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People Profile: Tim Coates

Editor

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portion spent on books has fallen from 12 percent to 6 percent. Books are no longer regarded as the lifeblood of the library service. We are told over and over again that “libraries are about a great deal more than books.”

Indeed, a report by consultants **PricewaterhouseCoopers** advising the British government in its quest to “improve life in communities” describes a “public library service” that is “focused on the optimum way of commissioning lifelong learning outcomes for local communities, rather than on traditional ‘bricks and mortar’ library services” and says that such a service “creates opportunities for radical new thinking on delivery vehicles within this sector ... [that encourage] a range of alternative providers, expertise, and new ways of working ... maximising resources on frontline delivery, and making the services much more responsive to existing users, and bringing in new users.”

So public libraries in the United Kingdom find themselves caught between two extreme alternatives. On the one hand there is the view expressed by the **PricewaterhouseCoopers** report, which says book stocks don’t matter because libraries are about seeking “learning outcomes,” and on the other there are those who say the decline in book stocks signals the end of civilization. And meanwhile, the book stocks keep on declining, so that when you go into a library nowadays, it may be that all you will find are some old dog-eared copies of titles you wouldn’t ever want to read.

The problem is that because in the United Kingdom libraries are funded by the government, and those funds are awarded without any reference to any measure of performance, it is possible to define what library policy should be without having to take into account the public response to what is done. If people don’t borrow books, no one necessarily investigates why, and so those holding the purse strings are just as likely to decide that society has changed and people no longer wish to use libraries as to recognize the real cause — that there were no books they wanted to borrow.

The Good Library Campaign

I have attempted, through the Good Library Blog (www.goodlibraryguide.com/blog/), to call attention to the terrible position public libraries (university libraries are another story; my efforts, I must stress, are focused on public

Rumors

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should be encouraged. As both producers of copyrighted works and users of orphan works, publishers are experienced both in administering and granting permissions as rights-holders and in trying to obtain permission from other rights-holders. The **United States Copyright**

against the grain people profile

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Weblog: www.goodlibraryguide.com/blog

Tim Coates

BORN & LIVED: Old England.

EARLY LIFE: I am still in my early life.

FAMILY: Wife, **Bridget Cave**, two sons: **Sam** writes for *The Times of London*; **Ollie** is an internationally known cellist.

EDUCATION: **University College, Oxford; University of Stirling.**

FIRST JOB: Theatre designer.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Managing director of **Sherratt & Hughes**, of **Waterstone’s** bookshops, and of the English book chain **WHSmith** in Europe; library management consultant.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE: Reading and listening to my son’s cello.

FAVORITE BOOKS: 19th-century government papers.

PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD: Bad writing in official documents.

PHILOSOPHY: Keep trying!

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: *Patsy, the story of Mary Cornwallis West* published by **Bloomsbury**. I also hope I have made a difference to the standard of bookselling.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: UK public libraries have an even higher standard of service than that which has been achieved in commercial book selling. 🐼



libraries) have found themselves in and to provide a forum for people to discuss what is happening. Independent publishers and well-known authors such as **Susan Hill** and **John Cunliffe** are using the blog to bring pressure to bear on those in power. **Susan Hill**, in fact, has taken the issue to the national papers. An article that appeared in the *Guardian* on 11 September 2006 describes her as “accus[ing] senior managers of public libraries of abandoning their commitment to books and manoeuvring to turn library buildings into social centres” and quotes her as saying, “They have been actively trying for years to get rid of books and introduce almost anything else.”

But no one had the right to decide, arbitrarily, that books are a thing of the past. No one has asked the public how they feel about the matter, and whenever the **British Parliament** has expressed a view, it has certainly not been to this effect. No one would ever expect them to ask for books to be removed from libraries.

As a management consultant, furthermore, I take issue with **PricewaterhouseCoopers’s** misguided conclusions (not to mention the jargon-rich language in which those conclusions are expressed). There are perfectly sensible models for an efficient and popular public library service that make use of the supply chain methods used now in book retailing. Proper use of modern systems would substantially increase the numbers of books bought and the quality of the collections offered. Libraries are about books for reading, access to the best sources of informed information, and provision of places for private, dignified study and reading. They do not need radical new thinking on “delivery vehicles,” although they might need a few new trolleys — once they boost their collections a bit. 🐼

Office has recently recognized the problems of ‘orphan works’ that authors, libraries, and other institutions are seeking permission to reuse and similar issues are being raised in the **European Union**. As we all know, the astute **Michael Mabe** is CEO of **STM**. www.stm-assc.org/documents-statement-public-co

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