



Hardy Perennial ? Patrick Hardy

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Tony Bradman talks to the man behind a new imprint in children's publishing.

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It seems to be an inauspicious time to start any new business, let alone a new hardback children's list. But that is exactly what Patrick Hardy has done and the first five titles from Patrick Hardy Books are published this month (March).

Why take such a gamble? There's no doubt that Patrick Hardy has all the knowledge and experience essential for such a venture. He has been in children's publishing for many years; he was an editor at Constable Young Books under Grace Hogarth and publisher at Longman Young Books. But he's probably best known for his work at Penguin where he created the Kestrel hardback list before being, in his own words, 'elevated' to a position which carried with it the grandiloquent title of Publisher for the Children's Books Division. He left Penguin last April in search of more involvement with books and authors.

'At Penguin I felt I was in a position which was too far away from authors and real editing. I was dealing with contracts, the husbanding of money and the writing of all the letters which were less easy to write. I came to the point in my own life of asking myself whether I wanted to get more and more involved in administration or to do more work with authors.

'I decided that it was time to leave Penguin and do something much more editorial. I didn't set out to start my own list, but simply to look for a publishing job.'

He describes his course over the succeeding months as 'meandering'. After talking to several firms which didn't already have children's lists, he eventually found himself working for a packaging company, producing a list. The backers pulled out, and Patrick - together with Hugh Tempest Radford, an old friend - decided to find some more investors and launch out on their own. And so a new children's list was born.

'I'd never really decided to start my own company - it just happened that way. I know it's a time of gloom and doom in business, but I think that applies whether you're in a big company or a small one which has just started.

'If you look at it in those terms, there's never a good time to start a new company - you'd wait forever. I feel that the right time is when you need to do it, and I needed to. Circumstances conspired, and here I am working for myself, and working very hard.'

He has taken a fairly uncompromising line with his list, too. 'We made a general decision to search out a list balanced between picture books and fiction, and we'll probably do 16 or 17 titles a year. We'll also do one or two one-off special non-fiction titles with adults in mind.

'I think *I should* be publishing fiction, although I know other companies have been whittling away at it or even giving it

up altogether because of the problems of selling it. Customers can pick up a picture book in a shop and read it in a few minutes so they know what they are going to get for their money. You can't do that with a novel.'

The books in the first Patrick Hardy Books catalogue are 'all very different'. There's a general interest book for all ages called **Feasts and Festivals** by Catherine Storr, illustrated in colour by Jenny Rhodes. There's a picture book by Robert Kraus called **Boris Bad Enough** (due in May) and illustrated by that ubiquitous pair, Jose Aruego and Ariane Dewey. This one is something of a first too. It may well be the first children's picture book which has a psychiatrist as a central character.

Patrick Hardy hopes readers will find his list 'sometimes controversial'. One title which may well cause a few eyebrows to be raised is a teenage novel by Rosemary Manning, **Down by the Riverside** (due in September) which has a lesbian relationship as a sub plot. Other well-known names in the list are Barbara Willard, John Astrop, and John Gordon whose **The House on the Brink** is reissued in March along with a new novel, **The Edge of the World**.

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