girls: A Ladybird book of childhood*. Its 200 pages featured a wide range of images from standard format Ladybird books published over the decades. This was soon followed by two additional titles also aimed at adults. *The Vintage Ladybird Box for Boys* and a parallel title for girls were published in early 2008 aimed at the gift market as Father's day and Mother's day purchases. With a retail price of £12.99, the slip-cases contain a total of six books, each a facsimile of the original. A recent project to come to fruition is that of selling the iconic Ladybird books' images as art prints or canvases. A website was launched in 2008, which allows consumers to browse a database of over 4,000 images from original Ladybird artwork and to order these directly from the website.<sup>28</sup>

In addition, a vintage ladybird website has been set up to fully exploit this particular market.<sup>29</sup> Recognising the growth in nostalgia purchasing and the marketing potential in using the 'Ladybird' brand, it is now being utilised as a 'vintage' brand on items other than books. A specific company entitled 'Vintage Ladybird Ltd' has been set up by the parent group with a dedicated website. The iconic images are now printed on such items as lunch boxes, mirrors, badges, chalkboards, greetings cards and wrapping paper, coasters, aprons, magnets, clocks, stationery, tins and badges.

At the beginning of 2009, Ladybird Books issued a press release announcing the acquisition of a new licensing deal for 'GoGo's Crazy Bones'. These are 'miniature

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<sup>28</sup><http://www.ladybirdprints.com/index.php> [site accessed 13th June, 2008].

<sup>29</sup>[www.vintageladybird.com](http://www.vintageladybird.com) [site accessed 15th January, 2009].

figurines which kids trade to complete their collection.<sup>30</sup> The brand is to be attached to two new books, *Gogo's Official Guide* and *Gogo's Activity Book*.<sup>31</sup>

The Ladybird continues to flourish around the world. Whilst Ladybird no longer publish their titles in foreign languages themselves, they do offer licences to any foreign publishers keen to publish translated editions.<sup>32</sup> However, English language books from the Ladybird brand continue to be exported outside the United Kingdom. These are sold and distributed either directly from the company's website or, via other offices of the Penguin Group in Europe. Additionally, they are available via distributors in India, Pakistan, Nigeria, Singapore, Malaysia, Phillippines, South America, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and Thailand. In fact, access to a Ladybird book continues to be global.<sup>33</sup> The iconic Ladybird brand continues to thrive and it is evident that, for the parent company, its acquisition was extremely valuable.

Ladybird books have long been associated with the educational sector of publishing and this continues to the present day. Their role and progression within a wider educational context is discussed in the following chapter.

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<sup>30</sup>'Kids are going Gaga for Gogo's Crazy Bones', [http://www.ladybird.co.uk/aboutus/press\\_pdfs/Penguin\\_GoGo\\_press\\_release.pdf](http://www.ladybird.co.uk/aboutus/press_pdfs/Penguin_GoGo_press_release.pdf) [site accessed 2nd February, 2009]

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup><http://www.ladybird.co.uk/ladybirdworldwide/overseascontacts.html> [site accessed 24th March, 2009]

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

## Chapter 8

# Literacy and Education

### 8.1 Britain and Literacy

Throughout the centuries, various methods of teaching children to read have been deemed the most appropriate at various periods by a variety of people and organisations. Children were often taught to read in order to be able to access the Bible, whilst additional texts were also used for moral instruction. Some primers incorporated illustrations of direct relevance to the text as a means of providing visual clues, whilst others assisted the young reader by clearly identifying each syllable. Devices including the use of phonic recognition, text repetition and the controlled introduction of new vocabulary have all been utilised in an attempt at improving the nation's literacy rates.<sup>1</sup>

Forster's 1870 Education Act allowed for the provision of elementary education throughout Britain<sup>2</sup> which, with the passing of the 1891 Fees Act, effectively became free of charge.<sup>3</sup> With free access to elementary schooling, the literacy of the nation's five million elementary school children<sup>4</sup> was set to improve and publishers were afforded an opportunity to provide the necessary texts. Provision of secondary education was undertaken by Local Education Authorities (LEAs) from 1902 when responsibility was passed from school boards to the newly established authorities with schools receiving government funding.<sup>5</sup> This measure further expanded the market available to those publishers keen to become involved in the production of all manner of educational resources.

Sir William Beveridge's report<sup>6</sup> in 1942 advocated that the government should provide for the nation's welfare, and that included education. Educational reform

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<sup>1</sup>Roy Yglesias, Education and publishing in transition, in Asa Briggs, ed. *Essays in the history of printing in celebration of the 250th anniversary of the House of Longman 1724–1974*, Longman Group Ltd (London) 1974, p. 370.

<sup>2</sup>Gillian Sutherland, Education, in F.M.L. Thompson, ed, *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750–1950*, Vol. 3, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge) 1990, p. 142.

<sup>3</sup>Sutherland, 1990, p. 145.

<sup>4</sup>Sutherland, 1990, p. 146.

<sup>5</sup>Sutherland, 1990, p. 152.

<sup>6</sup>Sir William Beveridge, 'Beveridge Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services', (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1942).



followed the resultant Butler 1944 Education Act<sup>7</sup> which required local education authorities to provide universal free schooling for young people up to the age of 15.<sup>8</sup> Subsequent additional funding enabled resources, invariably books, to be purchased from those publishers embarking upon educational publishing programmes. Wills and Hepworth Ltd were involved with both the printing of children's books as well as the sales of books to schools during this period and were, therefore, familiar with the funding available for such texts. With such trade knowledge it is not surprising that the firm began to publish an increasing number of non-fiction titles for educational use from the early 1950s onwards.

The post-war baby boom followed by another in the 1960s meant that the number of children receiving a primary school education remained high throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The government made provision for sufficient resources by increased funding for school libraries.<sup>9</sup> This was the perfect opportunity for such publishers as Wills and Hepworth who took great advantage of this valuable market, selling directly into schools. In fact, by 1974 a quarter of the company's business was attributed to sales to schools.<sup>10</sup>

The acquisition of literacy was, obviously, an important factor in improving the education of the nation. In the mid 1970s, the British government commissioned an investigation into the teaching of reading throughout the country's primary schools. The resultant Bullock Report, based on a large-scale survey of 2,000 schools in England, was published in 1975.<sup>11</sup> It concluded that, 'There is no one method, medium, approach, device, or philosophy that holds the key to the process of learning to read.'<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Education Act 1944: An Act to reform the law relating to education in England and Wales, 3rd August, 1944. <http://www.statutelaw.gov.uk/content.aspx> [site accessed 23rd September, 2009]

<sup>8</sup>David Childs, *Britain Since 1939*, Macmillan Press Ltd (London) 1995, p. 59.

<sup>9</sup>Kimberley Reynolds, in Kimberley Reynolds and Nicholas Tucker (eds) *Children's Book Publishing in Britain Since 1945* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1998), p. 22.

<sup>10</sup>Paul Medlicott, 'A 52 page package', *New Society*, 13th February, 1975, p. 400.

<sup>11</sup>The Bullock Report (1975: A language for life. Report of the Committee of Enquiry appointed by the Secretary of State for Education and Science under the Chairmanship of Sir Alan Bullock FBA (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1975).

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

Continually changing attitudes towards education have influenced the types of educational material produced by publishers. This is particularly the case for those resources used in the teaching of literacy skills. Over the years, a few publishing companies have embraced this market, providing a wide range of 'reading schemes' with which to teach the nation's children to read. One such scheme was devised by Wills and Hepworth Ltd in 1964, but it was always maintained that the scheme was not to be taught in isolation and was just one component in the teaching of reading. When interviewed in 1975, the author of the scheme, William Murray stated that,

'People seem to assume that children will read nothing but Ladybird scheme books; but that was never our intention, nor is it our experience.'<sup>13</sup>

In fact, as will be seen in the diversity of the company's publishing programme from the 1960s to the present day, as documented in this chapter, provision had been made within the list for a wide range of material specifically for the teaching of reading.

The 1988 Education Reform Act saw the introduction of the National Curriculum, a prescriptive way of teaching aimed at providing a more uniform education system throughout the country.<sup>14</sup> Over the next few years, this afforded children's book publishing companies a wide variety of publishing opportunities with materials specifically linked to the National Curriculum. Ladybird Books Ltd seized this opportunity by publishing a range of such teaching materials. An example of the firm's commitment to such ventures can be seen with their recruitment of child education practitioners, Jill Harker and Geraldine Taylor. They collaboratively produced such titles as: *Learn Cursive Writing*, *Learn Reading Skills* and *Learn Phonic Spelling* for the National Curriculum English Stage One.

In 1997, the National Literacy Strategy was implemented throughout the country following research indicating that many children had not acquired the necessary literacy skills at primary school level. With the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy it was recognised that synthetic phonics<sup>15</sup> schemes had proved beneficial in

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<sup>13</sup>William Murray quoted in Paul Medlicott, 'A 52 page package', *New Society*, 13th February, 1975, p. 400.

<sup>14</sup>Education Reform Act, [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1988/ukpga\\_19880040\\_en\\_1](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1988/ukpga_19880040_en_1) [site accessed 27th November, 2008]

<sup>15</sup>Definition of synthetic phonics: All 'phonics' involves teaching letter-sound correspondences. The adjective 'synthetic' refers to the fact that children are taught to 'synthesise' (i.e. put together or build

teaching children to read. However, although advocated by Jim Rose in a report in 1997, it was not until 2006 that the government recommended that synthetic phonics schemes should be utilised as the prime teaching method for literacy. Publishers involved in the production of teaching materials had already begun to address the issue in the intervening years. Jolly Learning, for example, published a range of 'Jolly Phonics Workbooks' in the mid 1990s which 'took 6 of the top 20 positions in school text book sales over the past year [2004–2005], and the company's trade sales now exceed school sales.'<sup>16</sup> Ladybird Books Ltd had been actively involved in publishing phonics-based teaching material since 1993.

The debate regarding how best to teach children to read has raged for decades with each of the various methods having gained popularity only to find itself again out of favour only a few years later. In 2005, the Education and Skills Secretary, Ruth Kelly announced an independent review of the use of synthetic phonics in primary schools. In the same year it was announced that Ladybird would be launching a new reading series with a strong phonics component. The brand's publishing director, Stephanie Barton commented that 'Parents have always related to teaching phonics and most teachers are already using both synthetic and analytical phonics.'<sup>17</sup>

The Ladybird brand rests heavily upon its well laid foundations as a sound imprint upon which to entrust the teaching of children's literacy skills. Ladybird's 2005 brochure, entitled *For every stage of a child's development*, provides clear guidance on which books to choose and the appropriate stage at which to use them. A table appears in the brochure with the aim of informing parents as to which series would be most applicable at each age and stage of development.<sup>18</sup> This advice is also reinforced on the company's website where a comprehensive guide to the teaching of reading skills can be found.

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up) pronunciations for unfamiliar written words by translating letters into sounds and blending the sounds together ('blending = 'synthesising'), [http://www.syntheticphonics.com/synthetic\\_phonics.htm](http://www.syntheticphonics.com/synthetic_phonics.htm) [site accessed 24th September, 2009]

<sup>16</sup>'Publishers plan to develop new phonics schemes', *The Bookseller*, 17th June, 2005, p. 10.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>*For every stage of a child's development* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 2005), p. 8.

### **8.1.1 Ladybird Reading Schemes**

Since the early days of Wills and Hepworth, many Ladybird books have been produced with the key aim of teaching children the art of reading. From simple primers produced during the First World War to the elaborate Key Words Reading Scheme devised over half a century later, the firm's publishing output has consistently included books intended to introduce the key skills necessary for the acquisition of literacy in young children.

#### **8.1.1.1 Key Words Reading Scheme**

Published by Wills and Hepworth Ltd in 1964, the Key Words Reading Scheme became one of Britain's most popular reading schemes by 1974. It was the company's most significant publishing venture in its entire history. In fact, the firm made a decision to cease its commercial printing in order to concentrate its efforts on producing the large numbers of books necessary to launch the reading scheme. The commitment to such a large project meant that the firm had to print and publish 36 titles within a particularly short time in order to ensure that the scheme was adequate enough to cater for young readers' progression. By 1969 it was acknowledged by the firm that the reading scheme had played a significant role in the company's success to date. Featured in a local careers exhibition brochure, this statement by the company describes the project,

'Perhaps the most important of all Ladybird ventures so far is the Key Words Reading Scheme. This consists of thirty-six books and many supplementary items. The Ladybird scheme is rapidly becoming established as one of the leading methods of teaching reading in the schools, not only in Great Britain but throughout the Commonwealth.'<sup>19</sup>

Douglas Keen was instrumental in developing this particularly successful venture for the company. He had attended a lecture by William Murray, headmaster of a school in Cheltenham, where he had heard him explaining a method for teaching children to read. Entitled 'Keywords to Literacy' it was based on the systematic introduction of certain commonly occurring words. Keen immediately thought that the system could be used as a basis on which a reading scheme to be published by the company could

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<sup>19</sup>*Loughborough Industry and Careers Exhibition Official Handbook*, Monday, 28 April–Saturday, 3 May, 1969, Loughborough Town Hall (Loughborough: Echo Press Ltd), p. 40.

be formed. William Murray had initially shown little interest but was eventually persuaded to work as author of the books.<sup>20</sup>

The resultant Ladybird Key Words Reading Scheme was based upon research carried out by Murray, together with educational psychologist Joe McNally, from which they had established that 12 words comprise 25 per cent of spoken English.<sup>21</sup> These 12 words were identified as, 'a; and; he; I; in; is; it; of; that; the; to; was.'<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, they concluded that 100 words accounted for 50 per cent of the spoken English language. In addition to the listed 12 these were, 'about; all; an; are; as; at; back; be; been; before; big; but; by; call; came; can; come; could; did; do; down; first; for; from; get; go; had; has; have; her; here; him; his; if; into; just; like; little; look; made; make; me; more; much; must; my; new; no; not; now; off; old; on; one; only; or; our; over; other; out; right; said; see; she; so; some; their; them; then; there; they; this; two; up; want; we; well; went; were; what; when; where; which; who; will; with; you; your.'<sup>23</sup> An additional 300 words made up 75 per cent of spoken English, they had concluded. The resultant programme of reading books consisted of 36 titles, in three series (numbered 1a to 12c). These utilised the results of the research and texts were based upon the 'key' words that had been identified. The 'a' books introduce the words using a simple storybook format, the 'b' books repeat the same words but in different contexts, whilst the 'c' books introduce writing skills and phonetic training. A free booklet, entitled *Notes for Teachers*, was made available to schools. This acted as an excellent marketing tool, for in it was illustrated the complete range of books, supplementary material and the apparatus available in the scheme, as well as suggestions for basic purchase plans to accommodate differing class sizes.<sup>24</sup> The standard format that had previously proved to be such a success for almost a quarter of a century was also adopted for the books of the reading scheme. The full-colour illustrations appearing on each recto were 'designed to create a desirable attitude towards learning – by making every child *eager* to read each title.'<sup>25</sup> It has been reported that the initial artwork costs for the reading scheme, in 1964, totalled

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<sup>20</sup>George Towers, in letter to the author, March, 2003.

<sup>21</sup>J. McNally and William Murray, 'Key Words to Literacy: a basic word list for developing early reading and writing skills', (London: Schoolmaster Publishing, 1962).

<sup>22</sup>William Murray, *Teaching Reading* (Loughborough: Wills and Hepworth Ltd, 1969), p. 30.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup>Murray, 1969, inside back cover.

<sup>25</sup>Introductory text appearing on endpapers of each book in the Key Words Reading Scheme.

£25,000.<sup>26</sup> However, in the early 1970s, many of the illustrations had to be updated to reflect not only changes in fashion, but also to ensure inclusion of characters from ethnic minorities following criticism of inherent racist attitudes within children's book publishing. Similarly, the publishers were obliged to commission new illustrations in which female characters were portrayed in a more positive light when feminist critics protested that the women and girls in books of the reading scheme were always depicted in domestic and passive roles. (See Chapter 9 for more information on race and gender issues.)

The majority of the books in the Key Words Reading Scheme were illustrated by artists Harry Wingfield and Martin Aitchison. The books were never produced with dust jackets but did retain all other components of the standard format devised decades earlier and maintained throughout the previous series. Although criticised by many as being an unimaginative way of teaching reading, this particular scheme proved to be an extremely popular way of teaching basic literacy skills. In fact, the company claim that more than 90 million children have learnt to read using this particular scheme, and it currently remains in print.<sup>27</sup> The Key Words Reading Scheme was a significant commercial success for the company, and played an important part in the education of British children throughout the 1960s and 1970s in particular.

During the 1960s, sets of picture-word matching cards were published to accompany the series with each box containing six picture cards and 32 word cards to be used in conjunction with one another. Following this, in the late 1970s, the company published a series of flash cards for use by teachers and parents in assisting children with their acquisition of reading skills. The aim of the flash cards was that they were to be used in conjunction with the books from the Key Words Reading Scheme to reinforce learning.

In 1969, an accompanying handbook aimed specifically at teachers and parents as educators, was produced as an addition to the reading scheme. In its foreword, the author, William Murray, makes the extravagant claim that, 'The method of teaching

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<sup>26</sup>Emma Houghton, 'Peter and Jane hit 60', *The Times*, 9th December, 2000.

<sup>27</sup><http://www.ladybird.co.uk/outsideUK/keywords.html> [site accessed 2nd October, 2008]



reading described in the following pages is the most widely used throughout the English-speaking world.’<sup>28</sup> The handbook describes not only the Key Words Reading Scheme and ways in which to use the books but gives advice on ways in which to incorporate other methods such as the ‘sentence’ method, ‘look-say’ method, ‘whole word’ method, and the ‘phonic’ method. It advocates the use of a range of approaches to literacy teaching and stresses the importance of encouraging a love of books through shared storytelling and individual ‘reading’ for pleasure.

The Ladybird Key Words Reading Scheme grew in popularity and was in wide use by the end of the 1960s. Sales of the books grew to a remarkable level and it was reported that, by 1974, over 34 million copies had been sold.<sup>29</sup> The amazing success of the Key Words Reading Scheme was, in part, due to the ease of accessibility to the books themselves. The books were also easily available for parents to purchase as they were marketed in non-traditional book outlets such as newsagents and local corner shops. They were inexpensive, attractive and accessible and allowed parents to take an active role in the education of their children.

After a decade in publication, Ladybird’s reading scheme surpassed its competitors; in 1974, ‘Don Labon carried out a survey of reading schemes in use in West Sussex schools containing children in the five- and six-year-old age groups. Against a general background showing a greater diversification in the use of schemes, Labon noted that,

“‘Janet and John’ had dropped from first to third place in popularity, but was, however, still in use in 45 per cent of schools. What was more disturbing was that the first place in popularity had been taken by the equally obnoxious (and for the same reasons) Ladybird Keyword [sic] scheme, in use in 78 per cent of schools.’<sup>30</sup>

Labon’s disdainful attitude toward the books was shared by others. For example, they were criticised, for example, by teacher Ken Worpole who accused Ladybird of creating characters that looked as though they were from mail order catalogues, of being traditionally middle class and promoting typically middle-class values.<sup>31</sup> Whilst

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<sup>28</sup>Murray, 1969, inside front cover.

<sup>29</sup>Medlicott, 1975, p. 399.

<sup>30</sup>Don Labon, *Initial Reading Schemes – a Survey of Usage in West Sussex Primary Schools during Spring 1974*, a report issued by West Sussex County Council Education Department, Chichester, 1974. cited by Bob Dixon in *Catching Them Young: Sex, Race and Class* Pluto Press (London 1977).

<sup>31</sup>Ken Worpole, ‘Ladybird Life’, *New Society*, 23rd December, 1971.

some views of the scheme remain disparaging, there is no doubt that many children have benefited from its merits. By 1990, for example, reported sales of books from the series had reached 70 million copies.<sup>32</sup> The books are still published today and have been used to teach the rudiments of reading for several generations. The fundamental teaching methods undertaken by the scheme have, in fact, recently been exonerated by the findings of a research project. Results of a study undertaken at Warwick University's Institute of Education in 2005<sup>33</sup> indicate that the method undertaken by the Key Words Reading Scheme may have actually been a very sound way of teaching literacy. Having been criticised for many years as being a dull way to learn how to read because of its limited vocabulary, the scheme became less popular in schools which began to use more progressive methods of acquiring literacy skills. However, the government's literacy strategy 'requires children to learn 158 words by the age of 7'.<sup>34</sup> Solity and Vousden's research showed that children only need to learn the 100 most commonly used words before they can start to read books. It was advocated that, having learnt these 'key' words, children could then develop a love of reading by turning to story books in order to widen their vocabulary. This was precisely the way in which Ladybird's Key Words Reading Scheme was intended to be used when it was devised in the 1960s. Solity and Vousden concluded that 'only 16 words accounted for a quarter of written English and that children could understand 48 per cent of texts studied by learning 100 'high-frequency' words.'<sup>35</sup> This approach contradicted the government's decision advising schools to adopt the traditional synthetic phonics method.

A similar study undertaken in Australia in 1998 investigated three initial reading schemes in use in schools. By creating word lists identifying the first 50 most frequently used words occurring in books within these three schemes, this study identified 'key' words with a high level of similarity to those identified in the much earlier Key Words Reading Scheme published by Wills and Hepworth Ltd. The study

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<sup>32</sup>'Ladybird – the first 50 years', *The Bookseller*, 20th July, 1990, p. 183.

<sup>33</sup>Research undertaken by Jonathan Solity and Janet Vousden, from Warwick's Institute of Education. They analysed 900,000 words in a range of adult and children's books and two popular reading schemes used in primary schools. Their findings were published in December 2005. Reported in, Warwick Mansell, 'English decoded in 100 words' *The Times Educational Supplement*, 9th December, 2005).

<sup>34</sup>Tony Halpin, 'Why the old-style Ladybird books are word perfect', *The Times*, 9th December, 2005, p. 15.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*

concluded that 'the development of these high frequency word lists has the potential to be a useful tool for teachers.'<sup>36</sup> This fundamental principle had been adopted in all the titles of the Key Words Reading Scheme and used by many British primary schools throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

The Key Words Reading Scheme is still in print and used to teach another generation of children how to read. A booklet is currently available, entitled *Notes for Using Key Words with Ladybird*, which explains how to use the scheme and teaching suggestions. In addition, two corresponding posters, particularly useful for classroom teaching, have also been published.

### 8.1.1.2 Competitors to the Key Words Reading Scheme

By 1974, there were six main reading schemes being used in British primary schools. As a result of their popularity with teachers, each of these was chosen for a study of gender roles following an increased awareness of gender stereotyping, prompted by the feminist movement. (See Chapter 8 for further discussion on the findings of this study.)<sup>37</sup>

The main competitor to the Key Words Reading Scheme was the 'Janet and John' reading scheme. Published by James Nisbet & Co, the 'Janet and John' set of readers became extremely popular many years before Wills and Hepworth considered becoming involved in publishing books for the teaching of literacy. It was well established within British primary schools by the time the Key Words Reading Scheme was launched. First published in 1949, the scheme was 'found to be in use in 81 per cent of primary schools in a survey carried out by Dr Elizabeth Goodacre in 1968'.<sup>38</sup> The package consisted of 6 basic books, 8 extension readers, 4 workbooks, 10 comprehension cards, 32 'little books', one picture dictionary and additional items including flash cards, picture pads, word-matching cards, lotto sets etc. There were two series, one in phonic and one in look-and-say which could either be used independently or in conjunction with one another. The survey revealed that 'many

<sup>36</sup>Robin Spencer and Ian Hay, 'Initial reading schemes and their high frequency words', *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, Vol. 21, pt. 3 (1998), p. 231.

<sup>37</sup>Glenys Lobban, 'Sex-Roles in Reading Schemes' *Forum – for the discussion of new trends in education*, Spring 1974, Vol. 16, no. 2.

<sup>38</sup>Bob Dixon, *Catching Them Young: Sex, Race and Class in Children's Fiction*, (London: Pluto Press: 1977).

reading schemes, except a few recent ones, are similar to the 'Janet and John' scheme and the situation isn't likely to have changed very much over the last few years, as few schools are in an economic position to replace their schemes, even if they wished to.<sup>39</sup>

Others in use in British schools at the time included, the 'Happy Venture Reader' scheme, published by Oliver & Boyd in 1958; the 'Ready to Read' scheme, published in 1964 by Methuen; the 'Nipper' reading scheme, published in 1968 by Macmillan Ltd; and 'Breakthrough to Literacy' which was a scheme published by Longmans for the School Council in 1970. This scheme embraced the use of a child's natural language and incorporated situations familiar to them.<sup>40</sup>

The modern approach has successfully been incorporated in a reading scheme that has now become the most popular. Published by Oxford University Press in the mid 1980s, The 'Oxford Reading Tree' scheme was, by 2004 used in 75 per cent of British schools. This range of reading books successfully integrates a whole host of literacy teaching methods such as phonics, picture cues, humour and patterned sentence structure incorporated in appealing stories.<sup>41</sup>

Directors of Ladybird Books Ltd were conscious of criticism aimed at a scheme that could be perceived as being a particularly dull way of learning how to read. It was always maintained by them that the Key Words Reading Scheme was to be used as a starting point and was to be combined with the array of supplementary material published by the company. The following sections demonstrate the abundance of literacy teaching materials produced by the company and illustrate their multifaceted approach to the task.

### **8.1.1.3 Read it Yourself**

From 1977, the Ladybird 'Read it Yourself' series was published. It comprised a multitude of titles ranging from traditional fairy tales to non-fiction texts. The texts were reworded with a carefully structured vocabulary to allow for independent

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Yglesias, 1974, p. 373.

<sup>41</sup>'How should we encourage kids to read?', *Woman's Hour*, BBC Radio 4, 3rd June 2004.

reading. The books were arranged into four progressive levels which introduced a wider vocabulary as children gained increasing confidence in their reading ability. Having grasped the basic literacy skills from the Key Words Reading Scheme, children could put these into practice on more interesting texts such as those in the 'Read it Yourself' series.

#### **8.1.1.4 Puddle Lane**

In 1985, Ladybird Books Ltd launched an additional reading scheme entitled the Puddle Lane series. Aimed at children aged three to six years, the books were designed to be used by teachers and parents together with the children. Based in a fantasy world of Puddle Lane in Candletown, the fictional tales were written by well known children's author, Sheila McCullagh and illustrated by a team of five artists. The books were exported to the United States with an American editor being employed to suitably 'Americanise' the text for that particular market. As in previous publishing ventures, the company did not produce books only for this scheme. Additional items included cassette tapes, activity books and a wall frieze. Puddle Lane merchandise, such as clothes, stationery, jigsaws, toys and games, was also being manufactured and sold by other companies to further raise the profile of the scheme. The series was particularly successful and, by 1990, sales of Puddle Lane books had, it was claimed, reached 8 million copies.<sup>42</sup>

#### **8.1.1.5 Read with Me**

In 1990 the 'Read with Me' series was launched with a wide range of reading books together with some workbooks and a teaching guide for use by either teachers or parents. Based upon the sound principles already initiated in the Key Words Reading Scheme the new series used the tried and tested method of controlled vocabulary and repetition. The scheme included the use of around 800 words including 300 key words that had been identified as making up 75 per cent of all the words spoken, read and written. Activity books were also included to reinforce learning.

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<sup>42</sup>'Ladybird – the first 50 years', *The Bookseller*, 20th July, 1990, p. 183.

#### **8.1.1.6 First Readers**

In 1992, a series of just four titles comprised the 'First Readers' (series 929): *About the Zoo, About Building, About the Farm, About Wheels*.

#### **8.1.1.7 Say the Sounds**

A phonics-based reading scheme was published by Ladybird Books Ltd, in 1993. Entitled 'Say the Sounds' this series was comprised of several reading book titles with accompanying workbooks.

#### **8.1.1.8 Read with Ladybird**

Published from 1996, the books in the 'Read with Ladybird' series use stories, rhymes and non-fiction texts to provide a structured reading programme. Pictures are used to provide visual clues, whilst repetition and the use of a limited vocabulary aim to help young children with word recognition.

#### **8.1.1.9 Ladybird Phonics**

From 2000, a large series of books called 'Ladybird Phonics', was published. This series comprised books featuring stories using humour and rhyme to encourage reading progression. The books introduce 40 phonemes and their corresponding letter groups. The key sounds are highlighted and learning is encouraged by providing children with the skills to sound out the words. This series also features activity books for use in combination with the readers.

#### **8.1.1.10 A Story to Share**

This series of books, published in 2001, was aimed at 'pre-readers'. The story books were created with the full story on the verso, with simple words, phrases and sentences corresponding to this full text, on the recto.

#### **8.1.1.11 Rhythm and Rhyme**

Rhythm and Rhyme books were published in 2003. This teaching method involves the use of rhyming stories. Each page features 'lift-up' flaps, underneath which are single words for the child to say out loud.

Ladybird Books had long advocated the use of phonics in the teaching of reading and, as can be seen from the range of books (above) produced a wide range of phonic-based books. In response to the government announcement of placing phonics schemes at the heart of teaching literacy, Ladybird Books responded by launching a new reading series in 2006 with a strong phonics component.

### **8.1.2 Initial Teaching Alphabet (ITA)**

The Initial Teaching Alphabet is a phonetics-based system made up of 45 characters – 27 consonants and 17 vowels together with y which can be considered either. It uses no upper case letters. Devised by James Pitman, its aim was not to advocate spelling reform but, ‘about the use of consistent spelling as an initial medium intended only to introduce beginners to the reading and writing of normally printed English. The simple Spelling and the Initial Teaching Alphabet are to be cast aside as soon as skill and confidence in reading are established.’<sup>43</sup>

In truth it was a compromise by those advocating spelling reform. It had long been argued that the English language posed great difficulties to those learning to read. In 1848, A.J. Ellis compiled tables to illustrate the perversity of the language. He proved that the letters of the alphabet are, in fact, used in at least 642 different ways and that, although there are only approximately 40 sounds they are represented by 615 signs.<sup>44</sup> In 1908 the Simplified Spelling Society was founded. One of its benefactors was Andrew Carnegie, whose generosity enabled the foundation of many a public library, and who donated several sums of £1,000 to the campaign for spelling reform.<sup>45</sup> For decades the society campaigned for a change to English orthography and, throughout the 1920s, set up a few small-scale experiments using a simple phonetic scheme of spelling in schools.

In 1953, Labour MP Mont Follick proposed a second private member’s bill entitled the Simplified Spelling Bill following a successful ballot in the previous year. The bill was threefold in its aims: to conduct research into the reasons for the failure in teaching reading; to determine the most suitable form in which a simplified spelling

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<sup>43</sup>Maurice Harrison, *Instant Reading: The Story of the Initial Teaching Alphabet*, London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons Ltd, 1964, pp. 3–4.

<sup>44</sup>Harrison, 1964, p. 42.

<sup>45</sup>Harrison, 1964, p. 52.



investigation should be carried out; and to investigate whether simplified spelling would reduce the rate of school leavers' illiteracy and whether the teaching of reading would be accelerated by this method.

There was, inevitably, much opposition to such a proposal. It was felt that it was an attempt to reduce educational standards, that it would 'debase and impoverish' the English language and, most significantly, would confuse children by forcing them to learn two systems of spelling.<sup>46</sup> Although the second reading of the bill passed through the House of Commons, it was considered that the House of Lords would prove too formidable an opponent so the bill was withdrawn.

However, James Pitman, a dedicated campaigner of the scheme to simplify reading, invented the Augmented Roman Alphabet (later named the Initial Teaching Alphabet) in 1959. He specified that one sign should represent each sound with ITA but there was to be no absolute right or wrong provided that the signs broadly represented the intended word. This was to take into account differing regional accents.

The Monotype Corporation produced Pitman's new typeface (a lower case Ehrhardt fount) and copyright was given away freely to anyone who wanted to use it in their book production.<sup>47</sup>

With government support, a substantial experiment using the Initial Teaching Alphabet began in 1961. It involved a handful of education authorities in the West Midlands with a proposed report into the comparative effectiveness of ITA, when compared to teaching reading and writing using the conventional alphabet, for 1964. The reading scheme to be translated was James Nisbet & Co Ltd's 'Janet and John' series. Reasons for this choice were twofold: it was used in more British schools than any other reading scheme at that time and, the company allowed the entire series as well as supplementary material to be translated into ITA.<sup>48</sup> It was a daunting task for those teachers involved for an initial shortage of ITA books meant that they were

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<sup>46</sup>Harrison, 1964, pp. 84–85.

<sup>47</sup>Harrison, 1964, pp. 107–109.

<sup>48</sup>Harrison, 1964, p. 120.

forced to transcribe books by hand and paste this over the printed books and, in addition, classroom notices had to be similarly transcribed.

At the outset of the experiment there were 50 titles together with the 'Janet and John' readers, a total that had risen to 250 by 1962.<sup>49</sup> This increase in the number of titles was as a result of the experiment being expanded from its original 19 schools in the West Midlands to a total of 78 schools throughout the whole of Britain. In addition, initially two schools had experimented with the scheme for use remedially and this had been expanded to 57 schools and clinics in 23 areas. In fact, it was stated that well over half of all British education authorities had teachers using the ITA method.<sup>50</sup>

The method was not confined to Britain only. It was also in use abroad. For example, children were being taught in this manner in South Africa in 1969. A primary school newsletter from 1969 explains the method to parents and also features examples of children's written work that clearly demonstrates their use of the initial teaching alphabet.<sup>51</sup>

By 1964, Wills and Hepworth Ltd, in association with the Initial Teaching Publishing Co. Ltd had translated 15 titles into the Initial Teaching Alphabet (see Figure 33<sup>52</sup>).

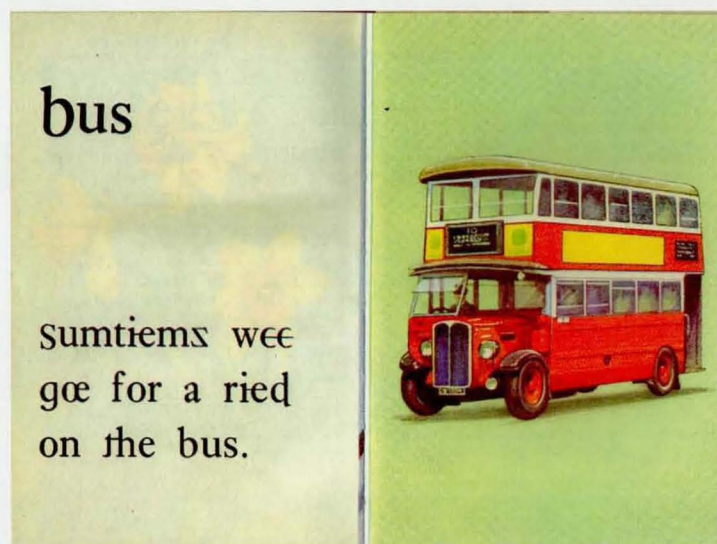


Figure 33: Sample page from a Ladybird ITA title.

<sup>49</sup>Harrison, 1964, p. 119.

<sup>50</sup>Harrison, 1964, pp. 140–141.

<sup>51</sup>Craighall Primary School pamphlet (Transvaal, South Africa), October 1969.

<sup>52</sup>Extract from *Mie Littl Book* by Brenda Lewis, illustration by Harry Woolley. Copyright © Ladybird Books Ltd., 1954. Reproduced by permission of Ladybird Archive.

Although the scheme had its advocates it has, subsequently, been heavily criticised with one of its main problems being that children did, in fact, have to get used to two different systems thus burdening junior school teachers with the added responsibility of re-teaching the art of reading. In response to such criticism, George Towers, former director of Wills and Hepworth Ltd, explained the company's involvement,

'Ladybird reluctantly followed other established publishers in supporting the ITA experiment but with no enthusiasm. It was predicted from the outset that the system would be short lived and, in any case, the standard Peter and Jane books [the Key Words Reading Scheme] continued to thrive and were used in something like 75 per cent of all our primary schools.'<sup>53</sup>

## **8.2 English Language Teaching**

Following the Second World War, many of the countries that formed part of the British Empire sought independence. The resulting Commonwealth countries provided an outlet for the export of English Language Teaching materials published in Britain. Many British publishers, including Longmans who along with Ladybird Books Ltd were owned by the Pearson Group, had traditionally sold their books to these markets.<sup>54</sup>

Wills and Hepworth Ltd had enjoyed considerable success with exports of their books, many of which had been translated for their appropriate market. They too, however, realised the potential market for specific English language teaching materials and began to publish such books in the mid 1970s.

### **8.2.1 Sunstart Reading Scheme**

Ladybird Books Ltd published a series of readers, entitled Sunstart (series 747), from 1974 to 1976. This series of books based on the 'key words' method of learning, featured stories set in the Caribbean. Using the same vocabulary as the Key Words Reading Scheme, the books introduced a wider range of words at an earlier stage and were used for more confident readers. Together with six reading books the series also featured three activity books, a teaching guide for parents or teachers and an A1 wall

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<sup>53</sup>George Towers, in letter to the *Daily Telegraph* in response to article condemning the ITA method of teaching reading, 16th June, 2001.

<sup>54</sup>Yglesias, 1974, p. 383.

chart. Written by William Murray, they were illustrated by Martin Aitchison who was sent to the West Indies to take photographs and sketch the surroundings and people to ensure an accurate representation.<sup>55</sup>

The purpose of the books was to act as English Language Teaching materials for schools in the Caribbean. Designed by educators of the Caribbean, the books incorporated language appropriate to the target market in that, 'English word-forms and grammar not peculiar to Standard English' were used to help link the standard form of English to the local patois and dialect of the spoken language. The guidebook produced for teachers and parents as part of the scheme was rated highly by the reviewer.<sup>56</sup> The scheme's overall content was not deemed to be adequate for stimulating young readers as they progressed. Similarly, there was not, it was considered, enough material within the scheme to adequately teach all the necessary skills for the acquisition of literacy for which they had been intended.<sup>57</sup>

### **8.2.2 Series 873 ELT**

It was realised by Ladybird Books Ltd that many European countries also represented potential additional markets at which to target English language teaching materials. Therefore, in 1987, series 873 featuring a multitude of titles comprising traditional and classic tales was published. These books were rewritten by Sue Ullstein, whose brief was to make the text suitable for teaching English as a foreign language. Whilst mainly aimed at the export market especially for Italy, France and Spain, they were also used for special needs' teaching in Britain.

Many Ladybird books not specifically designed for English language teaching, such as the Key Words Reading Scheme, have been used for that purpose all around the world. In fact, they continue to be used for the teaching of the English language, to the present day. For example, William Murray's son and daughter are still advocating the Key Words Reading Scheme for use abroad. In 2005, they visited Pakistan in

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<sup>55</sup>Medlicott, 1975, p. 400.

<sup>56</sup>Dorothy J. Darville (reviewer), 'Critically Speaking', *Reading Teacher*, Vol. 35, Pt. 5, (1982) p. 632.

<sup>57</sup>Darville 1982, pp. 631-632.

order to promote the books for use in schools. They participated in a presentation to teachers as well as attending press events in the country.<sup>58</sup>

### 8.3 Educational Publishers

Publishing books with a strong educational content had been at the heart of the company's strategy since the days of Wills and Hepworth. The earliest primer, published by the firm in 1916, set the precedent for almost a century of educational publishing. Ladybird books had not only been targeted toward schools but had also been heavily marketed towards parents as educators. The importance of the educational market to the company was expressed by directors in 1969 when they stated

'An important factor in this growth has been the policy of ensuring that the books are not only attractive, but sound in content and, in every way suitable for the educational market.'<sup>59</sup>

It was recognised that the factual books produced by the firm continued to have a strong educational impact in Britain throughout the 1960s. Reasons for this were given by the firm,

'It is a fact that, because many senior titles present accurate information in a manner not easily to be found elsewhere, adult organisations find them of considerable value. At the same time, it would seem that almost every Junior School in the country has a Ladybird library and for much the same reason.'<sup>60</sup>

Meeting teachers at exhibitions was one method employed by the firm in the marketing of their educational resources. It was estimated by its managing director at the time that, in 1974, 25 per cent of the company's business came from sales to schools.<sup>61</sup>

Whilst the company had become firmly established as providers of books specifically designed to encourage the teaching of literacy, their philosophy of creating and maintaining their readership encouraged them to publish a wide array of books. This

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<sup>58</sup>'Ladybird Scheme Anniversary on November 14', *Business Recorder*, 13th November, 2005.

<sup>59</sup>*Loughborough Industry and Careers Exhibition Official Handbook*, Monday, 28 April–Saturday, 3 May, 1969, Loughborough Town Hall (Loughborough: Echo Press Ltd), p. 40.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup>Medlicott, 1975, p. 400.

diversity within their publishing programme meant that Ladybird books, in one guise or another, captured the imagination of a multitude of children for many generations.

The firm introduced a helpline for parents with queries regarding the use of the company's books as educational tools and it became evident that parents often wanted books to give clear indications as to their suitability for a particular function. For example, it was found that parents often found it difficult to establish the correct age for which a book was suited. Ladybird Books Ltd introduced 'age-ranging on some of its early learning titles in 1998.'<sup>62</sup> According to Sally Floyer, managing director of Ladybird, research carried out by the company in 2003 indicated that purchasers required assistance when choosing books for children, mainly at the point of sale. Publishing director, Stephanie Barton, indicated that the company's response was to look into the possibility of 'putting more structured guidelines on books about where they fit into a child's development, not just age-ranging.'<sup>63</sup> The company promoted its telephone helpline for 'advice on how Ladybird books can help children's learning' by printing the number in an advertising box on the back of its books.<sup>64</sup> In addition, it featured the website address where users could access a broad range of advice on its educational books.<sup>65</sup>

Providing materials for the acquisition of literacy is still at the forefront of the brand's philosophy. The Ladybird website currently offers guidance for parents on ways of helping children learn to read. Taking advantage of its firm foundations in publishing books for the teaching of reading the advice page states,

'Ladybird has been helping children to learn to read for many years, and has a range of different books to suit every child – even the most reluctant reader. The key to Ladybird reading programme[s] is that any of them can be used alongside those used at school. This is the take-home option. It's all about practising and building skills.'<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>'Too young or too old?', *The Bookseller*, 30th July, 2004, pp. 22–23.

<sup>63</sup>*The Bookseller*, 30th July, 2004, pp. 22–23.

<sup>64</sup>Parents were advised to call the company's helpline on 0845 036 6600. Advertisement on back cover of books.

<sup>65</sup>Website address printed on back cover of books. <http://www.ladybird.co.uk>

<sup>66</sup><http://www.ladybird.co.uk/grownups/parents/atSchool/images/readwithladybird.pdf> [site accessed 2nd October, 2008].

### 8.3.1 Other Educational Aids

The Bullock Report had concluded that, 'Technological aids have a considerable contribution to make to language development and the teaching of reading, but they do not represent a solution in themselves.'<sup>67</sup> Wills and Hepworth Ltd had, for decades prior to the publication of the Bullock Report, realised the potential of reproducing their books' offshoots using alternative forms of media. Slide sets were manufactured presenting the contents from Ladybird books in 35mm slide format. These were pages from the books that had been reproduced by the Slide Company of London for use with a slide projector. The pack comprised a ring binder in which the slides were placed in plastic wallets with the printed copy of the corresponding Ladybird book inserted into a flap at the back of the binder.<sup>68</sup> Film strips were also produced which, similarly, reproduced images from the Ladybird books.<sup>69</sup> Used in schools to ensure wider access to the books' material, their contents would have been shared in a group activity.

Towards the end of the 1960s Wills and Hepworth Ltd, probably encouraged by the success of the Key Words Reading Scheme, devised a series of work cards to be used across a broad educational curriculum. Having moved increasingly toward the non-fiction side of publishing, they realised the potential of capitalising upon an integrated product range which complemented their books and broadened the market. Ladybird Work Cards for English comprehension study, History, Science and Nature were to be found in many primary schools. As the cards consisted of a classic Ladybird illustration taken directly from those used in the books it was not necessary to commission any new artwork thus curtailing production costs. The text comprised a short paragraph describing a story or event with five comprehension questions printed on the reverse, together with two additional questions for additional research and ideas for linked activities. The cards were packaged in thin boxes labelled on the side and were a familiar addition to many primary and junior schools. Most cards ended with the phrase 'now go and read a book about...' in an attempt to further promote their information books, for by this period Ladybird non-fiction books covered a wide

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<sup>67</sup>The Bullock Report (1975: A language for life. Report of the Committee of Enquiry appointed by the Secretary of State for Education and Science under the Chairmanship of Sir Alan Bullock FBA (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1975).

<sup>68</sup><http://www.easyontheeye.net/ladybird/items/slides.htm> [site accessed 9th October, 2008].

<sup>69</sup>[http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/other\\_collectables.php](http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/other_collectables.php) [site accessed 9th October, 2008].



variety of subjects. The English Work Cards were divided into two sets aimed at dual levels of attainment.<sup>70</sup>

In order to reach as far-ranging an audience as possible, some Ladybird books were packaged with corresponding video tapes specifically designed for children with hearing difficulties. Produced in conjunction with Chase Video Productions, the tapes featured presenters 'reading' the books by using British sign language.

#### **8.4 Teaching Mathematics**

Many Ladybird books have been produced to teach mathematics. From the most basic counting books aimed at babies, to those titles written specifically to coincide with the teaching of mathematics in line with the National Curriculum, the firm have produced a range of titles assisting the teaching of numeracy skills.

Specific series include 'Words for Number' devised by William Murray and Jo MacNally in 1966. This series comprised five titles which were subsequently revised to accommodate changes made necessary by using metric measurements. In 1982, a new series numbered 678, later changed to 'Junior Maths', comprised 12 titles involving four books to cover the basics. Aptly entitled *Addition*, *Subtraction*, *Multiplication* and *Division* the books were published with accompanying practice books to reinforce learning. Published in 1995, the '30-second-challenge' series comprised three books covering the subjects of mental arithmetic, adding and subtracting, and multiplying and dividing. In 2000 a series called 'Success at School' incorporated several titles for the teaching of mathematics. In 2005, the 'Help for Homework' series also included several titles covering all aspects of mathematics for children of primary school age.

#### **8.5 Teaching Science**

As in the other fundamental subjects of literacy and numeracy, many Ladybird books have been published throughout the decades aimed at the teaching of scientific principles. Series 621 comprised a range of titles introducing children to various aspects of science. The books used a very practical experiment-based approach to

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<sup>70</sup>A description of the work cards appears on the collectors' website:  
<http://www.easyontheeye.net/ladybird/items/workcards.htm> [site accessed 9th October, 2008].

teach the basics of the subject. For example, *Magnets, Bulbs and Batteries*, together with *Lights, Mirrors and Lenses and Levers*, and *Pulleys and Engines* each featured simple experiments to teach physics to young children. Later books in the series covered botany, chemistry and zoology. Another series conceived in the 1960s, entitled 'How it Works' introduced children to the mechanics of all manner of vehicles including the highly topical *The Rocket* which was published in 1967. Not confined simply to texts of the rudiments of vehicle technology, the series incorporated titles encompassing such innovations as microscopes and telescopes, telephones, cameras, and later, television and computers. Wills and Hepworth Ltd were committed to educational publishing throughout the 1960s, producing additional work cards for use in schools. Workbooks and sets of 48 work cards included those for science and nature.

It was not until 1989 that new books were published to replace those books that had achieved steady sales over the previous decades. Series 8911 featured titles such as *Your Body, Ecology, Animals and Space* providing a whole new generation with material introducing the sciences. The new 'Discovery' series was published in the mid 1990s covering a range of topics, some relating to the sciences. Such titles as *Thunder and Lightning, Scientists and Inventors* and *Flight* combined a lively factual text with strong illustration.

### **8.6 Ladybird Non-fiction in Schools**

Wills and Hepworth Ltd had targeted sales of all their non-fiction titles towards schools from the outset. Manufactured to be robust enough for use by multiple groups of children and small enough to be easily handled, a standard format Ladybird book was produced on every conceivable subject. All Ladybird non-fiction titles were intended to be educational. Published in the 1950s, series 522 dealt with Bible stories used for the religious education of generations of children. Similarly, in the 1950s natural history was taken care of with series 536 which dealt with every possible topic from butterflies to birds of prey. These books had a definite British bias solely featuring the flora and fauna of this country so would not have been particularly suitable for export. Series 561 has proved to be particularly memorable for those history lovers whose interest in the subject had been sparked by the lively prose and strong illustration of these history books. Whether it was the inspiring tales of

adventurers such as Marco Polo or the amazing lives of leaders like Julius Caesar or Queen Elizabeth I, many a school child in the 1950s to the 1970s would have been subjected to a lesson involving a Ladybird book featuring some historical character. Series 561 would have been equally inspiring for it told of many great civilisations. Wills and Hepworth Ltd also produced a large wallchart depicting the Kings and Queens of England which, no doubt, adorned many a classroom wall in British primary schools.

Topics ranged from transport, travel, the history of any conceivable subject, people's occupations, public utilities, hobbies, and all manner of inventions and sporting activities. In fact, it would be difficult to find a subject not covered by a Ladybird book. The Ladybird book became synonymous with providing a basic guide to all manner of subject matter. With prices remaining consistent throughout the 1940s and up to the early 1970s, sales rocketed and Ladybird non-fiction could be found in the majority of schools.

It can be said with confidence, that the Ladybird book has played a significant role in the education of many generations of children both in Britain and, indeed, around much of the world.

Any publisher is influenced to some degree by the political, economic and social factors surrounding their business operations. The contents of their publications are, inevitably, produced within certain social parameters. Ladybird books have been produced for many decades and have, consequentially, been influenced by outside factors. The more significant of these are discussed in the following chapter.

## Chapter 9

### Political and Social Issues

#### 9.1 Social Change

Britain experienced widespread social changes during the decades of the 1960s and 1970s. Class divisions had begun to be broken down following the Second World War, the feminist movement was demanding equal rights for women and immigration was on the increase. The three main political influences on, and of, Ladybird books have been those associated with gender, class and race issues. Ladybird books, especially those titles within the Key Words Reading Scheme, were presumed to relate to contemporary British life with both the text and illustrations reflecting what was perceived to be 'normal' British society. The books have been on the receiving end of both praise and criticism, itself often an indication of political thinking of the time. One particularly harsh critic, referring to Wills and Hepworth Ltd's Key Words Reading Scheme in 1976, said of the books that they were, 'likely to be irrelevant and harmful for urban working-class and black children.'<sup>1</sup>

By 1970, the firm of Wills and Hepworth Ltd was producing a reported 15 million books per year.<sup>2</sup> As mentioned earlier, the books were widely available to parents, having been marketed in non-traditional outlets such as supermarkets, newsagents and petrol stations. In addition, Ladybird books could be found in the majority of British primary schools following a direct marketing campaign towards the educational sector. With 30 million books of the Key Words Reading Scheme having been sold by 1974 it was 'first place in popularity' of all the reading schemes in use in the schools studied by Don Labon.<sup>3</sup> Thus, it can be said with confidence that their influence upon children in the 1960s and 1970s could have been significant. Indeed, Worpole writing in 1971 stated that,

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<sup>1</sup>Glenys Lobban, 'Sex-Roles in Reading Schemes' in *Children's Rights Workshop, Sexism in Children's Books: Facts, Figures and Guidelines* (London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1976), p. 38

<sup>2</sup>'Fifteen million Ladybirds a Year', *British Printer*, September 1970, pp. 90-93.

<sup>3</sup>Don Labon, *Initial Reading Schemes – a Survey of Usage in West Sussex Primary Schools during Spring 1974*, a report issued by West Sussex County Council Education Department, Chichester, 1974. cited by Bob Dixon in *Catching Them Young: Sex, Race and Class* Pluto Press (London 1977), p.57.

'Ladybirds can be found in nearly every primary and secondary school in the country. With such a massive area of publications spanning two generations of children, it's reasonable to assume that they have had some influence in helping to give shape to social attitudes of both children and parents.'<sup>4</sup>

Not only were the books influencing the population, they were themselves being influenced by changing social attitudes. In the early 1970s, the artwork of the 36 books in the reading scheme was updated not only to represent changes in fashion but also in response to criticism. Consideration was given to two of the issues that had most caused offence, those of gender role stereotyping together with a lack of representation of non-white members of society. Both issues were tackled in an attempt to update the books and make them more relevant to a wider audience. However, subsequent studies by critics indicate that the changes did not go far enough to satisfy the changing pace of British society.

## 9.2 Gender Divides

Feminist activity from the early 1970s demonstrated that many women were demanding a more equal role in society and were willing to fight against any discrimination on account of their gender. From this period on there was an increased awareness of the influence of children's literature on determining sexist attitudes and a campaign for changes within children's book publishing ensued. Nicholas Tucker summarised the nature of the problem when he stated that,

'Another important influence for change was the new insistence on the changing role of girls and women in fiction as in life. Previous attitudes in picture books often meant that boys were shown taking most of the action while girls tended to be relegated to supporting domestic roles.'<sup>5</sup>

This depiction was of particular importance in reading primers because of their extensive use in primary schools with very young and impressionable children where role models in books could be perceived as the norm. Males, it was argued, always seemed to be shown taking the more active roles whilst females were, more often than not, portrayed in domestic or passive roles.

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<sup>4</sup>Ken Worpole, 'Ladybird Life', *New Society*, 23rd December, 1971.

<sup>5</sup>Kimberley Reynolds and Nicholas Tucker (eds) *Children's Book Publishing in Britain Since 1945* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1998), pp. 13–14.

It was recognised that the use of specific vocabulary and the presentation of people, roles and situations using sexist assumptions could, and probably would, influence children's attitudes at specific gender roles. The American publisher McGraw-Hill first issued guidelines for the use of non-sexist language in their publications in May 1974. Two years later, the first British guidelines, the *Non-Sexist Code of Practice for Book Publishing*, were created.<sup>6</sup> Introduction of the Sex Discrimination Act and the Equal Pay Act, in 1975, provided the impetus to change the status quo in the traditionally parochial business of children's publishing. Publishers were generally slow to react to the changes and the 1976 Children's Rights Workshop commented that,

'It is hoped that publishers and everyone else concerned with the production and distribution of children's literature will soon begin to take seriously the issue of sexism as well as that of racist and class bias in children's books and contribute to the still tentative but positive anti-discriminatory steps already under way.'<sup>7</sup>

Research undertaken in 1974 by Glenys Lobban<sup>8</sup> sought to analyse the gender roles portrayed in a range of reading schemes. Those included were Longman's 'Breakthrough to Literacy', Oliver & Boyd's 'Happy Venture Reader', James Nisbet & Co.'s 'Janet and John', Wills and Hepworth Ltd's 'Key Words Reading Scheme', Macmillan Ltd's 'Nipper' and Methuen's 'Ready to Read'. She concluded that they depicted a world where females were almost solely occupied by domestic activity whereas the male role was more active and required ingenuity. In addition, it was felt that their portrayal of the world was actually more sexist than reality. However, it should be pointed out that the earliest of the books analysed in the study had been published in 1950. Others were produced in 1958, two in 1964, 1968 and another in 1970. Therefore, two-thirds of the schemes were, by that stage, over a decade old which suggests that they were more representative of the post-war era in which they were produced.

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<sup>6</sup>Leaflet entitled 'Non-sexist code of practice for book publishing', produced by group called Women in the Publishing Industry, 1976.

<sup>7</sup>Children's Rights Workshop, *Sexism in Children's Books: Facts, Figures and Guidelines* (London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1976), p. 3.

<sup>8</sup>Glenys Lobban, 'Sex-Roles in Reading Schemes' in *Children's Rights Workshop, Sexism in Children's Books: Facts, Figures and Guidelines* (London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1976).

Another critic strongly condemned several children's books of the period for their portrayal of stereotypical roles. He states that within those books particularly associated with reading schemes which seek to portray the norm, that,

'Girls are often shown as unimaginative, placid, inward-looking, concerned with trivialities, docile and passive. Girls often just *are*. Boys *do* – they invent, plan, think about their future careers and are shown as moving in the world. They are confident, outgoing and give instructions (usually to girls).'<sup>9</sup>

His criticism was levelled specifically toward the revised and updated version of Ladybird's Key Words Reading Scheme. He states that the books reinforce the traditionally distinct 'male' (such as playing with toy cars, playing football, gardening, climbing trees and building things) and 'female' (such as playing with dolls, skipping, preparing food, taking care of other children) activities claiming that despite the illustrations being updated to show the characters in more up-to-date clothing, little change had been made regarding stereotypical roles.

Research carried out by Whiting in 1981 sought to provide an update on Lobban's earlier work. In order to assess whether changes had been implemented to address the gender imbalances in Ladybird's Key Words Reading Scheme highlighted by Lobban, he compared the original 1964 version of *Book 4a Things we do* (one of 36 titles from the series) with its revised counterpart. He concluded that 'there is no evidence that the book analysed here, and therefore the series which it represents, has moved any faster ahead in relation to the society it serves than when Lobban asserted the reading schemes were more sexist than reality.'<sup>10</sup>

Other research clearly showed that gender stereotyping was common in children's book publishing. It was found that several prize-winning children's picture books were similarly sexist with females being under-represented in central roles, shown as passive characters, generally displayed in domestic roles and less likely to feature in illustrations.<sup>11</sup> With such widespread use of gender stereotyping across a broad range

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<sup>9</sup>Dixon, 1977, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup>David S. Whiting, 'Sex Role Stereotyping and Ladybird Books', *Forum for the Discussion of New Trends in Education*, 1981, Vol. 23, Pt. 3 pp 84–85.

<sup>11</sup>Lenore J. Weitzman et al., 'Sex-Role Socialization in Picture Books for Preschool Children' in *Children's Rights Workshop, Sexism in Children's Books: Facts, Figures and Guidelines* (London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1976), p. 3.



of children's books it is evident that the criticism levelled at the Ladybird books was not specific to this company's publications.

### 9.2.1 Gender Roles in Ladybird's KWRS

Throughout the 1970s, Wills and Hepworth Ltd were strongly criticised by some, for their portrayal of gender-specific roles in some of their Ladybird books, particularly those in the Key Words Reading Scheme series. For example, girls were seen to be less active in shared activities, to undertake traditionally feminine pursuits such as playing with dolls, holding tea parties and helping their mother with domestic chores. Boys, it was argued were shown to be more physically active following such pursuits as tree climbing, helping their father with such traditionally masculine activities as gardening and washing the car. Whiting's conclusion regarding the Key Words Reading Scheme, however, was based upon a single title. As his research looked at just one book from a scheme comprising 36 titles, the study cannot be said to be truly representative. To see whether his findings were indeed true, it is useful to take a look at a larger sample of the first editions and then the revised editions of books that make up the scheme in order to address these criticisms. Six titles were randomly selected from a total of 24 books that form the 'a' and 'b' series. Books from the 'c' series were not used as these feature reading exercises and word lists rather than actual characterisation. Of the six chosen titles, which represent 25 per cent of the series, the revised editions were compared to their corresponding first editions specifically for their gender portrayal.

One of the first books in the series, book *2a We have fun*, shows both the male and female characters generally being represented equally. In both the original and revised editions the female character appears on all 24 of the illustrated pages whilst the male character appears on 22 of the illustrated pages in the revised edition. In each edition they participate in all activities together. There are two instances, however, where the male character is shown to be dominant. Firstly, the boy makes the decision on behalf of both of them to return home, "We have to go", says Peter. "Come Jane. Come," he says. "We have to go."<sup>12</sup> Additionally, the female character asks him for permission to buy sweets, "Can we have some sweets?" says Jane. "Can we go to the shop for

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<sup>12</sup>William Murray, *2a We have fun* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1964), p. 38. Unchanged in revised edition.

some sweets?" "Yes, says Peter."<sup>13</sup> Showing the male making the decisions and the female asking him permission firmly reinforces the gender differences in their authoritative status.

Another title for comparison, *3a Things we like*, shows the boy in the more dominant role on several occasions. Early in the book he climbs into a boat and orders his sister to join him saying, "Get in the boat, Jane".<sup>14</sup> He later plays with a toy train set and his sister asks if she can play too. His response to her plea is, "Yes, says Peter. I have the train. You play with the station."<sup>15</sup> He even chooses the rabbit for both of them "Look at this one, says Peter. This is the one we want."<sup>16</sup> Later the father and son clean the car together whilst the daughter sits inside. Similarly the boy plays football with a group of boys whilst the girl looks on "That was good, Peter, says Jane. That was good."<sup>17</sup> Changes to the illustrations in the later edition are minimal but in one instance the children are in the car with their father. Whilst they are both in the front seat in the 1964 version, the girl is in the front seat and the boy in the back seat in the updated version, to demonstrate the favourable role of the female character. However, in the earlier version another illustration shows the children both standing on the ground picking apples from a tree whilst the revised edition shows the boy up the tree passing apples down to his sister who is standing firmly on the ground. This kind of active/passive role is typical of those situations under the scrutiny of those keen to uphold balanced gender representation. When both children pick flowers, it is the later edition that shows the boy holding the bunch of flowers with the girl holding them in the original book. This is a clear indication of the positive intentions of those seeking to provide more relevant illustration for the updated edition. The female character is seen cheering and jumping as her male sibling plays football in the later edition whilst she is shown watching the game passively in the earlier version. Again, this shows the positive intentions of the publisher in that there is indication of a less static role for her but it could be argued that the fact that the female is shown as a spectator whilst the male engages in an activity offers no improvement in representation of equality. A female bus conductor is shown in the 1970s' version whilst no conductor is present in

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<sup>13</sup>William Murray, *2a We have fun* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1964), p. 42. Unchanged in revised edition.

<sup>14</sup>William Murray, *3a Things we like*, (Loughborough: Ladybird Books, 1972), p. 10.

<sup>15</sup>William Murray, *3a Things we like*, (Loughborough: Ladybird Books, 1972), p. 18.

<sup>16</sup>William Murray, *3a Things we like*, (Loughborough: Ladybird Books, 1972), p. 20.

<sup>17</sup>William Murray, *3a Things we like* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books, 1972), p. 40.

the 1964 version. This is an obvious attempt at depicting a female in employment other than as a housewife. However, the mother is still illustrated in both versions presiding over a tea party and, whilst the father has at least moved out of his armchair to say goodnight to the children in the later version, we are left in no doubt as to the mother's continuing domestic role with her wearing an apron in the 1970s' version and not in the earlier book.

In both editions of *Book 3b Boys and girls* the boy takes the immediate initiative when playing with a trampoline. He jumps first before his sister begs him to allow her access, "I want to play, please," Jane says. "Peter, I want to jump please."<sup>18</sup> Once again, the male character is taking a lead role in shared activities. In another instance, the boy is shown assisting his father with painting the outside of the house, in both versions, whilst the girl brings them tea. These are typical activities associated with gender stereotyping. In this book also, on a car ride with their father they both share the front seat in the earlier version whilst the girl takes the front seat in the later edition, demonstrating a more favourable role for the female. At home, the girl helps her mother with the tea whilst the boy helps his father with the car, in both versions. The boy helps his father build a rabbit hutch, they both play a game of pretending to have a flower shop and both paint pictures. However, the task of making a wooden boat falls to the males only in both editions. The boy enters the water to play with the boat whilst the girl stands watching outside the boating pond. When they reach a shop, the girl asks her brother to make the purchases (sweets in the earlier version and healthier apples in the latter) which indicates that he must have control over any money they may be able to spend jointly. As they arrive home, it is their mother who provides them with food and drink in both editions, whilst in the latter edition the father can be seen erecting a fence in the garden. By showing the female characters in typical passive roles and males in the more active roles, both versions of this book are demonstrating gender stereotyping.

On the first opening of *Book 4a Things we do* there is an obvious difference between the two versions. In the 1964 version, the boy is painting a toy car whilst his sister looks on. The latter edition shows both children actively painting the car and the text

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<sup>18</sup>William Murray, *3b Boys and girls* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1964), p. 6.

has changed from 'Peter wants to make a car to play with.' to 'They want to make a car to play with.'<sup>19</sup> However, the following pages demonstrate clear gender divides as the girl is shown helping her mother to bake cakes in the kitchen. Both help their father to build a tree house. Once inside the tree house they have a tea party served by the girl having been told to do so by her brother. "Yes," says Peter, "you make the tea." The girl reaffirms her feminine role by stating, "Yes, I will be like Mummy and get the tea."<sup>20</sup> Following a joint shopping expedition the children have to help their parents with chores. In the original edition the text says, 'Peter has to help Daddy work with the car. Jane has to help Mummy work in the house. She likes to help Mummy work.'<sup>21</sup> The accompanying illustration shows the two females tidying the house. In the revised edition, however, the text is changed to, 'Peter has to help Daddy work with the car. Jane has to help Mummy work in the house. She and Peter like to help Mummy work.'<sup>22</sup> The illustration shows the two children making a bed whilst their mother supervises. Gardening tasks are undertaken by the male characters whilst the female restrains the dog. Both children enjoy fishing on equal terms but the horse-riding pursuit again indicates a divide. The boy takes the larger horse whilst the girl has the smaller but he is assisted in mounting by his sister who requires no help in mounting her own horse. On a family visit the text is changed, from the earlier version to the revised edition, by the father asking the girl what she would like to do in the latter version whereas it was the boy who was given the choice in the former. As in the other books examined, the characters are clearly being portrayed within the confines of specific gender stereotypes.

Both the 1965 and 1974 editions of book *5b Out in the sun* do portray the boy taking the lead in most activities with the girl following his example. The boy retrieves a ball from the water, not the girl; the boy takes the lead in using a slide to enter a swimming pool, 'Soon Peter is going down into the water again. "I must do that," says his sister.'<sup>23</sup> Later the boy is the one taking the initiative using stepping stones to cross a river. When the mother tells the children to get out of bed, the boy goes directly out in the garden to join his father but the girl says "I'll be down soon. I must

<sup>19</sup>William Murray, *4a Things we do* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd) 1964, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup>William Murray, *4a Things we do* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd) 19??, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup>William Murray, *4a Things we do* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd) 1964, p. 22.

<sup>22</sup>William Murray, *4a Things we do* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd) 19??, p. 22.

<sup>23</sup>William Murray, *5b Out in the sun* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd) 1975, p.12.

help Mum and then come down.”<sup>24</sup> Later, joined by two friends the text clearly divides the two sexes, ‘The girls want to get some flowers. The boys want to make boats.’<sup>25</sup> Even when participating in the same activity the children are shown to be distinct by their gender, ‘The children walk by the trees and the water. The girls look at the flowers as they go by. The boys look for rabbits and fish.’<sup>26</sup> The text was barely altered between the 1965 and the 1974 editions. However, the illustrations do show the girl in more animated poses rather than standing serenely with her hands neatly held behind her back as is the case in the earlier version. Similarly, on the final page the father is depicted drying the dishes whilst in the earlier version he is sitting in an armchair reading the newspaper. Whilst some effort has been made to redress the balance between the genders in the later edition of the book, it is clear that some gender stereotyping still exists.

Both the original and revised versions of book *6b Our friends* demonstrate a clear gender divide. When visiting a friend who lives on a farm, it is the boy who opts to mount one of the horses saying, “The big one is best, let me get up on him.”,<sup>27</sup> whilst the girl chooses apples to feed the horse. When out walking round the farm, it is the boy who looks at the fish in the river whilst the girls both pick flowers.<sup>28</sup> When referring to the family car the girl says, “I can see a car going to the farmhouse. It is our Dad’s car.”<sup>29</sup>

Both children go out in a boat but the boy uses a rod to catch fish whilst the girl sits next to her doll.<sup>30</sup> Upon their return home, the mother instructs the boy to assist the father with carrying the bags from the car whilst the girl is sent to the next door neighbour’s house to collect their cat.<sup>31</sup>

On another occasion the text says, ‘Pat [the dog] likes to be with the boys. He runs round them with a ball, as they play their game. The two girls like it best when they

<sup>24</sup>William Murray, *5b Out in the sun* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1975), p.7.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup>William Murray, *5b Out in the sun* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1975), p.36.

<sup>27</sup>William Murray, *6b Our friends* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1978), p. 8.

<sup>28</sup>William Murray, *6b Our friends* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1978), p.12.

<sup>29</sup>William Murray, *6b Our friends* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1978), p.13.

<sup>30</sup>William Murray, *6b Our friends* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1978), p. 19.

<sup>31</sup>William Murray, *6b Our friends* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1978), p. 22.

can look after the baby.<sup>32</sup> The boys look for birds' eggs and rabbits whilst the girls play with dolls and hold tea parties.<sup>33</sup> The only concession to the girl playing a more active role is that in the revised version she is seen riding a chopper bicycle whereas in the same illustration in the first edition, she is picking flowers.<sup>34</sup> The book clearly demonstrates that the father of the family goes out to work whilst the mother is the full-time carer. In the revised version there is a female bus conductor.<sup>35</sup> In another situation, the young male protagonist states that, "I read at school today that a horse is a man's best friend."<sup>36</sup>

It is acknowledged that this simple comparison between different editions is not a scientific study in the precise nature of changes undertaken. However, it is valid inasmuch as it can provide a general view of the way in which gender stereotypes were portrayed in the books, together with a look at the ways in which the publisher sought to address these in view of subsequent criticism. It can be seen by looking at a sample of the books that the charges laid against the books' portrayal of gender stereotypes are, in fact, valid and that steps taken by the publisher in the revised editions to take account of societal changes did not really go far enough to address the concerns raised by critics.

It is important, however, to understand the context in which the texts were created. Traditionally publishing was a patriarchal industry with most, if not all, publishing houses being headed by white, middle-class men and Wills and Hepworth Ltd was no exception. The board of directors consisted solely of men and all editorial decisions were taken by Douglas Keen and James Clegg who were of a mature age. The author and illustrators of the Key Words Reading Scheme were also all older men. Therefore, the world depicted in the books was the 'normal' British way of life as experienced by them. This is not an atypical situation for publishing in this period hence the criticism being levelled at much of children's publishing of the period, especially reading schemes which were seen to reflect that which was perceived as representing normal British family life.

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<sup>32</sup>William Murray, *6b Our friends* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1978), p. 25.

<sup>33</sup>William Murray, *6b Our friends* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1978), pp. 28–35.

<sup>34</sup>William Murray, *6b Our friends* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1978), p. 37.

<sup>35</sup>William Murray, *6b Our friends* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1978), p. 42.

<sup>36</sup>William Murray, *6b Our friends* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1978), p. 50.

It is true that the earliest version of the books in the scheme and, indeed the later revised versions, did show the family in distinctive gender roles. This was a reflection of the post-war situation in Britain where mothers did generally stay at home to look after children (only one in five married women went out to work in 1951)<sup>37</sup>, men were usually drivers of family cars (only one in ten drivers were women in 1960)<sup>38</sup>, women generally did the cooking and housework and men the gardening and vehicle maintenance. Post-war gender roles did change as men returning from the services took up jobs once again and the traditional family unit was valued once more. The illustrators were portraying a situation more relevant to this era. However, during the late 1960s and 1970s many families continued in this manner with few mothers in full-time employment and even fewer men taking on the roles of full-time carers to children. For example, in 1971 a third of all women who were in employment only worked in part-time jobs and would have taken on a domestic role in addition.<sup>39</sup> In addition, by 1975 only 55 per cent of all women of working age were in the labour force at all, indicating that a good percentage of them would have been full-time homemakers.<sup>40</sup>

Harry Wingfield, one of the main illustrators of the Key Words Reading Scheme, based his characters upon composites of neighbours' children of whom he took photographs from which he illustrated the books. One of the young girls in question was interviewed, as an adult, and when challenged about the sex-role stereotyping, her response was that, 'In those days it wasn't an issue. Girls just helped Mum in the kitchen while boys helped Dad in the garden.'<sup>41</sup>

It could be argued that the changes made to the books' contents in the 1970s did not go far enough. Although revisions were made to the books' illustrations in order to promote a more proactive role for the female characters, it was not possible in many instances. Difficulties in making extensive changes arose because of the very nature

<sup>37</sup>Miriam Akhtar and Steve Humphries, *The Fifties and Sixties: a lifestyle revolution*, Boxtree (London, 2001), p. 16.

<sup>38</sup>Akhtar and Humphries, 2001, p. 159.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup>Margaret Walsh, 'Womanpower: The Transformation of the Labour Force in the UK and the USA since 1945', *Recent Findings of Research in Economic and Social History*, Summer 2001, Vol. 30, p. 2. <http://www.ehs.org.uk/othercontent/Walsh30a.pdf>

<sup>41</sup>Jill Ashton in interview by Michele Martin, 'I was really a tomboy says Ladybird's 'angel' Jane', *The Mail on Sunday*, 7th November, 1999, p. 37.



of the reading scheme. Whilst illustrations could be replaced with updated pictures, they had to reflect the text very closely in order to provide the visual clues necessary in assisting children to read the text. The fact that the text was made up of key words with measured repetition meant that the text could not be significantly changed without affecting the finely crafted use of specific words.

Ladybird Books Ltd was not alone in finding itself with this particular problem. Gender stereotyping was common throughout publications relating to reading schemes. Indeed, Dixon, who so heavily condemned Ladybird's Key Word Reading Scheme states that 'examination of well over a hundred reading schemes and early reading series has shown a similar pattern of findings'<sup>42</sup>; which are that males appear far more frequently; girls are more restricted in physical activities; boys' clothing is less restrictive; boys are shown with a range of toys including vehicles, weapons, footballs and mechanical toys whilst girls are predominantly portrayed with dolls and domestic utensils.

In the mid 1980s, the firm decided to counter the claims that their books were sexist and depicted a middle-class way of life. Following the Inner London Education Authority's call for the books to be removed from schools, Vernon Mills, Ladybird Ltd's editorial director, spoke out in the company's defence. He claimed that the books in question had actually been published a decade previously and that they had been subsequently revised. In addition, he pointed out the fact that this illustrated that the books had been used for a long period of time in schools. He advocated that the authority should dispose of the outdated copies and replace them with the updated ones.<sup>43</sup>

It should also be remembered that the firm had produced almost 400 titles between 1940 and 1972 and that accusations of sexism had only been levelled at the 36 titles relating to the Key Words Reading Scheme. Indeed, the company had made deliberate attempts at addressing such issues in its new publications. One such title, *Telling the Time* published in 1978 incorporated such an obvious attempt at political correctness

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<sup>42</sup>Dixon, 1977, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup>'Book firm hits back', *Leicester Mercury*, 2nd April, 1985

that Whiting stated that, 'parts of the text were more non-sexist than reality.'<sup>44</sup> The instances to which he refers include: a black female interviewing a white male; a father shopping with his children; a white male mopping up spilt tea whilst two females watch; a male hairdresser and female police officer; and a father telling children a bedtime story whilst the mother goes out to an evening class. In 1990 a new series entitled 'Read with Me' was launched using the key words identified by William Murray and which formed the basis of the original Key Words Reading Scheme. Obviously mindful of criticism levelled at the original series, the authors wrote in the introduction that, 'To avoid the clumsy he/she, him/her, we have referred to the child as 'he'. All the books are of course equally suited to both girls and boys.' However, in the 'Notes for using this book' the text states, 'To avoid the clumsy he/she, him/her, we have referred to the child as 'she'. All the books are of course equally suited to both girls and boys.'<sup>45</sup> It was clearly no simple task endeavouring to publish books that were politically correct and able to silence all critics. Indeed, the extent of the problem was acknowledged by John Rowe Townshend, in 1976, when he pointed out that the 'innocent pastures of children's literature are beginning to look like minefields as one instance after another of alleged racism or sexism is detected and exploded.'<sup>46</sup> With a large number of books under scrutiny and possible sexist or racist connotations amassing from many of them it was difficult for authors and editors to maintain a sensible response. As Townshend points out, 'authors and editors run scared and go to absurd lengths to avoid giving offence.'<sup>47</sup>

### 9.3 Racism

During the 1960s and 1970s, Britain moved increasingly toward becoming a multi-cultural society. A 1948 act of parliament had recognised Commonwealth citizenship as British citizenship which allowed unrestricted entry into the country.<sup>48</sup> British Empire immigration was welcomed as a solution to a shortage of labour and several non-white immigrants sought to take advantage of this opportunity. However, some received a hostile reaction to their presence in the country and encountered a range of

<sup>44</sup>David S. Whiting, 'Sex Role Stereotyping and Ladybird Books', *Forum for the Discussion of New Trends in Education*, 1981, Vol 23, Pt. 3 pp 84-85.

<sup>45</sup>William Murray and Jill Corby, *Let's play* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1990).

<sup>46</sup>John Rowe Townshend, 'Racism and sexism in children's books', *New Community*, Vol. 5 Summer, 1976, p. 157.

<sup>47</sup>Townshend, 1976, p. 159.

<sup>48</sup>Simon Schama, *A History of Britain: The Fate of Empire*, Vol. 3, (London: BBC Worldwide, 2002), p. 550.

discrimination.<sup>49</sup> In 1962, the Commonwealth Immigration Act was introduced to severely restrict the number of immigrants. However, the announcement of the intended introduction of the legislation accelerated those seeking to enter the country and, by 1961, 100,000 people from Commonwealth countries were arriving in Britain.<sup>50</sup> Over two million immigrants entered the country between 1966 and 1976 (excluding those from the Irish Republic).<sup>51</sup> Legislation to protect immigrants from racism was passed with the establishment of the Race Relations Commission in 1968.<sup>52</sup>

Together with accusations of sexism, another common criticism aimed at children's literature in general, throughout the 1970s, came with an increasing awareness of racism. It was pointed out by some teachers and librarians working in inner city areas that many publishers' offerings were either overtly racist in their depiction of black people or were inadvertently racist by the exclusion of people of ethnic minorities.

Wills and Hepworth Ltd received criticism for depicting a white-only environment, particularly for books in the Key Words Reading Scheme. They were, however, timely with their response and sought to update titles for revised editions of the Key Words Reading Scheme in an attempt to depict a more multi-ethnic society. The firm endeavoured to reflect the wave of change that was taking place within the country. When questioned about the changes in 1974, George Towers had responded that, 'The black boys had been put there because the immigrant situation had developed in the last ten years' and that, 'any reputable publisher tries to keep abreast of things.'<sup>53</sup>

In general, publishers were not pioneering in their inclusion of non-white characters in their children's books. It was believed by critics that publishers had failed to recognise the need for representing the changing ethnic structure of the country in their books. One such view was that,

'Inner-city librarians and teachers also became conscious that young readers from the new ethnic minorities also had little to read reflecting their own experiences. Elaine Moss

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<sup>49</sup>David Childs, *Britain Since 1939: Progress and Decline*, (London: Macmillan Ltd, 1995), p. 96.

<sup>50</sup>Schama, 2002, p. 551.

<sup>51</sup>Childs, 1995, p. 188.

<sup>52</sup>Childs, 1995, p. 161.

<sup>53</sup>George Towers in interview, *The Times*, 21st January, 1974.

concluded in 1974 that 'the desperate need for picture books with black or Asian children in them is evident every minute of the day. Britain has been very slow off the mark in this respect.'<sup>54</sup>

### 9.3.1 An Early Title

The only title produced by the company between 1914 and the present day that could possibly be considered racist in its content, is one published in the 1920s. Wills and Hepworth produced a book entitled *Ten Little Nigger Boys* which depicted the rhyme of the title along with other popular rhymes. Although there had been several publications involving this particular rhyme it is a title that could, with the benefit of hindsight, be perceived as racist for the use of the word 'nigger', nowadays, has extremely negative connotations. As Pilgrim and Middleton state,

'There is a direct and strong link between the word nigger and anti-black caricatures. Although nigger has been used to refer to any person of known African ancestry, it is usually directed against blacks who supposedly have certain negative characteristics.

...The word *nigger* carries with it much of the hatred and repulsion directed toward Africans and African Americans. Historically, *nigger* defined, limited, and mocked African Americans. It was a term of exclusion, a verbal justification for discrimination.'<sup>55</sup>

However, this publication has to be set in context taking into account the lack of awareness of racism during the 1920s. The word 'nigger' derived from the Spanish word 'negre' simply meaning black, would not have been considered offensive at the time. The rhyme had been commonly used and reproduced in many books and magic lantern slides since the late nineteenth century.

### 9.3.2. Non-white Characters in KWRS

The criticism levelled against Ladybird books in the 1970s was that they did not show any non-white characters in their illustrations particularly in the Key Words Reading Scheme which, as discussed previously, was said to reflect British society. It is, indeed, true that the first editions do not portray any non-white characters but the main protagonist, Jane does have a black doll. However, some particular first edition

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<sup>54</sup>Kimberley Reynolds and Nicholas Tucker (eds) *Children's Book Publishing in Britain Since 1945* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1998), p. 13.

<sup>55</sup>Dr. David Pilgrim, Professor of Sociology, and Dr. Phillip Middleton, Professor of Languages and Literature, 'Nigger and Caricatures, Ferris State University. Sept., 2001, <http://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/caricature/> [site accessed 9th October, 2008]

books within the scheme also feature golliwogs which could draw criticism with all their associated negative connotations. Nowadays, it is not acceptable to include illustrations of golliwogs in children's books as it has become a 'symbol of reviled racist stereotyping'.<sup>56</sup>

Ladybird Books Ltd responded to criticism and, by the mid 1970s, the updated versions of the Key Words Reading Scheme titles reflected these changes by the incorporation of non-white people in their books. In order to discover whether the inclusion went far enough and to see whether those citizens of ethnic origin were portrayed positively or whether their depiction was a token gesture paying lip service to critics, it is necessary to examine the range of updated titles from the scheme. The table below lists instances of relevant changes to the artwork of the books in the Key Words Reading Scheme.

<b>Table 6: Artwork updates to revised editions of KWRS to include non-white characters</b>	
<b>Title</b>	<b>Illustration description</b>
1a - Play with us	Black doll in shop window; the white female protagonist purchases a black doll
2a - We have fun	None
3a - Things we like	Black male friend playing football; black boy at bus stop; black lady on bus
4a - Things we do	None
5a - Where we go	Black male school friend
6a - Our friends	Black couple in café; black female bus conductor; black boy in class
7a - Happy holiday	Multi-racial group of children on beach watching Punch and Judy show
8a - Sunny days	Asian boy on roundabout with group of children
9a - Games we like	None

<sup>56</sup>Marcus Dunk, 'How the golliwog went from innocent children's hero to symbol of bitter controversy', *Mail online*, 5th February, 2009. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1136016/How-golliwog-went-innocent-childrens-hero-symbol-bitter-controversy.html> [site accessed 23rd September, 2009]

10a - Adventure on the island	NOT AVAILABLE
11a - Mystery on the island	None
12a – Holiday camp mystery	None
1b - Look at this	Black doll in shop window; black doll owned by white female protagonist
2b - Have a go	Multi-racial park scene; black dolls; multi-racial lake scene; multi-racial fairground scene
3b - Boys and girls	Black child in school playground; black railway guard
4b Fun at the farm	None
5b - Out in the sun	Black female friend; black man rowing boat to help children retrieve a ball; black girl on swimming pool slide; black boy in street scene
6b - We like to help	Multi-racial street scene
7b - Fun and games	None
8b - The big house	NOT AVAILABLE
9b - Jump from the sky	Black boy in group of children,; black member of cricket team; black spectators at cricket match; black female nurse in hospital
10b - Adventure at the castle	None
11b - The carnival	One Asian male in a group of six friends; a black female nurse; multi-racial crowd
12b – Mountain adventure	One black teenager at a youth club

The revisions clearly show that the new illustrations do include non-white people in positive roles. In those titles where no non-white characters are shown it is generally because the only protagonists in the story are the family members. One title makes reference to the practice of white actors depicting coloured people in films. The children are looking at a film of the Wild West through a projector when one of the girls says, "These were real Indians," says Mary. "You can see that. They are not white men who pretend to be Indians."<sup>57</sup>

<sup>57</sup>William Murray, *Jump from the sky* (Loughborough: Ladybird Books Ltd, 1980), p. 30.

As mentioned earlier, one of the principal illustrators of the Key Words Reading Scheme was Harry Wingfield who, when questioned why everyone was white in his artwork replied, "No black kids. Well there weren't a lot of black kids when I was young anyway."<sup>58</sup> The reasons that the first versions of the books had no coloured people in them are, again, that the directors, authors and illustrators of the Key Words Reading Scheme were all white, from middle-class backgrounds and lived in suburban areas with few resident immigrants. Perhaps rather naively, they simply depicted their own neighbourhoods. With the majority of New Commonwealth immigrants arriving in Britain specifically to fill the labour shortage, they tended to settle in city areas, specifically London, Nottingham, Leicester, Wolverhampton, Bradford and Bristol.<sup>59</sup>

By taking a look at the books in question, it is fair to say that the firm had attempted to incorporate non-white characters into the books of the Key Words Reading Scheme in the revised editions.

### 9.3.3 Sunstart

Similarly, in the mid 1970s with race issues to the fore, whilst some of the company's books were criticised for portraying a white-only society their 'Sunstart' reading scheme, devised for use in the Caribbean, was attacked for depicting a black-only society. In order to ensure the accuracy of the books' illustrations, the company sent one of its illustrators to the Caribbean in order to observe members of its society. He then proceeded to illustrate the series of books based upon his observations.

However, despite the company's attempts to create a realistic portrayal of its intended market, the Sunstart Reading Scheme specifically for use in the Caribbean was also criticised. Reviewed in 1982, the books' illustrations were criticised for their sole representation of the 'Negroid race',

'Educators in the Caribbean have long bemoaned the fact that available materials have catered mainly to the Caucasian race. The illustrators of this series have swung the

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<sup>58</sup>Interview with Harry Wingfield by Jo Digger 14th November, 2001, [http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/harry\\_wingfield\\_interview.php](http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/harry_wingfield_interview.php) (page viewed 10th November, 2006)

<sup>59</sup>Miriam Akthar and Steve Humphries, *The Fifties and Sixties: A Lifestyle Revolution* (London: Boxtree, 2001), p. 68.



pendulum almost completely in the other direction... It must be borne in mind by anyone attempting to cater to the peoples of the Caribbean that these islands are inhabited by a mixture of races, whose children are all educated side by side in harmonious relationships.’<sup>60</sup>

Children’s book publishing companies have to bear a degree of responsibility for portraying ethnic diversity in their output and, nowadays, this is at the forefront of editors’ minds. However, the pace at which this has changed may have proved too slow for many critics. The decision makers at Ladybird Books Ltd clearly thought about the problem and took steps to address the issue.

#### 9.4 Class Issues

The 36 titles within the Key Words Reading Scheme were also heavily criticised for portraying a middle-class family within a middle-class context with no regard for working-class people. This criticism had similarly been levelled at the ‘Janet and John’ reading scheme which was imported from the United States of America in 1949. Antagonism toward the Ladybird Key Words Reading Scheme was strong. One critic, describing the overtly middle-class ‘Janet and John’ reading scheme launched a vitriolic attack on its counterpart, ‘What was more disturbing was that the first place in popularity had been taken by the equally obnoxious (and for the same reasons) *Ladybird Keyword* [sic] scheme.’<sup>61</sup> As for class issues; again, although heavily criticised in the 1970s for being too middle class, they were later praised for showing a world that was more realistic than the upper-class boarding school and privileged childhoods of those previously featured in children’s books.

The text and illustrations could be considered to represent a white middle-class suburb because that is, in fact, exactly what they are. The illustrations are based on what the artists believed was appropriate for such a book. When questioned about this criticism, Harry Wingfield, one of the principal artists of the series, replied,

‘middle-class, well no kids want to be dustbin kids, you can’t illustrate the dustbin kids all the time...

...I was illustrating what the average council family would like to be regarded as they were, but of course you can’t illustrate disadvantaged kids all the time, it’s not what your business

<sup>60</sup>Dorothy J. Darville (reviewer), ‘Critically Speaking’, *Reading Teacher*, (1982) Vol. 35, Pt. 5, p. 632.

<sup>61</sup>Dixon, 1977, p. 57.

is doing. I trained myself as a commercial artist, as selling medium commercial, art is designed to sell....goods...well that's the kind of self-training I'd had for thirty years.....and.....for a start you've got to sell to the parent, you're not selling to the five year old or the three year old, you're selling to the parent or the grandparent, who's trying to please these children or teach them and that's the recognised way of doing things. But you've got to make them nice to look at.'<sup>62</sup>

The books portray a family where the father works and the mother stays at home to look after the house and children. They live in a modern, three-bedroomed, semi-detached suburban house with a garage and garden. The family are car owners but whenever the children travel any distance with their mother they use public transport and use buses when travelling without their parents, locally. The children have a cat and a dog as pets and appear to have a generous amount of toys. However, they spend much of their time playing outside in the garden or at a local park. Both children are expected to assist their parents with household chores and to be helpful and respectful to relatives, neighbours and friends. They are educated at a modern, state primary school and visit friends within their same social circle.

Whilst this could be classed as a limited representation of the life of the average child at the time it is important to consider the social aspirations of the period. Millions of new homes were built in the post-war era with six new towns being purposely constructed. Many slum areas were cleared to make way for new housing. By the early 1960s the government were encouraging the construction of new housing for private ownership. Home ownership for the working classes became a real possibility and the numbers of owner-occupied properties began to rise.<sup>63</sup> By 1971, 48 per cent of households owned their own property, 31 per cent of households were in rented council houses and 20 per cent in private rented accommodation.<sup>64</sup>

While an increasing number of working class people were purchasing their own home, they were also purchasing cars in which to commute to their workplace. Private

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<sup>62</sup>Interview with Harry Wingfield by Jo Digger 14th November, 2001, [http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/harry\\_wingfield\\_interview.php](http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird/harry_wingfield_interview.php) [site accessed 10th November, 2006]

<sup>63</sup>Akhtar and Humphries, 2001, p. 63.

<sup>64</sup>General Household Survey, 2007, Office for National Statistics [http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme\\_compendia/GHS07/GHSoverview2007.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_compendia/GHS07/GHSoverview2007.pdf) [site accessed 5th February, 2009].

car ownership in Britain, grew from 28 per cent in 1960 to 37 per cent in 1965, and had reached 45 per cent in 1969.<sup>65</sup> By 1972, 52 per cent of households had access to at least one car or van.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, to illustrate a family living in their own home and owning one car could not be considered elitist and, as such, the criticism is unfounded. It is acknowledged, however, that the books would have had less relevance to those children growing up in urban areas.

While it is recognised that not all families comprised both parents with one female child and one male child, family sizes had decreased with the advent of more widely available birth control methods. Thus, a family of just two children was not atypical with the average household comprising 2.91 people in 1971.<sup>67</sup> With the rise in divorce rates during the late 1960s and 1970s there were obviously more children not living within the classic two-parent family but this was still the situation for the majority of children at this time. In 1971 only 8 per cent of families with dependent children were headed by a lone parent.<sup>68</sup> With fewer children and more disposable income, families were able to afford to purchase toys for their children especially as gifts for birthdays and Christmas. The toys depicted in the books are fairly simple items such as dolls, toy cars, bats and balls, paints and crayons, toy boats etc. Another feature of the books that rooted them firmly in a classless role was their portrayal of their characters' education. State education was available for every family that required a place at a local primary school and this is the situation depicted in the Ladybird books. Many children's books had previously described life in the elitist world of fee-charging, private boarding schools, and some publications contemporary to the Ladybird books continued to so.<sup>69</sup> It would be fair to say that Ladybird books were not overtly representative of a middle-class way of life.

Any claims that the books were sexist, racist and aimed firmly at middle-class consumers should be taken in the political context within which they were written at

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<sup>65</sup> Akthar and Humphries, 2001, p. 155.

<sup>66</sup> General Household Survey, 2007, Office for National Statistics  
[http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme\\_compendia/GHS07/GHSooverview2007.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_compendia/GHS07/GHSooverview2007.pdf) [site accessed 5th February, 2009].

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Examples include: Enid Blyton 'Malory Towers', 'St. Clare's' and 'Naughtiest Girl' series; Elinor M. Brent-Dyer 'Chalet School' series; Anthony Buckeridge 'Jennings' series; and Ronald Searle 'St Trinians' series.

the time. Sales of Ladybird books continued to soar throughout the decades, with customers obviously more than happy with their content. Sales of books from the contentious Key Words Reading Scheme grew from a reported 34 million in 1974<sup>70</sup> to 62 million in 1985<sup>71</sup> and to 80 million in 1995<sup>72</sup>. This is despite changes in teaching methods towards various other less prescriptive strategies. Whilst the scheme has fallen out of favour in schools, the books continue to be bought by parents and grandparents regardless of the fact that the illustrations and text have remained unchanged for over 30 years.

### 9.5 Conclusion

While the company can be seen as pioneering in many areas such as its use of modern technology, working practices and marketing approaches, it may be true to say that they might have been less progressive when it came to tackling the social issues of gender, class and race. The board of directors prior to the sale of the company to the Pearson Longman Group comprised a group of elderly gentlemen. In addition, the author and illustrators of the Key Words Reading Scheme were equally advanced in age and all male. The directors were all nearing, or indeed past, the normal retirement age having joined the company prior to the Second World War as young men. It is understandable that they may have been out of touch with the radical and fast-paced social changes that were taking place elsewhere in the country. They lived in the suburban areas of the Midlands that had been largely unaffected by immigration and the feminist movement and were probably unaware of the developing trends in these areas with regard to their relevance to children's book publishing.

The firm's modernisation was underway by the time that it was taken over by the Pearson Longman Group. This accelerated from 1972 onwards when all staff members were relocated to the brand new, modern premises at Beeches Road and the company changed its name. Within a few years of these major changes, most of the original pioneering directors had retired. Therefore, it is not surprising that this was the era that marked a more modern approach to the books' contents.

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<sup>70</sup>Paul Medlicott, 'A 52 page package' *New Society*, 13th February, 1975, p. 399

<sup>71</sup>'Letterpress, lamination and binding fit to burst', *Printing World*, 23rd October, 1985, p. 13.

<sup>72</sup>'How Ladybird changed its spots', *The Bookseller*, 13th October, 1995, p. 50.

For a brand to have remained popular for such a sustained length of time it must have enjoyed some degree of success. The following chapter attempts to provide evidence as to whether the company and the brand were indeed successful, by taking into account a variety of both quantitative and qualitative factors.

## Chapter 10

### Measures of Success

In order to assess whether the Ladybird imprint and the company associated with it were successful, it is first necessary to determine the ways in which success can be measured. Ultimately, a company is considered successful if it is profitable. However, success cannot be measured exclusively in financial terms for the concept can be defined as 'a favourable outcome of an undertaking'.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the company and imprint will be assessed both financially and, less tangibly, in terms of their significance. Firstly, the firm's commercial success will be quantified using any available financial data from the period during which it became a limited company through to its current status. Secondly, the imprint's significance will be assessed using a range of criteria: its impact upon childhood readers; its influence upon choices made in adulthood and the books' current role as collectors' items. Thirdly, ways in which the firm differed to other children's publishing companies will be examined and, finally, reasons as to why the brand did become successful will be suggested.

#### 10.1 The Commercial Dimension

A company's commercial success can be quantified: its financial viability measured and assessed. In order to analyse whether a company is economically sound it is only necessary to take a look at certain output measures. In simple terms, its total annual turnover, together with the overall profit or loss figures, are indicators of whether a certain enterprise is actually a financially successful venture.

Its significance, on the other hand, is something less tangible. For publishers the total number of books sold, and thus extent of readership, as well as the geographic diversity of their market can impact upon their significance regardless of resounding financial success.

##### 10.1.1 Valuation

From the 1870s, as an independent printing firm the Angel Press, firstly under Henry Wills' and later William Simpson Hepworth's ownership, was a thriving business in

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<sup>1</sup>*Longman Dictionary of the English Language* (London: Longman Group UK Ltd, 1991) p. 1614.

its own right. It was a local firm producing high quality work; a small-scale business not unlike many other jobbing printers found in towns around the country. It was not until 1924 that this independent firm of Wills and Hepworth was formed into a limited company. A formal valuation for the year ended 1923 had put the firm's worth at £5,278.17s.10d. (before depreciation).<sup>2</sup> Following the subsequent year's valuation, this figure was raised to £5,724.18s.2d. (before depreciation).<sup>3</sup> (See Chapter 2 for the inventory accompanying the valuation.) The firm's owner, William Simpson Hepworth, sold the business in 1924 for just under £12,000 (see Chapter 2 for details of the transaction) to the newly formed limited company. As an astute businessman, however, he retained the freehold to the shop and printing premises, allowing him to generate an additional personal income from the company to whom he leased them. Wills and Hepworth Ltd finally purchased the printing premises from him in 1943. (See Chapter 2 for more information regarding this.) At this stage the company was essentially a provincial commercial printer additionally publishing a handful of children's book titles each year.

It was not until the years of the Second World War that the company's children's book publishing venture really began in earnest. The resultant creation of the standard format Ladybird book set the firm on its course to some significant financial success. An inventory was taken in 1945 and a subsequent valuation revealed the company's pre-depreciation worth as £53,333.2s.3d.<sup>4</sup> The firm's growth continued and, when valued in 1960, a valuation of £239,330.17s.6d. (before depreciation)<sup>5</sup> was attributed to the company. (See Chapter 2 for the inventory accompanying the valuation.) During these years, several additional pieces of land and buildings adjacent to the original print works and shop had been purchased in order to expand the business. When taking inflation into account, the company's value in 'real terms' had gone from around £5,278 in 1923 to £5,729 in 1924: a 12.7% increase with a 573% increase from 1924 to 1945. Following the end of the Second World War the 'real

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<sup>2</sup>Inventory and valuation of The Angel Press 1923. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

<sup>3</sup>Inventory and valuation of The Angel Press 1924. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

<sup>4</sup>Inventory and valuation of The Angel Press 1945. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.

<sup>5</sup>Inventory and valuation of The Angel Press 1960. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office.



term' value rose from £38,555 in 1945 and £159,351 in 1960 representing a 313% increase.<sup>6</sup> (See Figure 35 in the Appendix for a visual representation of this growth.) Comparing the company's value over the four decades it can be seen that growth had been rapid.

The firm invested heavily in the business during the late 1960s and early 1970s and growth necessitated a change of premises. A substantial plot of land was purchased on the outskirts of Loughborough and new premises were built. (See Chapter 2 for more details.) There is no record of the eventual transactions resulting from the sale of the town centre properties but as the premises were substantial and in a prime location, it is presumed that any figures achieved were not insignificant. Between 1967 and 1975 the company had purchased four four-colour printing presses costing, in total, a reported £2,500,000.<sup>7</sup> Annual turnover for 1971 was reported as £1,500,000.<sup>8</sup> The company was sold to the Pearson Group in 1972 for a reported total sum of £3,370,000.<sup>9</sup> Whether this was its true market value, in view of the substantial investment made, is open to question. Certainly, the approach to sell came from the directors of Wills and Hepworth Ltd themselves. As ageing gentleman publishers of a provincial firm that had remained particularly insular from the general publishing world, they may have been viewed as rather genteel when faced with a conglomerate, in respect to financial negotiations. As a rather 'shy man who never felt at ease in any large gathering', James Clegg who was managing director at the time, had apparently, never become a 'doyen of the book trade fraternity.'<sup>10</sup> Had the directors made approaches to more than one potential purchaser it is possible that the company could have sold for more. However, James Clegg was described as 'an astute man of business, a tough negotiator and meticulous about detail.'<sup>11</sup> In fact, it was as an accountant that he was initially employed by the firm of Wills and Hepworth Ltd. In any event, it cannot be denied that the firm's growth had been spectacular for a small, independent children's book publishing company and the transaction provided the

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<sup>6</sup>Inflation figures taken from parliamentary report, 'Inflation: the Value of the Pound 1750–1998', Research Paper 99/20, 23rd February, 1999.  
<http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp99/rp99-020.pdf> [site accessed 18th March, 2009].

<sup>7</sup>'Investment the key to Ladybird success', *Leicester Mercury*, 7th June, 1983.

<sup>8</sup>'Ladybirds join Penguins, Pelicans and Puffins in the same 'nest'', *Smith's Trade News*, 1st January, 1972, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>Obituary: Mr James Clegg, Pioneer of Ladybird books', *The Times*, 30th September, 1976.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*

purchaser with a valuable asset to add to the other publishing companies in its portfolio. (See Table 1 in Chapter 2 for comparison of value in relation to Longman and Penguin.)

The company's earlier investment had been planned in order to increase production and this it had successfully achieved. Sales of Ladybird books had grown from a reported 12 million books per annum in 1969<sup>12</sup> to 24 million by 1975.<sup>13</sup> The number of books sold was a significant factor for the firm as its business philosophy was based upon production of a mass-market, large print-run, low-cost product. With standardisation, production costs could be curtailed and with no royalties to pay to authors and illustrators, the greater number of copies sold, the better the profit. Following the company's takeover, it continued to thrive, with production rates remaining fairly steady. In the period of ownership by the Pearson Group from 1973 until the closure of the Loughborough premises in 1999, the number of books sold per annum remained between 20,000,000 and 30,000,000. Figure 36 in the Appendix shows the number of books sold for the years from 1973 until 1998.

An article published in 1989 reported growth from a £9,000,000 turnover in 1984 to £14,300,000 in 1987<sup>14</sup> and by 1990 the same journal announced an annual figure of £16,000,000.<sup>15</sup> This steady increase contributed a £2,000,000 profit for the company in 1984 and a £2,700,000 profit in 1987.<sup>16</sup> However, recession hit the country at the beginning of the 1990s and the company made a loss of £90,000 on a turnover of £12,200,000 for the financial year ending 1991.

Although the price of the standard format books remained static for over thirty years from 1940 to 1971, prices rose at a fairly rapid rate following this. Figure 37 in the Appendix illustrates the price rises from 1971 to 1999. The decade of the 1990s saw mixed fortunes in the book trade and at its end, the Loughborough plant was closed

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<sup>12</sup>John Walton. From notes taken on visit in February 1969. Letter to author 12th June, 2003.

<sup>13</sup>Paul Medicott, 'A 52 page package', *New Society*, 13th February, 1975, p. 399.

<sup>14</sup>'Ladybird – low profile, high sales', *The Bookseller*, 10th March, 1989.

<sup>15</sup>'Ladybird – the first 50 years', *The Bookseller*, 20th July, 1990, p.183.

<sup>16</sup>'Ladybird – low profile, high sales', *The Bookseller*, 10th March, 1989.

down. Figure 38 in the Appendix documents the company's turnover and profits and losses for the decade.<sup>17</sup>

As can be seen, the firm turned around its fortunes from the 1991 loss of 90,000 to report a healthy profit of £1,800,000 the following year. Things continued well with gross profits improving until the middle of the decade. However, economic failure was cited for the closure of the Loughborough premises in 1999. It was reported that Anthony Forbes-Watson (a former managing director of Ladybird Books Ltd), speaking as head of Penguin UK, in 1998, had said that the 'high cost of maintaining Ladybird's in-house printing operation had been a major factor affecting trading performance.' and that the impact of the 'pound on exports and problems in the Far East markets would lead Ladybird to record a substantial loss for the current trading year.' In addition, he attributed the 'changes in reading habits to children, more and more of who prefer computers to books.'<sup>18</sup> Whilst turnover for the year ended 1998 was £15,127,000 with overseas turnover accounting for £5,420,000 indicating that exports had also remained strong, the profit as a proportion of total sales was affected.<sup>19</sup> The overall turnover remained below £10,000,000 for much of the decade from 2000 to 2009 but profitability was increased following the sale of the Loughborough premises. This was achieved by the radical reduction of production costs. The amalgamation of editorial and marketing teams from other imprints owned by the group, the sole office premises for all imprints based in one central building in London and the increased use of outsourcing as well as printing the books overseas are all factors in the fall in the cost of producing the books. The previous success of the Ladybird book had been based upon a business philosophy of making profit by the sheer volume of sales with a cheap selling price. In more recent years, whilst overall sales have been less than previous decades, the percentage of profit in relation to the total sales figures has been greater.

The total number of children's books published in the UK rose from 7,595 in 1995 to 9,099 in 1999.<sup>20</sup> This represented an estimated growth (in real terms) of 34 per cent in

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<sup>17</sup>Data for years 1991–1993 from: *Book Publishing in Britain* (London: J Whitaker & Sons Ltd, 1995), p. 236. Data for years 1996–1999 from company accounts registered with Companies House.

<sup>18</sup>'210 lose their jobs at Ladybird Books', *Leicester Mercury*, 26th November, 1998, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup>Company report for Ladybird Books Ltd. <http://fame.bvdep.com> [site accessed 23rd January, 2009]

<sup>20</sup>Whitaker/The Bookseller/Mintel. <http://academic.mintel.com> [site accessed 21st January, 2009]

the retail sales of children's books for the period from 1995 to 2000.<sup>21</sup> Annual turnover had slowly decreased from its peak in the mid 1990s whilst gross profit was variable for the rest of the decade with 1998 showing a decided decrease in profit.

Financially, the brand has continued to produce a fairly consistent level of turnover and gross profit since the closure of the Loughborough premises and the subsequent move to London.<sup>22</sup> However, this is substantially less than the levels of turnover seen during much of the 1990s. In addition, the gross profits remain steady but have not reached the levels achieved in 1996 and 1997. The peak in profit achieved during this period was due, in no small part, to the proceeds of sales resulting in the successful negotiation of a licence to produce certain products in the UK for the Disney. (See Chapter 6 for more information regarding licensing deals.) Figure 39 in the Appendix shows the company's annual turnover together with its gross profit/loss.

It can be seen that the company was financially successful. The value of the firm increased significantly from 1924 when it first became a limited company to its valuation in 1960 (See Figure 35 in Appendix). Moreover, having been sold to the Pearson Longman Group in 1972 for £3,370,000<sup>23</sup> it can be concluded that the firm's worth had grown substantially. It remained a profitable venture following its incorporation into the Pearson Longman Group plc with reported sales of £21m in 1973,<sup>24</sup> £5.9m in 1980,<sup>25</sup> £9m (£2m pre-tax profit) in 1984,<sup>26</sup> £14.3m (£2.7m pre-tax profit) in 1987,<sup>27</sup> and £16m in 1990.<sup>28</sup> A financial recession impacted upon the firm in 1991 resulting in a reported pre-tax loss of £90,000, the following year saw a recovery. The firm returned healthy profits for the remainder of the decade and into the new millennium. (See Figures 38 and 39 in Appendix)

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<sup>21</sup>Mintel. <http://academic.mintel.com> [site accessed 21st January, 2009]

<sup>22</sup>Company report for Ladybird Books Ltd. <http://fame.bv.dep.com> [site accessed 16th January, 2009]

<sup>23</sup>'Ladybirds join Penguins, Pelicans and Puffins in same 'nest'.' *Smith's Trade News* (London) 1st January, 1972.

<sup>24</sup>'The difference a decade makes', *The Times*, 21st January, 1974.

<sup>25</sup>Norrie, 1982, p. 118.

<sup>26</sup>'Ladybird – the first 50 years', *The Bookseller*, 20th July, 1990, p. 183.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

## **10.2 Reader Responses and Collectors**

The impact of a company's brand can be assessed in a much more diverse and qualitative manner than simply with financial data. A specific brand may have either negative or positive connotations and can have an impact upon consumers for a short period or a more sustained length of time. The firm of Wills and Hepworth became so synonymous with its own Ladybird brand that the company later changed its name to Ladybird Books. The company's ultimate significance hinged exclusively upon its fortuitous choice of, and effective management of, its brand in a similar way to that afforded to the highly successful Penguin branding.

Today, Ladybird books are often remembered with great fondness and a sense of nostalgia by many. Other, more cynical observers are of the opinion that they represent a Utopian world that never existed. The books' illustrations were photographic in their realism and were designed to represent the post-war British way of life. In fact, one of the most prolific of Ladybird's illustrators did photograph his neighbours' children and worked directly from these images. The deliberate aim of the books' creators was to provide a strong sense of photo-realism in all their illustrations included within the non-fiction titles. This view of Britain was, say its critics, a white, middle-class elitist representation of reality. However, the mass-market availability of these affordable books ensured they were actually well within the reach of many working-class families. They were used by millions of children from which to learn to read and to sustain a good reading habit. They were important in their educational influences due not only to their far-reaching infiltration of the market but also because they were trusted by parents and teachers to provide information that was both accurate and well written. The aspirational nature of the British working classes throughout the post-war period allowed the books, with their optimistic nature, to thrive amongst working-class people whilst the competitive pricing allowed for a strong market share.

### **10.2.1 Inspired Readers**

Ladybird books have been influential upon many people. They have had a strong effect on generations of readers, parents, teachers, librarians, educationalists, critics and book collectors around the world. Some readers have been inspired by a single Ladybird book to undertake certain occupations or challenges in adulthood.

For the purposes of qualitative data collection, a systematic search of both printed and web-based literature was undertaken. This revealed many instances whereby former Ladybird book readers had attributed particularly influential memories and experiences linked to their exposure to the books in childhood. Several former readers of Ladybird books have been compelled to publicly express their thoughts regarding their formative reading experiences. In order to illustrate a general sense of the way in which the Ladybird books are remembered, a range of specific examples are quoted below.

### 10.2.1.1 Ladybird Fiction

Some readers were particularly influenced by the fiction titles produced under the Ladybird imprint over the decades. Those choosing to collect the books as adults appear to have been captivated by images and memories of the story books. Helen Day, for example, a Ladybird book collector, was inspired to purchase copies to read to her son as they invoked memories of her own reading experience as a child. She says 'Reading them to him was a pure nostalgia trip. *Shopping with Mother*, for example, has Susan and John going with their mother (complete with hat and white gloves) to the draper's to buy some socks – it was another world entirely, but I remembered reading it as a child.'<sup>29</sup> Fellow collector, Karen Strang, speaks of her nostalgic interest when she says, 'They remind me of my childhood – happy times.'<sup>30</sup> Another collector, musician Christopher Holland cites his reason for doing so when he says, 'I had quite fond memories of them from when I was small. The fairytales especially.'<sup>31</sup> As a child, pop star and horticulturist Kim Wilde's favourite book was *The Big Pancake*. She also advocates *The Ladybird Book of Prayers through the Year* as an excellent volume for teaching children to appreciate the natural world.<sup>32</sup>

### 10.2.1.2 Ladybird's Non-fiction Series

It was, however, the multitude of non-fiction series introduced in the 1950s and whose titles increased significantly in the 1960s that appear to have inspired a generation of writers, broadcasters, scientists and historians. The non-fiction range of

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<sup>29</sup>Mark Anstead, 'A Hit with Children and Adults', *Financial Times*, 5th May, 2007, p. 6.

<sup>30</sup>Jasmine Birtles, 'This is how it works: Bunnikin, Wonk and the Tinker will make their owners richer', *Independent on Sunday*, 26th September, 2004, p. 20.

<sup>31</sup>Cressida Connolly, 'Bitten by the Ladybird Bug' *Telegraph Magazine*, p. 51.

<sup>32</sup>Kim Wilde quoted in: Emma Marriott and Dan Newman, *Boys and Girls: A Ladybird book of childhood* (London: Ladybird Books Ltd, 2007), pp. 186–188.

titles was comprehensive and it would have been difficult to find a topic that had not been covered in a Ladybird book by the early 1970s. One former Ladybird book reader, Phil Crabtree recalls that, 'As a child I was brought up on them. I learnt to read with them and now my children use them a lot for school projects. Whatever the subject, we've usually got a Ladybird covering it.' The two most memorable titles for author Mick Jackson are books from the 'Junior Science' series entitled, *Magnets, Bulbs and Batteries* and *Lights, Mirrors and Lenses*. These titles remind him of his childhood with his brother who he says was the kind of child who, 'did all his homework, then settled down to conduct a series of experiments involving cotton reels, a horse-shoe magnet and a cork.' As an adult his brother chose biochemistry as an occupation.<sup>33</sup>

Other non-fiction series proved similarly influential. For example, the most fondly remembered book for writer and performer, Ronald Rivron was Ladybird's *The Policeman*. It had sustained his childhood idea of becoming a policeman when he grew up and whilst he did not actually fulfil his ambition, as an adult he purchased an original painting of one of the illustrations from the book.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, broadcaster and author, Alan Titchmarsh recalls that his passion for nature was fuelled by Ladybird's *British Birds and their Nests* followed by *A Second Book of British Birds* and then the third. He particularly recalls the vivid illustration of a kingfisher.<sup>35</sup>

Another popular series of books produced by Wills and Hepworth under the Ladybird imprint was the 'Adventures from History' series. Andrew Roberts recalls the profound effect they had upon his own choice of career, 'I had been engrossed in history since about the age of four, when the glorious Ladybird Books' Adventures from History series had opened my eyes to the romance of the lives of people like Admiral Nelson, Elizabeth I, Florence Nightingale and Alfred the Great.' 'A powerful narrative commentary which enthused but never patronised was the key to the publishing phenomenon that quite literally changed my life in that I am now a professional historian whose love of the subject can be traced back directly to

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<sup>33</sup>Mick Jackson, 'Building a Library: Ladybird books', *Independent on Sunday*, 7th August, 2005, p 26.

<sup>34</sup>Ronald Rivron quoted in: Emma Marriott and Dan Newman, *Boys and Girls: A Ladybird book of childhood* (London: Ladybird Books Ltd, 2007), pp. 64–66.

<sup>35</sup>Alan Titchmarsh quoted in: Emma Marriott and Dan Newman, *Boys and Girls: A Ladybird book of childhood* (London: Ladybird Books Ltd, 2007), p. 104.



Ladybird.<sup>36</sup> For Robert Elms, broadcaster and writer, it was also this history series that held the most fascination. Whilst hailing from a single-parent, working-class family where books were not prevalent in the household, he recalls that probably the only volumes they owned were a couple of Ladybird titles. Another favourite was *The Ladybird Book of London* which served as inspiration for lone trips around the city's capital aboard the Routemaster red buses.<sup>37</sup> It was this same series of books that also inspired Dr Timothy Brain, Chief Constable of Gloucestershire. He attributes his love of history and his subsequent doctoral study in a historical discipline to a childhood influence of Ladybird books. Speaking at a conference in January 2009 he said that they were 'wonderful books'.<sup>38</sup>

### 10.2.1.3 Images from Childhood

Ladybird books were highly influential on generations of readers. The books' images were particularly striking and evoke positive responses with former Ladybird book readers even today. The images and illustrations were, undoubtedly, the inherent reason for such vivid recollections and fond memories of the books.<sup>39</sup> It was the illustrations in particular that Dave Shepherd remembers the books for. He states, 'The images really endure in the mind.'<sup>40</sup> Another Ladybird fan, Jo Digger, writes that 'These images are part of the national psyche. They are deeply embedded in many people's memories because they were the first pictures that, as infants, they really had to concentrate on.'<sup>41</sup>

Whilst the texts were well written, informative and formed the basis for the corresponding images, it is the memory of the illustrations in particular that seems to have been particularly influential. Pieces of original artwork are now sought after by collectors for whom the books' illustrations are considered to be of even greater importance than the texts.

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<sup>36</sup> Andrew Roberts, 'Please, miss, I want to be Lord High Protector of England', *The Guardian*, 19th December, 2001.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Elms quoted in: Emma Marriott and Dan Newman, *Boys and Girls: A Ladybird book of childhood* (London: Ladybird Books Ltd, 2007), pp. 136-140.

<sup>38</sup> Dr Tim Brain, Chief Constable of Gloucestershire. Speaking at conference on 28th January, 2009, Cumberland Lodge, The Great Park, Windsor. Author in attendance.

<sup>39</sup> Emma Haughton, 'Peter and Jane hit 60', *The Times*, 9th December, 2000.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Catherine Milner, 'Ladybird artist sells 'Peter and Jane' pictures', *Daily Telegraph*, 2nd December, 2001, p. 13.

### 10.2.2 Collectors' Items

Various items and artefacts become collectable for many different reasons. For those collectors of children's books, it is often their nostalgic regard for a particular title. This is because it is those books read during childhood when one is most impressionable that seem to be valued most highly and one that is not based simply on monetary worth.

During the last few years, Ladybird books have become highly collectable and are now a feature of *Miller's Collectables Price Guide*.<sup>42</sup> The guide provides an opinion as to why they have become increasingly popular. It states,

'The appeal of Ladybird books to collectors is based on nostalgia. We all enjoy rediscovering books from our childhood and Ladybirds were often the first books we saw.'<sup>43</sup>

The guide also gives a general idea of those books of particular interest to collectors.

'Early editions from pre-1960 are the most sought after, provided their original dust jackets are still present and in good condition. Editions from the 1960s and '70s with illustrations from Martin Aitchison are also favourites. The various fairytales series continue to be popular. The later series are still very affordable, while earlier series are becoming more expensive.'<sup>44</sup>

The accuracy of this information is borne out by the variance in prices commanded by sales of Ladybird books on online auction websites and those belonging to second hand book sellers. Some first editions of the earliest standard format books or the rarer titles are changing hands for hundreds of pounds. However, a more common price range for first editions of the majority of titles is between five to thirty pounds. The table below lists a selection of titles featured in the *Miller's Collectables Price Guide*.<sup>45</sup> Some of these prices seem a little optimistic when compared with those of books actually attracting firm bids on the online auction sites, but they do reflect some of the titles that seem to be the most sought after.

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<sup>42</sup>Jonty Hearnden and Katherine Higgins (eds.), *Miller's Collectables Price Guide* (Tenterden: Miller's, 2006), p. 43.

<sup>43</sup>Jonty Hearnden and Katherine Higgins (eds.), *Miller's Collectables Price Guide 2008* (London: Octopus Publishing Group, 2007), p. 52.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid. and Jonty Hearnden and Katherine Higgins (eds.), *Miller's Collectables Price Guide 2009* (London: Octopus Publishing Group, 2008), p. 43.

**Table 7: Value guide prices for Ladybird books**

<b>Book Title</b>	<b>Series</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Price Guide</b>
<i>Bunnikin's Picnic Party</i>	401	1940	£230–£260
<i>Smoke and Fluff</i>	401	1941	£120–£130
<i>Downy Duckling</i>	401	1946	£100–£120
<i>The Snowman</i>	417	1949	£75–£85
<i>Uncle Mac's ABC book</i>	455	1950	£105–£120
<i>The Flower Show</i>	474	1953	£150–£165
<i>Tootles the Taxi</i>	413	1956	£200–£300
<i>Julius Caesar and Roman Britain</i>	561	1959	£30–£35
<i>Numbers</i>	563	1959	£115–£130
<i>The Lord's Prayer and other prayers for children</i>	612	1961	£25–£30
<i>Magnets, Bulbs and Batteries</i>	621	1962	£15–£20
<i>1b Look at this</i>	KWRS	1964	£20–£25
<i>1a Play with us</i>	KWRS	1964	£25–£35
<i>Cinderella</i>	Well-loved Tales	1964	£180–£200
<i>The Elves and the Shoemaker</i>	Well-loved Tales	1965	£30–£35
<i>The Three Little Pigs</i>	Well-loved Tales	1965	£25–£35
<i>The Magic Porridge Pot</i>	Well-loved Tales	1971	£40–£45
<i>The Customs Officer</i>	606B	1972	£40–£45
<i>Learning about Heraldry</i>	634	1974	£15–£20

Several collectors' websites have emerged during the last few years spawning a thriving business in second-hand Ladybird books sales.<sup>46</sup> These sites provide detailed information on how to date the different editions of the titles as the books did not feature their actual publication date. A copyright date appears on the title page generally but as the books were reprinted for many years usually without revision, it can be difficult to verify the date of any copy. Differences such as changes in the publisher's mark, alterations in the patterns printed on the endpapers, variations in the direction of the text on the books' spines, the inclusion of dust jackets and the list of additional titles in the series printed either on the dust jacket or back cover, all provide clues as to which edition each particular copy may relate. In addition, the price printed on the cover or dust jacket can be used as a guide to the date of the book. However, this remained at 2s. 6d. for over 30 years, but the advent of decimalisation meant that for a period prior to this, the equivalent price of 12½p was printed alongside the original price. From 1972 price rises were constant and any books from this date onwards feature the revised sums.

In addition, many general booksellers' websites dealing with the sale of second hand books now also include many Ladybird titles.<sup>47</sup> Online auction websites are also proving to be a popular vehicle for disposing of unwanted titles for a few pounds apiece. A search for Ladybird books on e-Bay for example, generally elicits a response involving thousands of titles at any one time.<sup>48</sup> These are usually accompanied by a photograph depicting the front (and sometimes the back) cover. The book's condition is described together with any distinguishing marks such as printed price, type of endpapers etc so that the buyer may attempt to identify the edition. Some sellers will state that the books are first edition or will attribute a date to the book but these should be viewed with caution as, has been mentioned earlier, dating Ladybird books and identifying first editions is not a simple matter. There is also, currently, a blog dedicated to Ladybird books.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Collectors' sites include: <http://www.ladybirdbookcollector.co.uk>; <http://www.theweeweb.co.uk/ladybird>; <http://www.easyontheeye.net/ladybird>; <http://www.stellabooks.com/articles/ladybird>; <http://www.mintylou.connectfree.co.uk>; <http://www.dottybug.co.uk>; [www.ladybirdflyawayhome.com](http://www.ladybirdflyawayhome.com), and [www.ladybirdbookcollector.co.uk](http://www.ladybirdbookcollector.co.uk)

<sup>47</sup>Examples include: <http://www.xanadubooks.co.uk>; <http://www.AbeBooks.co.uk>; <http://www.amazon.co.uk> and <http://www.alibris.co.uk>

<sup>48</sup><http://e-Bay.co.uk>

<sup>49</sup><http://oldladybirdbooks.blogspot.com/> [site accessed 18th May, 2009]

Some popular BBC television programmes have also shown an interest in the subject of Ladybird books. Both *The Antiques Roadshow*<sup>50</sup> and *Flog It!*<sup>51</sup> programmes have recently featured original artwork and the books themselves were amongst those topics discussed on James May's *My Sister's Top Toys*.<sup>52</sup> In addition, exhibitions of some pieces of original artwork have encouraged sales of these familiar images. Some examples of several such exhibitions include one in Gloucestershire where Cheltenham Borough Council funded a touring exhibition at the Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum in 2002.<sup>53</sup> This featured original artwork by prolific Ladybird book artists Martin Aitchison, John Berry and Harry Wingfield. Another exhibition held in the same year solely featured the ninety-one-year-old Harry Wingfield's original illustrations. This exhibition was held in his home town of Walsall at the New Art Gallery.<sup>54</sup> Harry Wingfield had previously sold many of his paintings over the years in order to supplement his state pension. Martin Aitchison currently sells his original artwork directly from his own website and he also held his own exhibition in 2008.<sup>55</sup>

In conclusion, it can be said that the firm was measurably successful in financial terms, and the brand even more so. There are few brands that are equally evocative and that have endured for so many generations. The brand's high profile remains undiminished both in Britain and, indeed, globally. Few could argue against the fact that the Ladybird venture did, indeed, ultimately result in 'a favourable outcome of an undertaking'.<sup>56</sup>

The following, final chapter will aim to provide an explanation as to why Ladybird books became so successful. In addition, the conclusions of the research and any evaluations will also be covered.

<sup>50</sup>BBC television programme broadcast 11th January, 2009.

<sup>51</sup>BBC television programme broadcast 3rd March, 2009.

<sup>52</sup>BBC television programme broadcast 23rd December 2007.

<sup>53</sup>Author visited exhibition. Exhibition accompanied by explanatory booklet leaflet. *The art of Ladybird Books*. Exhibition curators Paul McKee, Cressida Connolly and Mathew Connolly. Cheltenham Borough Council, 2002.

<sup>54</sup>Obituary: 'Harry Wingfield: Illustrator of Ladybird's Peter and Jane for twenty years – and creator of a wholesome vision of Britain', *The Times*, 15th March, 2002.

<sup>55</sup><http://www.MartinAitchison.co.uk> [site accessed 23rd September, 2009].

<sup>56</sup>Definition of 'success' in: *Longman Dictionary of the English Language* (London: Longman Group UK Ltd: 1991) p. 1614.

## Chapter 11

### Conclusions and Evaluation

Having concluded that the firm of Wills and Hepworth Ltd, later Ladybird Books Ltd, was financially successful, and that the brand has become culturally significant, the possible reasons for this will be examined. In addition, the key findings of the research will be summarised and any possible research opportunities suggested.

#### 11.1 Company Personnel

One significant reason for the firm's success can be put down to the human factor. The company's founders, Henry Wills and William Simpson Hepworth, were fine entrepreneurs. They had developed a high quality printing and bookselling business offering a varied range of additional services. The timeliness of Hepworth's diversification into children's book publishing, together with his fortuitous choice of imprint, featured highly in the firm's future achievements.

The company's directors, particularly James Clegg, Douglas Keen, George Towers and Charles Hall provided strong leadership. They were responsible for a range of good business decisions, were visionary in their publishing choices and sound in their marketing skills. James Clegg and Douglas Keen were the innovators behind the post-war renewal of the children's book publishing venture when other board members had preferred to focus on the commercial printing aspect.

Furthermore, relations between employer and employees remained positive throughout the decades, in what was a highly unionised industry. The result of such good relations allowed the firm to enjoy decades of constancy from a competent and skilled workforce. Following the closure of the Loughborough premises in 1999, with the loss of a reported 210 jobs, the company's personnel manager paid tribute to the staff saying, 'Our workforce has an enviable reputation for loyalty, flexibility and commitment and will be an asset to any future employer.'<sup>1</sup> Staff had, indeed, been extremely loyal to the firm with many spending their entire working lives working on either the publishing or printing aspects of the business. The location of the company

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Grinnel, 'New chapter for ex-Ladybird staff', *Leicester Mercury*, 19th March, 1999.

was also one factor in the retention of its staff. The fact that the small Midlands town of Loughborough was home to the firm, rather than a site traditionally associated with the publishing industry, such as in London, Oxford or Cambridge, meant that there was less competition for their skilled staff. However, the social provision of the firm also encouraged a sense of belonging and staff fidelity because the workforce was generally content, with employees often forming lasting friendships with one another. The firm was responsible for the employment of up to 400 people at its peak in the mid 1970s. There remained a steady number of employees, of between 300 to 400, for the subsequent decades until a decline in the total up until the final number of a little over 200 people made redundant at the closure of the Loughborough premises in 1999. As an employer, the firm had held great local significance for over a century of its existence.

### **11.2 Location**

One reason for the solid growth of the firm may have been its location. Its placement in the centre of the country with good transport links and, indeed, its own central location within the town centre of Loughborough were positive factors. Similarly, the steady expansion of the town centre premises between 1924 and 1970 sustained the firm's ability to progress. Sound investment in acquiring the necessary buildings and land in a prime town centre location was also a good business decision. The radical decision to relocate to purpose-built premises from 1970 onwards increased the company's significance when it was offered for sale to the Pearson Longman Group, as by 1970 the firm was one of the biggest specialised printing and publishing operations in Europe.

### **11.3 World Wars**

Both World Wars were factors in the success of Ladybird books. It was the diversification of the business necessitated by the First World War that focussed Hepworth's attention towards the development of a children's book publishing project. During the Second World War, the business had less custom for its commercial printing especially as some of their main contracts were linked to the motor industry. With less commercial printing to undertake, the firm needed to seek alternative sources of income and it is because of this that the children's book venture



was resurrected. In addition, the economies necessary for paper usage resulted in the standardised format book that was to be the mainstay of the firm for decades.

#### **11.4 Financial Management**

Company directors made sound financial decisions over the decades with Managing Director, James Clegg, being particularly astute when it came to finances. The board of directors took great care in their deliberations over how and when to invest and did so only where necessary. Whilst new technology was eagerly embraced where the production benefits were proven, older machinery was not discarded and its employment continued. When they deemed it appropriate, however, directors did invest in the most up-to-date machinery in order to boost productivity and to ensure that the whole book production process remained as efficient and automated as possible. This model of high volume production allowed for a keen pricing strategy and significant numbers of books were sold. Whilst the firm's redeployment to a new site had necessitated the purchase of some new plant, much of the existing machinery was relocated. Similarly, new furnishings were purchased for parts of the modern building when it was newly built in the early 1970s, but some remained up until its closure in 1999. This resulted in a curious amalgam of a company employing the latest technology necessary to increase productivity, juxtaposed alongside a somewhat old-fashioned approach to working practices. In addition, the firm only ceased its commercial printing, which had previously been the mainstay of the company, when it became prudent to do so.

Other significant financial benefits include the 'no sale or return' policy employed by the company. Once the order had been fulfilled, the product was despatched and money collected, resulting in the need for less warehouse space. The financial benefits of not having to pay out royalties to authors or illustrators, by paying a fixed fee for their services, are also not inconsiderable.

Another factor in their success was their early adoption of cost-effective, modern working practices such as the outsourcing of authors, illustrators, plate making and reprographics.

## 11.5 Brand Identity

Marketing strategies employed by the firm in the 1950s had been particularly forward-thinking and many are used by publishers today. Ladybird Books Ltd was amongst the first of children's book publishers to sell their books in supermarkets. The innovative use of their own point-of-sale display units allowed them to market their own books in a distinctive manner regardless of the outlet whether it was in a petrol station or a corner shop.

The company's profile was at its greatest and growth was at its strongest during the period of producing books in a standard format and this was one of the most important factors in its success. As Douglas Keen once said, the books were produced to a, 'formula that couldn't miss'.<sup>2</sup> The brand's strength lay in the books' formulaic design and consistency of editorial standard. Parents and teachers found the books to be reliable in their information, interesting in their prose and attractively illustrated. Moreover, their consistent pricing strategy was another reliable factor that played a vital role in their meteoric growth in sales. Another benefit of producing books in one particular format was the resultant economical manufacturing cost, and the ability to maintain this competitive pricing strategy. This concept of producing books to a well-developed formula has also proved to be successful for other publishing brands such as Mills and Boon whose similar fortunes have been documented.<sup>3</sup> Producers of romantic fiction for a century, this particular book publishing company has sold millions of books targeted at women readers (currently at a rate of 200 million per annum).<sup>4</sup>

Innovative marketing techniques and a very high profile image ensured the brand was easily recognisable. The brand was quickly established and for the decades following the Second World War, became synonymous with cheap yet attractive, reliable, informative and robust children's books.

The firm maintained an extensive backlist and the number of new titles rose significantly between 1940 and 1972. (See Figure 34 in the Appendix.) Over the

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<sup>2</sup>Douglas Keen in an interview. *Ladybird, Ladybird*, BBC Radio 4 programme broadcast 28th December, 2001.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph McAleer, *Passion's Fortune*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1999).

<sup>4</sup>Francesca Segal, 'Who said romance was dead?', *The Observer*, 27th January, 2008.

decades a multitude of titles were reprinted. The new impressions simply involved the reprinting of the original book reusing the plates many times, thus saving the initial creative costs such as those paid to the author, illustrator and plate maker.

Historically, there have been several instances of publishers adopting a kind of uniformity to their books in order to promote a strong brand identity. These include Penguin, who adopted 'a new physical format'<sup>5</sup>, and Gollancz whose 'books had a distinctive yellow and black cover'.<sup>6</sup> However, the Ladybird brand was unique in children's book publishing from 1940 to the early 1970s in that every book published under the imprint was almost identical in its structure. This included not only the books' size and number of pages but the way in which each verso contained text and each recto comprised a full-page illustration. Whilst it is acknowledged that other children's imprints contained various series of books with a similar uniformity, none could claim to have adopted such a wholesale approach to the design of their entire range of publications. However, more significant is the fact that whilst the uniform design of a Ladybird book undoubtedly raised its profile and provided for a strategic marketing opportunity in the same way as other publishers had sought to do with their attempts at uniformity, it is the reason behind the decision that is unique. The company chose to keep all their books to a standard format to facilitate production because they manufactured their books in addition to publishing them. Another factor that added to their uniqueness was that they alone kept the prices of their books constant for over 30 years. The firm differed from other publishing companies predominantly because it was the only children's book publisher to publish, print and bind their books within one premises. Their timeliness in producing the kind of book that was both affordable and attractive, appealing to those working-class parents who would not otherwise have purchased books for their children was an important factor in their success.

As the company's range of books from 1940 until the 1970s remained unique, it is the belief that they faced no major competitor. Former director, George Towers' response when questioned on this point was, 'We had no major competitors. No other publisher

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<sup>5</sup>John Feather, *A History of British Publishing*, 2nd edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 174.

<sup>6</sup>Feather, 2006, p. 168.

had our range'.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, another former director Mike Banks responded in a similar manner when asked the same question. He said, 'I do not honestly think that we had much competition in children's publishing when we first started and even until we were taken over by Pearsons.'<sup>8</sup> Whilst the product remained unique, that is in a single format covering a comprehensive range of non-fiction topics as well as fiction titles, there was nothing to really provide a strong rival in the market place. The only books facing direct competition were those titles within the Key Words Reading Scheme that had to compete with other such schemes. The main rival was James Nisbet & Company's 'Janet and John' reading scheme that had been in widespread usage prior to Ladybird Books Ltd's introduction of the Key Words Reading Scheme into British schools. After a few years, the Key Words Reading Scheme became more popular and its usage more widespread than its former rival.

### 11.6 Export Opportunities

The Ladybird brand is now globally renowned and directors' decisions regarding the exploration of export markets are not insignificant in its success. By the time Ladybird Books Ltd won the BPIF Export Achievement Award in 1991, the firm's exports accounted for 38 per cent of the company's sales.<sup>9</sup> A measure of the firm's success and influence at that period is illustrated by a comment made by one of the award's judges, W. Pincus Jaspert. He said, of the company, 'Its pioneering book manufacturing system has actually made one of the world's largest printing machinery makers modify offset machines to suit Ladybird's integrated manufacturing system.'<sup>10</sup> Exports to European markets replaced some of those to the declining Middle Eastern markets when recession threatened in the early 1990s and it is this continuing flexibility that enabled the firm to survive.<sup>11</sup>

Directors' exploration of export markets as early as the 1920s have contributed significantly to the success of the brand. Of particular note was the major export venture to the Middle East, in the 1970s, which represented the largest quantity of books printed in Arabic to be imported by any Arabic country. Whilst the global sales

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<sup>7</sup>George Towers, former director with Ladybird Books Ltd, in response to question from author.

<sup>8</sup>Mike Banks, former director with Ladybird Books Ltd, in response to question from author.

<sup>9</sup>Catherine Grainger, 'Ladybird scoops export award', *Printing World*, 8th May, 1991.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>W. Pincus Jaspert, 'The lowdown on European markets', *American Printer*, 1991, Vol. 207, Issue No. 5, p. 94.

of translated books remained strong for many decades, it was the export of English language versions of the books that accounted for the majority of export sales.

### **11.7 Key Findings**

The research has shown that the Ladybird brand has become significant and that the company responsible for devising the imprint and publishing and producing Ladybird books was measurably successful. Reasons for this have been suggested based on evidence from a range of resources. Ways in which the firm has been influenced by external factors and has, itself, influenced others have been identified and discussed. In addition, a comprehensive database of Ladybird titles has been created.

### **11.8 Future Research**

This thesis is broad in nature and the history of a company and its brand has been examined around a range of themes. It is possible that future research could further develop some of the issues raised. For example, more investigation into the gender, class and race issues associated with Ladybird books could be undertaken. Alternatively, the brand could be further researched in parallel with other children's book imprints to investigate any similarities.

# Appendix

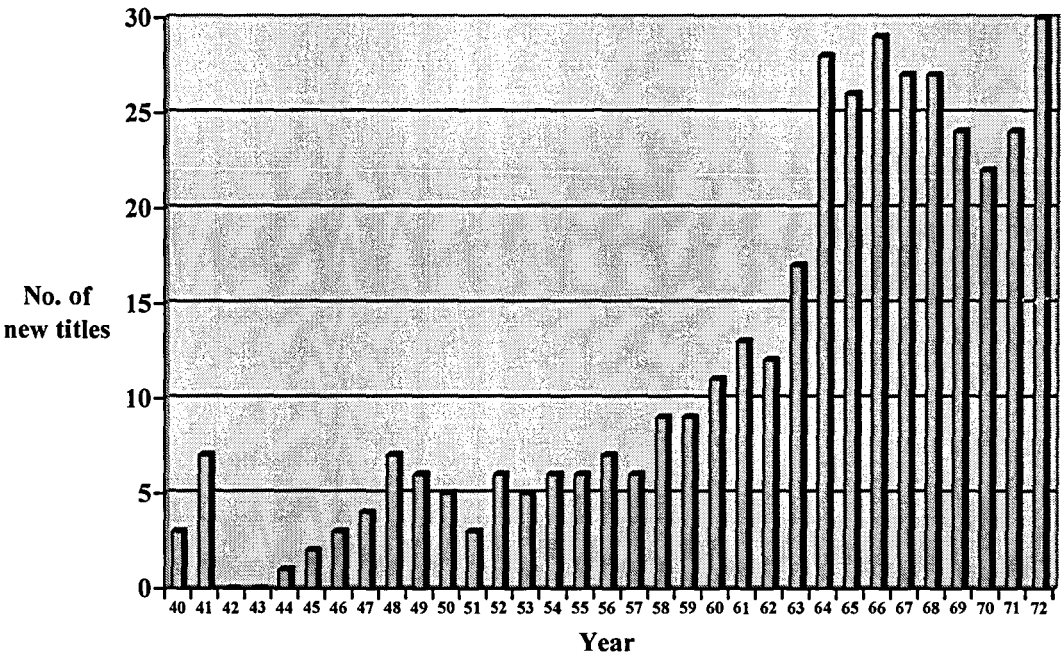


Figure 34: Annual number of new titles produced by Wills and Hepworth Ltd (1940-1972)<sup>1</sup>

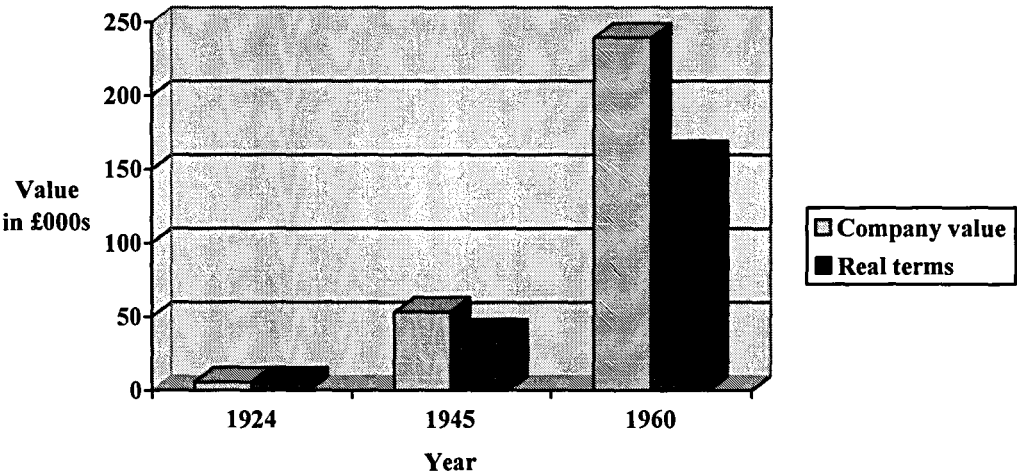


Figure 35: Value of Wills and Hepworth Ltd (1924-1960)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Data taken from database created by author.

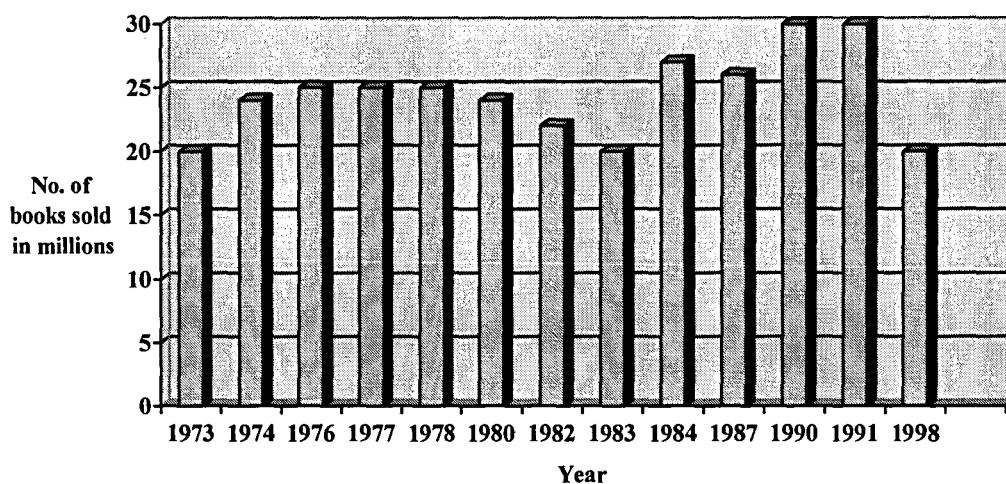


Figure 36: Annual numbers of books sold by Ladybird Books Ltd (1973-1998)

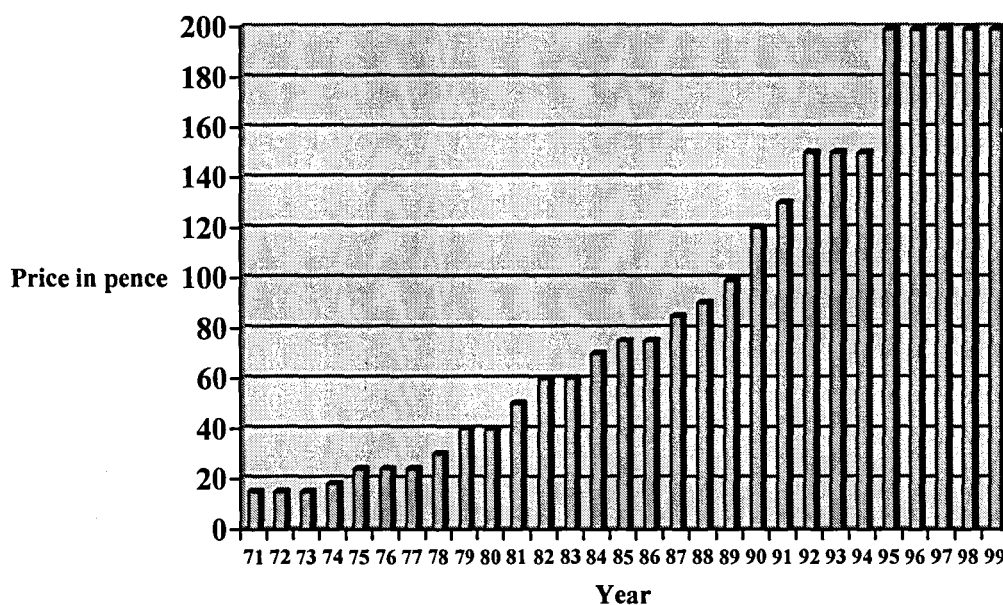


Figure 37: Price, in pence, of a standard format Ladybird book (1971-1999)

<sup>2</sup>Data for years 1923, 1924, 1945 and 1960 taken from formal valuations based on inventories undertaken by Frank Colebrook and Partners. Ladybird archive, ref. DE5578 Leicestershire Records Office. The 'real term' figures take into account the impact of inflation.



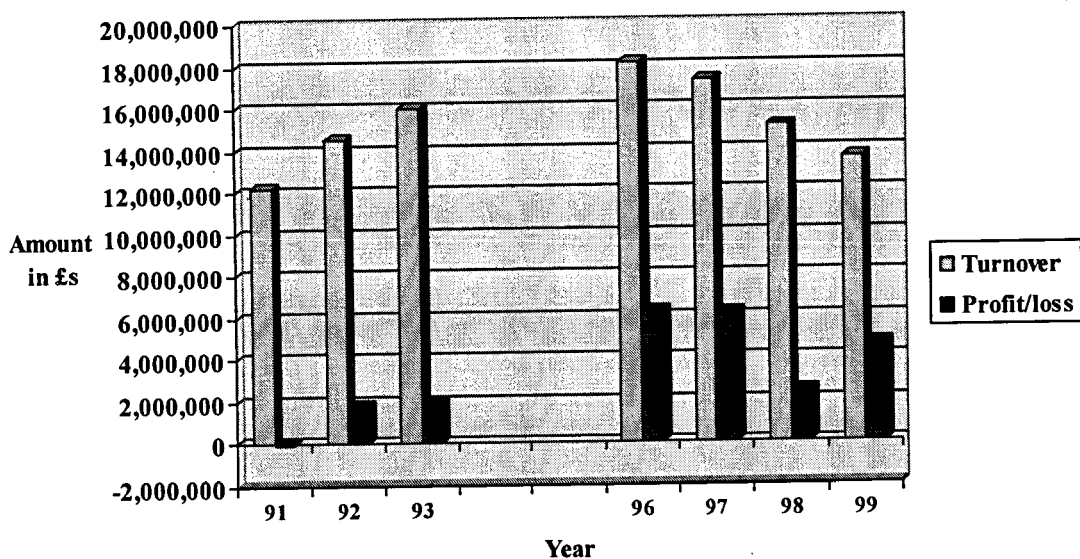


Figure 38: Annual turnover and pre-tax profit/loss for Ladybird Books Ltd (1991-1999)

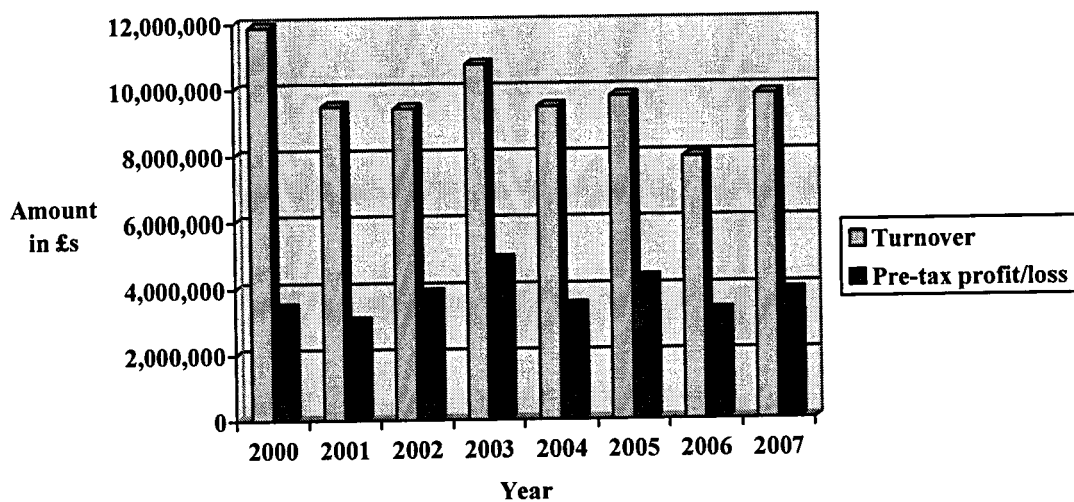


Figure 39: Annual turnover and pre-tax profit/loss for Ladybird Books Ltd (2000-2007)

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### Box 1

*Company Records (1886–1976)*

Account book (1886–1928); Directors' minute book (1924–1960); Schedule of deeds (1943; Agreements for sale of business: W. S. Hepworth to Wills and Hepworth Ltd. (1924); Wills and Hepworth Ltd. to Major R. Gaskill (1946); Bundle: 'Ladybird Service Agreements and Contracts', mainly re. staff, some re. copyright (1965–1976); Lease of shop and warehouse, Loughborough Conveyance, Loughborough (1924); Agreement with William Moss and Sons for building work (1973); File of deeds and agreements, property at Loughborough (1943–1963); Miscellaneous receipts re. shares (1943–1968); Bundle of pension fund trust deeds (1959–1975).

### Box 2

*Publication Information (1985–1997)*

Ladybird catalogues and order forms; *Young Telegraph* supplement to *Daily Telegraph*, with feature on Ladybird Books (October 1993); *Publishing News* special supplement re. Ladybird, including visit of Princess Diana (18th May 1990); Copies of press coverage re. tribute book to Princess Diana (1997); File on company history, incl. copies of newspaper/ magazine articles, correspondence, leaflets, lecture notes, papers re. 50th anniversary (1990) and BBC visit (1977).

### Box 3

*2 volumes (1960, 1967, 1934)*

Inventories and Valuations of plant and machinery; Loose page from account book (account of Edw. R. Buck and Sons, Manchester).

### Box 4

*(1924–1951, 1970, 1924–1948, 1951–1960, 1965)*

Share certificate counterfoils book; Account book; Register of members and share ledger; AGM minute book; Post register.

### Box 5

*2 volumes (1924–1935, 1935–1940)*

Nominal ledgers.

### Box 6

*(1921–1945, 1920–1924)*

Plant Inventory; Nominal ledger.

### Box 7

*(1915–1920, 1924–1947)*

Nominal ledger; Private ledger.

**Box 8**

*3 volumes (1923–1939, 1925–1934, 1925–1927)*

Agents' account book (UK, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand); Wages books: travellers, staff, shop; Wages book: manufacturing.

**Box 9**

*(1958–1969, 1945, 1955–1972)*

General ledger; Inventory and Valuation of plant and machinery; Register of members and share ledger.

**Box 10**

*(1969, 1972, 1960–1961, 1939–1960, 1945–1964, 1924–1971)*

Bills of Quantities for new buildings at Windmill Road, Loughborough; File of Christmas gifts and calendars; File of Factories Acts/Accidents; File of Newspaper Proprietors' Association, recognition as advertising agents etc; Bundles of cancelled share certificates, with associated correspondence.

**Box 11**

*7 volumes c.1940s*

Record of book customers, with contact details, comments etc., arranged by place.

**Box 12**

*(1951–1963, 1929–1936)*

Share certificate counterfoils book; Ledger (indexed by customer name).

**Box 13**

*(1940–1947, 1951–1955)*

Nominal ledger; Private cash book.

**Box 14**

*(1947–1951, 1950–1958, 1947–1951, 1944–1952)*

Private cash book; Stock book; Salaries book; Employees' tax deduction register.

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*(1949–1958, 1956–1960, 1973, c.1973, 1959–1971, 1957–1963, 1946–1950, 1903–1936, 1937–1943, 1963–1968)*

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**Portfolio**

*c.1900*

3 enlarged, mounted photographs of H. Wills Composing, Binding and Printing Depts. Loose covers and pages from brochure of H. Wills, incl. originals of above prints.

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