

2016

Oregon Trails: Hay-on-Wye or Bust!

Thomas W. Leonhardt
oskibear70@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Leonhardt, Thomas W. (2018) "Oregon Trails: Hay-on-Wye or Bust!," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 28: Iss. 3, Article 31.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.7377>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

Oregon Trails — Hay-on-Wye or Bust!

Column Editor: **Thomas W. Leonhardt** (Retired, Eugene, OR 97404) <oskibear70@gmail.com>



*“Hay was a quiet run down market town in 1962, when **Richard Booth** opened his first bookshop. Ten years and 40 bookshops later, the town had become a Mecca for book lovers the whole world over. On 1st April 1977 (All Fools’ Day) **Richard** declared Hay an Independent Kingdom and the town has been in the public eye ever since. The twinning with Timbuktu and our annual Literary Festival have also helped.” [From a brochure & map of Hay-on-Wye Bookshops]*

My pilgrimage to Hay-on-Wye began at the Harrogate railway station in North Yorkshire with changes in Leeds and Manchester.

Gazing on the familiar yet fresh English countryside as I rode the train from Harrogate to Hereford, I luxuriated in the knowledge that when I arrived in Hay, I had two full days and no appointments or obligations other than to look for the books on my list and those that would call out to me from their places on the shelves.

From Hereford (think white-faced cattle) one takes a bus to Hay. It was mid-afternoon when I arrived and I had a long wait for the next bus so I crossed the street to the Walk Café and fortified myself for the book-hunting ahead with one of their All Day Full English breakfasts — one fried egg, two large sausages, three large pieces of English bacon (like country ham), fried tomatoes (red not green), beans, mushrooms, and toast, all for £3.50. The coffee was another £1.50 with no refills and commensurably expensive compared to the cost of the meal. I must have been hungry because I polished it off with the gusto of a hound dog. I don’t think I have eaten that much at one sitting since I was in the Army. During the rest of my stay I would be eating food as good or better but never in such quantity although I came close the next morning.

England is a small country and although the British rail system is not what it used to be (what is?) but Amtrak pales in comparison, I thought, as I gazed at all the tracks, the multiple sidings, the constant flow of trains in all directions and trains of all sorts: locals, expresses, and high speed rockets. I thought of **Edna St. Vincent Millay’s** poem, “Travel” that ends,

*“My heart is warm with the friends I make,
And better friends I’ll not be knowing;
Yet there isn’t a train I wouldn’t take,
No matter where it’s going.”*
All aboard!

Before leaving for England, I entered my desiderata list into a small, red notebook, beginning with ten **Wright Morris** titles followed by sixteen **William McFee** titles. Most of both lists were UK first editions, scarce in the States but more likely, so I foolishly thought, to be found on the shelves in British bookshops.

I didn’t compile authoritative lists for other authors — **W.W. Jacobs**, **Christopher**

Morley, C.S. Forester (his Hornblower books), **John Steinbeck**, and Armed Services editions, perhaps in abundance given the number of Yanks stationed in England during World War II.

Not on my want lists and more likely to turn up, even or especially with twenty-one shops at my disposal, were those books that I didn’t know I was looking for. They would find me and several did.

A late addendum to my list were two titles by **Wilkie Collins** — *A Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*, either first or early contemporary editions. A bookseller friend, unable but not unwilling to accompany me to Hay, had asked me to seek, find, purchase, and bring home a couple. I didn’t ask him why he wanted them. He is a bookseller but also a consumer so it could just as well be that he wanted them to satisfy a personal craving or else he had a customer in mind who would buy them with an appropriate finder’s fee tacked on. Fair is fair and we need to support our local bookshops and those far away.

During my two days in Hay I had numerous conversations with booksellers but none so sustained and agreeable as those with **Brian Teviotdale**, owner of **Belle Books**.



He immediately greeted me when I entered his shop and asked if he could help me find something. I said that I was looking for some **W.W. Jacobs** books and was immediately led to one of the intimate aisles that had scattered Jacobs titles on them. He began pulling them off the shelves. We began talking books. If I like **W.W. Jacobs**, I might enjoy the stories about the men who shipped on Glasgow Clyde puffers. I soon held a paperback called *Para Handy Tales* by **Neil Munro** added to my **Jacobs** books, Methuen editions in distinctive green and white dust jackets. We banded about several other authors and books we like and then **Brian** really impressed me. When I mentioned the *Hopalong Cassidy* novels and he immediately followed with “**Clarence Mumford**.” How many Americans could name the author who was responsible for **William S. Boyd’s** great success on the movie screen but without **Mumford’s** realism and charm? From there we covered **Edgar Rice Burroughs** and his Tarzan and Martian series, **H.G. Wells**, books about the sea, and on we would go. I

would mention an author or a title and on we went, tit for tat. I’ll see you that author and raise you one title.

As we talked books, I mentioned my interest in **William McFee**. He regretted that he didn’t have any by **McFee** but later, as I was browsing his shop, **Brian** approached me and said, like the true bookman that he is, that he just remembered that he had a **William McFee** book at home. He consulted his database and announced that the title was *Letters from an Ocean Tramp*, 1928. I consulted my desiderata list and under *Letters from an Ocean Tramp* I saw 1911. Then I noticed that below was a note: “Subsequent English edition *Cassell’s Pocket Library* 1928.” Bingo!

“Yes, it’s on my want list!”

“Stop by tomorrow and I’ll have it for you.”

“Fine. I’ll call again tomorrow.”

I thanked him and paid him for my **Jacobs** and **Munro**, all the while anticipating receipt of *Letters From an Ocean Tramp* the next day.

I left **Belle Books** and wandered the crooked streets of Hay and entered **Hay-on-Wye Booksellers**. I found a couple of **Penguin** paperbacks by **Anthony Powell** and was exploring another section of the shop when **Brian** breathlessly approaches me saying that he had looked in every other bookshop in Hay for me. **Brian** had been diagnosed with cancer three years earlier and still tires easily but that didn’t deter him. He was worried that he might not be in his shop when I returned the next day, so he had gone home, retrieved the **McFee** book, and then hunted me down. He made the sale in someone else’s book shop but no matter in such a close book-bound community. Before we left he introduced me to **Hay-on-Wye Booksellers**, an antiquarian, he told me, and we puzzled over the lack of **Wilkie Collins** early editions. **Brian** returned to his shop and I finished browsing and paid for *From a View to a Death* and *A Question of Upbringing*. Laid inside the latter was a small sheet of paper (3 ¼” x 5”) containing a hand-written recipe for Egg & Prawn Curry, not worth mentioning of itself but in conjunction with the hand-written recipe for Yorkshire Cake on the last page [blank] of *Go She Must*. I somehow feel the spirit of previous owners when I find such notes and artifacts. I am reminded of another **Anthony Powell** title, *Books Do Furnish a Room*. Amen.

As an aside, while in **Brian’s** shop the next day (he did open as usual), he shared with me the story of the scale model, authentically colored Polish tank of WWII that perched on a shelf behind **Brian’s** desk and point of sale. He had made it from the get-well cards he had received when his friends learned of his cancer. Some of the odd pieces were made of match sticks and other small odds and ends but the bulk of it was from the cards and when turned upside down, the handwriting of well-wishers

continued on page 71

Oregon Trails from page 70

was visible next to printed text. It turns out that **Brian** had an engineering background before buying **Belle Books** to have something to do upon retirement, something he loved.

As in the States, several of the bookshops carry postcards, bookmarks, stationery items, and other souvenirs to help make ends meet. I did my best to help keep them afloat and came away with more than 60 post cards (42 have already been written and posted as I write this) and a dozen note cards, each with an association with Hay or books or both. Long adept at using email, I tend to eschew it except in certain circumstances when it suits the recipient best or when I want to convey something sooner than later. This is not a knock of the USPS, either, for it has served me well and deserves way more credit than it receives.

If I collected early editions of British children's books, I would have been in heaven, for almost every shop I visited had rows of **William** books, Noddy, Boys' Annuals, Girls' Annuals, Beatrix Potter, and Biggles, to name just a few. I looked at them, however, in hopes of finding some Uncle Wiggily titles or some of the tramp steamer adventures written by **Howard Pease**. The closest I came was finding a children's book by **Howard R. Garis** but it was not one of his beloved Uncle Wiggily tales.

On my first day I purchased ten books including **Fred Bason's** *Third Diary*, inscribed by the author. I have yet to see one of his diaries not inscribed. He wanted purchasers of his diaries to get top value. If you have never heard of **Fred Bason**, I encourage you to read his diaries and tell me that you don't find him interesting and likable. For more



information, see <https://paulrobinsonbooks.wordpress.com/2013/02/17/fred-bason-cockney-bookseller/>.

The bookshops in Hay vary greatly in size and book stock as one might imagine. Some are bare bones shelves and books while others have inviting chairs and couches. **Richard Booth's** has a table service café and a cinema. I did not see where the cinema is but I had the best and largest scope (not triangular but round like an American biscuit only larger) ever topped with cream and rhubarb jam. I needed two cups of coffee to wash it all down. It was the perfect nourishment in a land of books. As I sat there, with my purchases at my side, I was reminded of **Kramerbooks & Afterwords** in Washington, D.C. and the café in **Blackwell's** nonpareil bookstore on Broadstreet surrounded by **Oxford University**.

On my last day in Hay, I began by visiting **The Honesty Shop** situated among the ruins of the castle. The shop, so-called, was unenclosed and the shelves of books were in disarray. I had heard tales of valuable sleepers being found among the common titles but there were none when I visited although I was intrigued by the number of books by **Rita F. Snowden**. Who was she and why the 14 hardbacks and 5 paperbacks scattered around. They should all be together so that an interested party (I wasn't) could eliminate duplicates and compare condition. It turns out that **Ms. Snowden**, 1907-1999, was a New Zealander and a Methodist missionary who began writing in 1933 and churned out an average of one a year, 68 books in all. I was not in the market for devotional literature but hoped that I had made it easier for those who were. Just before leaving, I moved **William Styron's** *This Quiet Dust* so that it sat next to his friend **James Jones's** *The Merry Month of May*. But who would notice? 🌻

Standards Column from page 69

Another possible opportunity is with **CHORUS**, the Clearinghouse for the Open Research of the United States, "is a suite of services and best practices that provides a sustainable solution for agencies and publishers to deliver public access to published articles reporting on funded research in the United States."²⁴ **CHORUS** and *Transfer* have talked briefly on how we could possibly assist in their process.

Transfer has proven over the last ten years to be a very valuable and significant resource for the library community. Utilizing information gathered from surveys, continuing to provide transfer title data in a variety of ways, and updating the *Transfer Code of Practice* are a few ways that *Transfer* stays relevant. *Transfer* today, as always, has been a very collaborative endeavor between librarians and

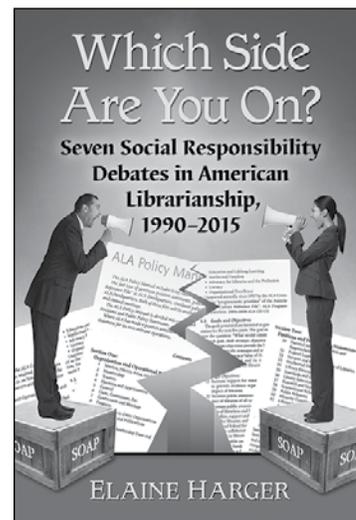
publishers, and continues to be as it progresses forward. 🌻

Please direct any comments on *NISO's Transfer* to **Alison Mitchell**: <a.mitchell@nature.com> and **Elizabeth Winter**: <elizabeth.winter@library.gatech.edu>

Endnotes

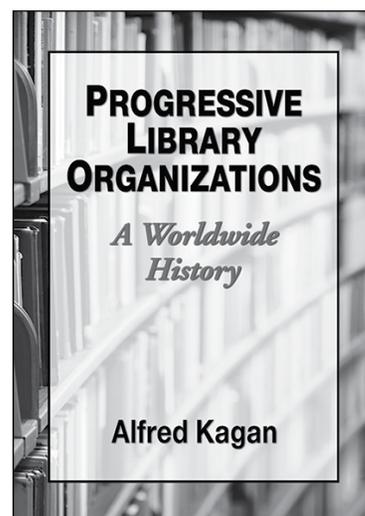
1. **Beals, Nancy, and Paul Harwood.** "Project Transfer: Findings from Surveys of Publishers and Librarians Undertaken in 2011." *The Serials Librarian* 63.2 (2012): 213-228.
2. **NISO Website** http://www.niso.org/news/pr/view?item_key=a0d43901fbfd-7674d20a70dfee8c78f9014b9a86.
3. Interview quote from **Allyson A. Zellner**, MLIS, Senior eLearning Specialist, EBSCO Information Services.
4. **CHORUS Website** <http://www.chorus-access.org/>.

 **McFarland**



by Elaine Harger

\$25 softcover (7 × 10) 2016
ISBN 978-0-7864-9455-2
Ebook 978-1-4766-2471-6



by Alfred Kagan

\$55 softcover (7 × 10) 2015
ISBN 978-0-7864-6400-5
Ebook 978-1-4766-1729-9

McFARLAND IS PUBLISHING
NEARLY 400 NEW BOOKS AND
EBOOKS THIS YEAR. VISIT OUR
WEBSITE FOR MORE INFORMATION.

www.mcfarlandpub.com