

**THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA**

**Report by - PAUL McSHANE – 2002 Churchill Fellow**

**To further Australia's understanding and involvement in the international booktown movement through a program of visits and interviews**

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## INTRODUCTION

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From *Churchill: A Life* by Martin Gilbert, on Sir Winston's appointment as Home Secretary

His own experience of captivity (*during the Boer War*) had made him the Prisoner's Friend, and his mind was seething with plans for lightening their lot by earned remissions of sentence while "in durance vile", by libraries and entertainment.

**"They must have food for thought – plenty of books – that's what I missed most – except of course the chance of breaking bounds and getting out of the damned place – and I suppose I mustn't give them *that!*"**

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*Food for thought* and *plenty of books* – that almost sums up this report. But instead of being kept captive in any way - thanks to the generosity of the Churchill Trust - I did *break the bounds* for several months to discover more about the story that is told in the following pages.

That story begins in 1961 – the year Gilbert records that frequent strokes had meant Churchill's chief pastime was no longer painting but reading novels instead. Books were also being handled elsewhere in Great Britain that year, but in ways never seen before. A young Oxford graduate began buying and stacking books on shelves in a small village of Wales, enough books eventually to fill the entire town. That was to begin a chain of events that would see two dozen villages across Europe, Asia and America begin to fill themselves with books – millions upon millions of them – and they would be called *booktowns*.

My story is the visiting of 15 of those two dozen booktowns. And in many cases I was fortunate enough to meet the remarkable people who had been the driving force in the creation of those booktowns. So my first acknowledgement is to those who had the energy and the vision – Richard Booth, Noel Anselot, Colette Trublett, Henk Ruessink, Tom Loome, Gary Goodman, Gary Stollery, Larry McMurtry, Clive and Christine Tanner, Dominique Fournier and Christian Valleriaux. I also acknowledge Professor Tony Seaton, who in a very real sense laid the groundwork for the development of Wigtown. He was also generous toward me with his time and the sharing of his ideas.

In fact all the booksellers, artisans and officials I spoke with during my Fellowship were helpful and pleasant so that made the whole trip a delight. In particular, I must thank for their hospitality Clive and Christine Tanner: they promised me the best meal I would have in North America and the Deep Cove Chalet restaurant was certainly that! Gary Stollery bought me a breakfast in California big enough to last me the rest of the day. Also our fun friends in Redu, Jan and Miep van Duin, for a wonderful time and fantastic Dutch/Belgian hospitality while there. Cousin, Louise, and her daughter Belinda were also kind enough to share their Swiss home.

What made the adventure especially delightful was having my wife and daughter, Sue and Melissa, with me for almost 3 months in the UK and on the Continent. We now have a store of fantastic, often hilarious, memories for a lifetime from our experiences together in our motorhomes and while travelling, as well as seeing some stunning sights. And it is official! My talented and beautiful daughter is confirmed as the best 10-year-old road navigator on the planet.

There were those who stayed behind or made it possible for us to go and in no particular order I'd like to thank our staff at BiblioQuest International, David Barr, Geoff King, Garry Barnsley, and the tourism academics at UWS, especially Deborah Edwards who assisted my research. Last, but not least, my sincere thanks to the Churchill Trust for their support and encouragement, particularly from those two special ladies - Elvie Munday and Meg Martin.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### **Fellowship Objective:**

To further Australia's understanding and involvement in the international booktown movement through a program of visits and interviews

### **Undertaken by:**

Paul McShane

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Writing and the books that contain those writings have exerted a talismanic effect on humankind for millennia. From even before classical times and the construction of the Library of Alexandria, and then later with the growth of the monastic libraries and the establishment of the university towns of northern Italy and western Europe, great collections of books have drawn men to them. In 1961 another form of book collection began in the tiny village of Hay-on-Wye, situated on the Welsh-English border. A million books later and a phenomenon began.

The village that was once all but dead had new life again as hundreds of thousands of readers, dealers and collectors each year began to visit this *Town of Books*. It completely revitalised and transformed the economy of Hay. Other towns and villages observed what had happened and in the space of just 20 years – from 1984 – around two dozen places across Europe, Asia and North America (and now Australia!) were attempting to emulate Hay's achievement. During this Fellowship I visited 15 of these towns in Canada, USA, UK, Netherlands, Belgium, France and Switzerland to try and discover what Australia could learn from this international experiment.

### **Fellowship Findings:**

- Hay-on-Wye itself is not a role model for how to develop a booktown though its attributes are what are desired. In fact, it is extremely unlikely that any other location could now replicate what had been achieved in Hay.
- The evidence from those locations that did emulate Hay is that creating a booktown still can generate welcome levels of economic activity, especially of a tourism and cultural nature, outweighing what are relatively small investment costs – using existing infrastructure and restored or renovated buildings.
- There are critical success factors, substantiated by academic research, that have been documented for European booktowns.
- These booktown success factors will need to be adapted for the Australian context
- There are issues to resolve in any attempted Australian booktown on the primary motive for establishing it and how it can best be managed.

### **Fellowship Conclusion:**

Stimulating discussion on possible locations for any Australian booktown, including the Southern Highlands of NSW, will help clarify the special conditions that could apply in our national context. More analysis of the critical success factors for Australian application and a public communication campaign are recommended.

## PROGRAMME

### What is a Booktown?

*A book town is a small rural town or village, usually between 500 and 1500 inhabitants, in which, over time, the retailing of second-hand and antiquarian bookshops has come to be concentrated, thus enabling each town ultimately to be branded as a unique destination type: a book town. In the towns bookshops are often culturally complemented by other artisan retail enterprises related to the production of books, such as paper production, calligraphy, printing, book design and illustration, and traditional bookbinding. They also commonly stage festivals and events with a literary or artistic theme. Through these activities the towns become centers of cultural tourism, particularly visited by the educated, affluent, audiences who tend to constitute the market for antiquarian and second-hand books.*

**Seaton, A.V.** *Book town tourism and rural development in peripheral Europe. International Journal of Tourism Research*, 1(5), 389-399

While this definition conveys the sense of what a booktown is - or perhaps **should** be - the concept is also being adopted by larger towns than 1500 people, especially outside Europe.

### Itinerary of Primary Locations Visited & Interviews Conducted

#### **Sidney-by-the-Sea in British Columbia, CANADA**

Tourist Information Office ; Clive and Christine Tanner - *Beacon Books & Collectables*; Adrian Batterbury - *The Haunted House Bookshop*; Terence Patten - *Compass Rose Nautical Books*; Rod Laurie - *Galleon Books & Antiques* and visits to all other bookshops in Sidney.

#### **Seattle in Washington State, USA**

Christine Higashi – Associate Director – *Washington Center for the Book at Seattle Public Library, Elliot Bay Bookshop*

#### **Archer City in Texas, USA**

Larry McMurtry - *Booked Up*; Julie Church Gilbert - *Booked Up*; Gary Beesinger - *Archer County Chamber of Commerce*

#### **Nevada City / Grass Valley in California, USA**

Gary J. Stollery - *Brigadoon Books & Gold Cities Book Town Promotions*; Clarinda B. Stollery - *Toad Hall Book Shop; Booktown Books Coop*; John Hardy - *Hardy Books & Gold Rush Book Fair*; Bud Plant - *Bud Plant Comic Art*, Irene Nicolas & John Fletcher - *Moonshine Books* and visits to many other bookshops

#### **Stillwater in Minnesota, USA**

Tom Loome - *Loome Antiquarian Booksellers* and *Loome Theological Booksellers*, Garry Goodman - *St Croix Antiquarian Booksellers*; The owner/manager *Valley Booksellers*

#### **Luton in England, UK**

Professor A.V. (Tony) Seaton, Director – Centre for Tourism Research  
*University of Luton Business School*

#### **Hay-on-Wye in Wales, UK**

Richard Booth - *Booth Books*; Mark Westwood – *Mark Westwood Books*; Greg Coombs – *Hay Cinema Bookshop & Francis Edwards Antiquarian Booksellers*; Derek & Ann Addyman – *Addyman Books*; *Hay-on-Wye Tourist Information Centre*; and visits and discussions in many other bookshops.

**Wigtown in Scotland, UK**

John Robertson, Project Manager - *Wigtown Book Town Company*; Jak Kane, Information Services Manager – *Machars Information Services*; Roy Surplice, Chairman – *Wigtown Book Town Company*; Moira McCarty – *M.E. McCarty & The Book Vaults*; John Carter – *GC Books & The Old Bank Bookshop*; Shaun Bythell – *The Bookshop*; Rosemary Baker – *AP&R Baker Ltd.*; Angela Everitt – *ReadingLasses Bookshop-Café*.

**NB. I was also interviewed by BBC TV when in Wigtown about my visit. When it aired this included mention of my Australian Churchill Fellowship.**

**Paris, France**

Maha Bulos & Mauro Rossi, Programme Specialists – *Division of Arts and Cultural Enterprise – UNESCO*  
*Bibliothèque nationale de France – Francios-Mitterand Building*

**Bredevoort, NETHERLANDS**

Henk Ruessink – founder of the *Stichting Bredevoort Boekenstand*; Bert van Genderen – *Antiquariaat Ovidius*; Grazia Boschi & Guido Pracca – *Chartae Laudes* (marble, decorated and handmade papers); Henk Visser – *antiquariaat Bolwerk*

**Redu, BELGIUM**

Noel Anselot – *Founder of Redu Village du Livre*; Marie Alix de Sande – *President Redu Booksellers Association & Proprietor of Art. 31*; Miep van Duin Joint Manager of the *International Organisation of Book Towns & Proprietor of De Boekenwurm & Crazy Castle*

**Fontenoy-la-Joute, FRANCE**

Alain & Nathalie Viollet – *Association Culturelle et Artistique du Village du Livre (ACAVL) & Publicites Anciennes*; Francoise Mathieu – *L’etablie*; Jacques & France Dialma Aux Livres de France; Francoise Fouminet – *Le Chat Botte*; Chantal Thielges (former president of ACAVL) – *Auberge Saint Pierre restaurant*

**Cuisery, FRANCE**

Nathalie Broux – *Village du Livre de Cuisery*; Florine & Richard Jaillet – *Le Livre a Venir Librairie*; the *Syndicat d’Initiative Saone et Seille* and visits to various bookshops

**St Pierre de Clage, SWITZERLAND**

Dominique Fournier, Presidente – *St-Pierre-de-Clages Village du Livre*, Alain Giovanola, Coordinateur – *Valorisation du Terroir de Chamosan*; Pierre-Antoine Favre – *Maison du Livre*

**Montolieu, FRANCE**

Melanie Hemery – *Syndicat d’Initiative de Montolieu*; Astrid Burchardt – *La Plume de ma Tante*; Michael Hasted – *The English Bookshop*; Gael van Baardewijk – *La Chouette Livres Anciens et d’Occasion*

**Montmorillon, FRANCE**

*Office de Tourisme de Montmorillon* ;  
Laurent Geneix – *l’empreinte* (M. Geneix is also a professional interpreter and has worked with international booktown organisation conference held in Montmorillon) ; and various other bookshops.

**La Charite-sur-Loire, FRANCE**

**Office du Tourisme, Place Sainte-Croix; Christian Valleriaux – Librairie Ancienne; Malika Le Grand – L’Arbre de Jesse; Denise Destin – Librairie “Nuit Blanche”; Alexis Husak – Charmes Librairie Ancienne**

**Becherel, FRANCE**

Colette Trublet – l'Association Savenn Douar; Alain Visset – Galeria-Librairie SAPHIR; Helene Pasqualini – *Librairie Neiges d'antan*; Pascal Tavernier – *Librairie – L'Ivresque*.

**Other Locations of Relevance to the Study Visited During the Fellowship****London, UK**

*Bibliion Bookshop of Bookshops*; *Shakespeare Globe Theatre*; *British Museum Reading Room*

**Canterbury UK**

The fame of this town has been enhanced by the title of one of the most important books in the English language and celebrated in the *Canterbury Tales* exhibition and the *Chaucer Bookshop*. A printed guide *Literary Connections in and around Canterbury* documents local landmarks associated with the likes of Chaucer, Marlowe, Defoe, Swift, Keats, Somerset Maugham, Dickens, T.S. Eliot, Jane Austen, Joseph Conrad and Ian Fleming.

**Sedbergh in England, UK**

Site of what may become England's first booktown. A feasibility study is currently being worked on by Professor Seaton.

**Alnwick, England UK**

Barter Books is a railway station converted into a secondhand bookshop - one of the largest in the Britain – and it was the main attraction here for me. But my daughter's enthusiasm for seeing Alnwick Castle because it was a film location connected with the *Harry Potter* books shows that books and tourism can work at different levels and different ages.

**Edinburgh Scotland UK**

*This Book Belongs To Me: From Tom Thumb to Harry Potter* An exhibition on the history of children's books and related toys in the National Library of Scotland

**Paris, France**

The capital of France holds many attractions for the bibliophile and demonstrates again the drawing power of the book. Aside from my *UNESCO* meeting, I made a point of wandering among the bouquinistes stalls along the Seine and paid a visit to that other pilgrimage point for an English-speaker in Paris, George Whitman's *Shakespeare & Co Bookshop* (alas, no longer at the location of Sylvia Beach's original shop made famous by James Joyce and Ernest Hemingway).

**Mainz, GERMANY**

The *Gutenberg Museum* not only holds the most valuable printed books in the world in the form of the Gutenberg bibles and other incunabula but has a massive display pertaining to the history of printing and its related arts and crafts. There is also a replica of an early printery and demonstrations for students and museum patrons of the manufacture of movable type and printing on an early press.

**The Churchill Trail**

Like many other Churchill Fellows before me, I made a point whenever possible of visiting places of significance to the memory of Sir Winston Churchill. In my case, doing most of my travelling by road and extending my trip at my own expense this allowed plenty of flexibility for the occasional detour. Churchill moments included the War Cabinet Rooms, Parliament Square, Dover Castle Wartime Tunnels, Chartwell, Blenheim Palace, Bladon Church and Winston Churchill Avenue in Paris.

## MAIN THEMES

### 1. Survey of Booktowns Visited

#### Sidney-by-the-Sea in British Columbia CANADA

##### LOCATION

Sidney is a residential community and harbour, mainly for recreational sailors and tourist cruises, located on Vancouver Island's scenic Saanich Peninsula. The town itself has a population of approximately 11,000 and the Peninsula itself has around 40,000. The nearest major urban centres are Victoria, provincial capital of British Columbia and the city of Vancouver. Sidney is situated quite close to the Pat Bay Highway, connecting Victoria with the Swartz Bay Ferry Terminal.

##### BOOKTOWN OVERVIEW

Creating Canada's first booktown in Sidney was the initiative in 1996 of Clive and Christine Tanner, the then proprietors of *Tanner's – A Bookstore and More*. They were originally inspired by visits to Hay-on-Wye. Sidney has 10 bookshops and all are located in the retail precinct of Beacon Street within a few blocks of each other. None of the stores are huge in size and the book stock has been estimated at approximately 150,000 volumes.

##### MANAGEMENT & MARKETING

Aside from the vision and influence of its founders, there is not a formal management structure of the booktown initiative aside from the meetings relating to decisions for joint advertising. Clive Tanner seeks out promotional opportunities whenever possible, though recently other booksellers have become more active in their collaboration with him. Not all booksellers in Sidney share the Tanners' degree of enthusiasm for the booktown project but all participate in the joint advertising. There is an informal but positive relationship with local tourism agencies and this is no doubt assisted by the supporting revenue the bookshops provide through advertising in various publications and brochures.

Sidney's location, combined with the many nearby tourism attractions and its seasonal popularity as a destination for sailors on the North American West Coast, gives it a constant influx of visitors and potential new customers. In addition, Sidney has a large retirement community among whom there is a high proportion of readers.

##### SPECIAL FEATURES & COMMENTS

The Tanners believe that Sidney is a booktown still under development; their hope is that eventually the town could host up to 20-25 bookshops, which they perceive as an optimum number for a true booktown in the Hay-on-Wye tradition. They readily concede that this is an ambitious target given that there have been 2-3 recent closures of stores. Sidney is a busy, apparently prosperous, suburban shopping centre and the bookshops do not dominate the town's commercial landscape as is the case in Hay or some of the other European booktowns. Having said that, the fact that 9-10 shops are within a few blocks of each other means that when standing almost anywhere in Beacon Street it is possible to see a bookshop somewhere. Main street rent values are an issue but some bookshops located off Beacon Street still achieve close proximity for much less rent.

Tactics employed by the Tanners to accentuate the appearance of the Sidney booktown include encouraging other booksellers to set-up by offering equity or other financial assistance as well as advice. They have also built up a popular genre section – detective and

mystery - of their main antiquarian store in order to stock an extension that is branded as a separate store, the *Mystery Bookshop*.

One particular strength of the Sidney booktown project is the collective commitment by the booksellers to regular advertising and marshalling a sizeable budget to support an ongoing campaign year after year. In part, no doubt, this is because the advertising strategy has inbound tourists as the definite primary target so use of publications directed at that market are more easily identified, especially for ferry traffic into the Swartz Bay terminal and for sailors seeking anchorage. A formula based on the floor area of the shops is used to calculate the share of contribution to the advertising budget. This has the advantage of using an objective but relatively non-controversial benchmark compared to revealing more commercially sensitive information, such as turnover.

In May 2002, the first Sidney Antiquarian Book Fair was held attracting some 50 exhibitors and strong public patronage. It was deemed a very successful event but most especially because it was considered to have further substantiated Sidney's credentials as a booktown.

## Archer City in Texas, USA

### LOCATION

Archer City is a town of about 2,000 people, a half hour drive south of Wichita Falls and about a two hour drive north of Dallas-Forth Worth. It is situated in the vast empty prairie country of west Texas north of the Brazos River, ancient lands of the Comanche indian tribe.

### BOOKTOWN OVERVIEW

Archer City is a town that almost all commerce seems to have evaporated from, especially at the height of a baking dry Texas summer day. But inside four buildings that have a dusty bland exterior, save for a simple sign *Booked Up*, an estimated three quarters of a million books have been steadily accumulated. The novelist -and lifetime book scout and bookseller - Larry McMurtry has the dream of creating a repository of literature and knowledge that will be a legacy for his home town and indeed for modern America. It is an America that, in his view, has all but lost the heritage of magnificent bookshops and bookmen that he remembers from his youth.

Aside from the four branches of *Booked Up*, there is a fifth bookstore called *Three Dogs*. Unfortunately it declares it is "open by chance or by appointment" and I was neither lucky nor organised enough to be able to visit, but it appeared to have considerably less stock than any of the *Booked Up* stores. It is in fact the only bookstore in Archer City that sells McMurtry's own books, whether signed or unsigned, as the author found such requests of him to do so at *Booked Up* to be increasingly tiresome.

### MANAGEMENT & MARKETING

Larry McMurtry engages in very little deliberate marketing aside from some advertisements in book trade journals. Having said that, his booktown project at Archer City has attracted immense free publicity and this avenue continues to be deftly exploited. This is largely due to the iconic status of his novels, especially the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Lonesome Dove*, and even more so the TV mini-series that it spawned. One of his best known novels, *The Last Picture Show*, and the resulting film were set in Archer City.

It seems that Archer City is intended by McMurtry as a place of pilgrimage for the true bibliophile or at least the serious book-buyer. The long drive to get there, the lack of amenities or other diversions in Archer City, and the almost invisible signage are all hurdles for the casual tourist. During our interview, McMurtry winced at the memory of a "successful" regional newspaper advertising campaign he had been cajoled into, and the

masses of people who subsequently turned up (by the busload even!). They came merely sightseeing, crowding the aisles but not buying the books, and this was anathema to him as a bookman. It was the first time, but not the last, that I was to hear a variant of this complaint in booktowns around the world.

Those in the town who are aware of its new status as pilgrimage destination for booklovers apparently have mixed feelings about the idea. This is perhaps partly due to the residual ill will toward McMurtry caused by his book, *The Last Picture Show*, and what they felt to be its unflattering portrayal of the locals, and partly because it is simply just not a bookish populace. A spokesman for the Archer County Chamber of Commerce, Gary Beesinger, who is also the County's parole officer, said that there is a realisation that McMurtry's project is probably the best chance Archer City has of rejuvenating itself. Unfortunately the County has no tourism budget and it was going to require a special tax to be agreed on by plebiscite to capitalise on the opportunity. But no dialogue had yet been opened up with McMurtry himself on this topic and a tourism strategy may be something he would spurn. Certainly he showed little enthusiasm for the notion of linking Archer City to other booktowns as a promotional tactic.

#### SPECIAL FEATURES

McMurtry's commitment to buying quality stock becomes apparent on inspecting the shelves. An academic who was browsing did offer me the opinion, however, that for him there was too much focus on American material and that his own visits to Hay-on-Wye had provided more variety of choice and price. Nevertheless, the quality of the inventory was uniformly better than most booktowns.

More than any other booktown I visited, Archer City had echoes of what I imagined to be the early days of Hay-on-Wye. McMurtry is not the eccentric showman that Richard Booth once was - and he certainly does not aspire to royal independence in the manner of the Kingdom of Hay - yet there are many points of similarity. To name a few: the grand, perhaps quixotic, objective of stocking a million books in a tiny town; a disdain for the tourism appeal of a booktown; being based in a town whose economy was otherwise exhausted and the rent or cost of real estate almost negligible; and the control influenced by a single founding bookseller with the ability to generate a considerable amount of publicity.

I posed the question to Larry McMurtry as to what would happen to his booktown project when the time came that he could no longer give it leadership and financial backing. It gave him pause for thought and he admitted that this was not something he had yet taken enough time to consider. He was hopeful that his grandson might be a candidate to do so. It would be a shame indeed if the outbound migration of a million books from Archer City took place even more quickly than the marvellous inbound one.

### **Grass Valley & Nevada City in California, USA**

#### LOCATION

The towns of Nevada City and Grass Valley are situated in the beautiful Sierra Nevada foothills of California at an elevation of 2,500 feet, about 100 kilometres northeast of Sacramento and 140 kilometres west of Reno. The other closest metropolis is the San Francisco Bay area which is 2-3 hours away by car. Nevada County is a very popular tourist destination, both for its scenery and for its strong historical associations with the Californian gold rush era. Traffic bound for the winter sport resorts in Lake Tahoe or the glitter and gambling of Reno must also pass by. The county is also an attractive residential community for retirees from the urban centres of San Francisco and Los Angeles.

The towns are about 5 kilometres apart. While both date back to the Gold Rush era, thanks to strict planning controls Nevada City has preserved many of its facades and whole blocks of

buildings from that time. The whole downtown area is designated a national historic landmark. Nevada City has a population of around 2,500 and is built on seven small but steep hills; it has the quaint compact streetscape that you associate with the days prior to the automobile. Grass Valley, with a population of around 10,000, has seen more typical suburban retail development so the characters of the two towns are quite different – or certainly were to this visitor.

#### BOOKTOWN OVERVIEW

The instigator of the combined Grass Valley – Nevada City book town was local bookseller, Gary J. Stollery. The inspiration to do so followed a visit by Gary and his wife, Clarinda, to Hay-on-Wye in the summer of 1995-96. On their return, Gary registered a trading name **Gold Cities Book Town Promotions** as an offshoot of his existing bookshop business to manage the marketing of the concept. The fact that Grass Valley and Nevada City already had two dozen booksellers - with a purported combined stock of 500,000 books - who had previously cooperated on joint promotion and production of a directory was a significant advantage. Additionally, there was a community of writers, readers and artists who were supportive of the idea and it fitted well with an existing *Wordslingers* literary festival.

Another positive development occurred in December 1997 when the founder of the Hay-on-Wye Town of Books, “King” Richard Booth, announced on short notice that he would visit the newly coined Gold Cities Book Town and was the guest of honour at a hastily convened banquet that included many civic dignitaries. That event went off very well and in effect officially launched the Gold Cities Book Town Association that then formed in 1998 with Gary Stollery as its President.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Gold Rush Book Fair was held in June 2002 attracting almost 50 dealers from the US west coast. This has developed into a successful event and will continue to be produced by John & Susan Hardy of Hardy Books after initial co-sponsorship by Gary Stollery’s business.

#### MANAGEMENT & MARKETING

Again, the influence of a single individual is apparent through the work done by Gary Stollery in creating and promoting the concept of the Gold Cities Book Town. But at the time of my visit, Gary Stollery had all but decided to withdraw from his involvement in the Gold Cities Book Town. This decision, which he was reconsidering, was partly due to ill health but also due to the stress and exhaustion of managing the seemingly inevitable and frequent tensions that occur among independently-minded booksellers.

The management issues being confronted by the Gold Cities Book Town at this time are illustrative of a generic problem I was to find repeated in slightly different forms at many booktowns I visited. In essence, that problem centres on the relationship between the resident booksellers (who are often not capable of promoting the booktown effectively themselves) and the agency that is doing that promotion.

Similarly, the status of a founding figure and their role over time proved to be problematic with booksellers who seemed to be quick to criticise them but slow to support. On the other hand, the booktown founders often struggled to find a satisfactory method to make the transition to delegating, transferring or abdicating their leadership role.

#### SPECIAL FEATURES

Grass Valley featured a cooperative-style bookshop called *Booktown Books* and promoted as “A book browser’s bonanza”. It had a section for each of 11 booksellers and in effect created a mini-bookshop for them. The expenses were shared and each bookshop was rostered to staff it for a period of time. One advantage of this model was that even when individual stores might have been closed, the coop was manned from Monday-Saturday 10.30am-5.30pm. Of

course this model has its problems, most notably that with separate collections for each dealer meant that a browser had to repeat their search among categories 11 times. In the case of fiction, this ultimately proved so inconvenient that the stock was combined into central shelves.

The Gold Rush Book Fair was reported to be a very popular initiative. Interestingly, it is being conducted as a business. This avoids many of the squabbles that can plague a volunteer or association-based organisation and makes for quicker decision-making. An invitation is extended to a major prestigious antiquarian bookseller as the *Honoured Guest Dealer*. The dealer is granted the most prominent #1 booth free of charge; but accepting that honour then also ensures their attendance, adding to the reputation of the event and the quality of the books on offer.

Promoting the Gold Cities Book Town means having to compete with other tourism brand images the region already has, and also with the larger general commercial environment. Like Sidney - and to a lesser extent, Stillwater (*see below*) – the proportion of bookshops in Nevada City-Grass Valley does make it harder to position it as a booktown. The apt use of “gold rush” metaphors to do so does help achieve some beneficial marketing synergy.

## Stillwater in Minnesota, USA

### LOCATION

Stillwater is a historic lumber, saw-milling and riverboat town situated in the St Croix Valley of Minnesota, only a half hour drive northeast from St Paul. The St Croix River defines the border between the states of Minnesota and Wisconsin and the lift bridge linking Stillwater to Houlton is one of the architectural landmarks of the town. The population of Stillwater is about 16,000. Its leafy setting and the many preserved Victorian-era buildings on the banks of the scenic St Croix, within an hour of the twin cities of Minneapolis-St Paul, have now made it one of the state’s most desirable residential districts.

### BOOKTOWN OVERVIEW

Stillwater’s economy began to stagnate in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century but it has bounced back to vibrant health over the past 10-15 years. That renaissance coincides neatly with the increased number of books in the town, beginning more than 20 years ago when Thomas Loome, a former employee of Richard Booth’s bookshop in Hay-on-Wye, began trading with 25 boxes of books as Loome Theological Booksellers. That bookshop, occupying the former Old Swedish Covenant Church, now houses some 275,000 volumes specialising in theology, philosophy and religious history. It claims to be the largest theological bookshop in North America, if not the world.

Gary Goodman is now the sole owner of St Croix Antiquarian Booksellers – currently stocking in the order of 40,000 volumes - though he started trading originally in partnership with Tom Loome. His partner’s voracious book acquisition habits eventually led to an amicable business separation. They were still partners when Loome and Goodman seized upon the idea in 1994 of promoting Stillwater as a booktown. Richard Booth accepted the invitation from his former employee to visit the inaugural Stillwater Antiquarian Book Fair and officially declared it to be the first booktown in North America.

Like Nevada City, its bookshops form only a modest proportion of Stillwaters’ economy, outweighed by more general tourism and hospitality activities, let alone the general commerce serving the residents. At first glance, the term booktown may seem a misnomer to describe Stillwater. Loome and Goodman both ruefully acknowledge what they did was opportunistic and something of a marketing gimmick. But Booth’s courting of publicity for Hay was not so different in motive. What Stillwater lacks in the number of separate booksellers, it certainly

makes up for in sheer numbers of books. In addition to Loome's Theological Booksellers, there is now Loome's Antiquarian Booksellers with 150,000 general subject volumes located on a prominent corner block in the main street. Just one block down is The Valley Bookseller, a retail outlet for 20,000 new books specializing in regional, childrens, and health along with fiction and non-fiction sections. Two other booksellers, Ross & Haines Old Books (12,000) and T.E. Warth Esq. Automotive Books (15,000) are the other booksellers advertised in the St Croix Valley though they are not in Stillwater itself.

#### MANAGEMENT & MARKETING

While the announcement of Stillwater as the first North American booktown may have been opportunistic, there followed a serious effort over the next few years to substantiate the claim. The Stillwater Book Center was established on South Main Street and 35 specialist dealers filled it with 60,000 volumes. A newsletter, the Stillwater Booktown Times, was printed. A summer book festival with outdoor book sale was staged along with a high school essay competition. The website address **www.booktown.com** was purchased with plans to create a virtual booktown beginning with an internet directory of booksellers.

Unfortunately, the lease was not renewed on the Stillwater Book Centre due to plans for redevelopment - real estate values were rising - and the other enthusiastic initiatives eventually succumbed to higher priorities. The branding as "North America's First Booktown" is still used prominently. Marketing these days is mainly in the local tourism publications and whatever publicity can be garnered. Certainly Stillwater can rightfully claim, on the basis of its half million volumes stocked within a single convenient pedestrian precinct, to be a "Town of Books".

#### SPECIAL FEATURES

In a similar fashion to Nevada City, Stillwater has marvellous attractions to offer the tourist, especially the day-tripper from the metropolis. As well as the historic setting, museums and scenery, there are ample shopping, cafes, restaurants and diversions for those who don't want to spend all their precious time browsing for books. This broad appeal seems essential for attracting visitors, especially as the internet now provides the truly serious book searcher with so many more efficient options.

One recent Stillwater project that did impress me was a series of seminars on book collecting dealing with different genres. It was the only program among the 15 booktowns I visited that took a proactive approach to educating and encouraging potential customers. Given the demographics in most developed countries, and the observation that book collecting may not prove as popular among post-baby boomers, this effort to cultivate new customers was an intelligent marketing project, aside from its community education value.

### **Hay-on-Wye in Wales, UK**

#### LOCATION

Hay-on-Wye is a small market town of about 1500 people situated on the Welsh-English border on the banks of the picturesque Wye River, in the foothills of the Black Mountains. The largest cities with proximity to Hay are Cardiff, Bristol, Manchester, Birmingham and London, which range from 1-5 hours driving time.

#### BOOKTOWN OVERVIEW

Richard Booth was a young Oxford graduate who rebelled against his family's plans for him to become an accountant, when in 1961 he opened his first secondhand bookshop in Hay-on-Wye. He purchased the town's former fire station and set out with the idea of creating the world's biggest bookshop. The novelty and initial success of the project, not to mention the resulting flood of books from his constant buying sprees, meant he had to expand his

premises. He acquired a range of properties and filled them with books, most notably the former cinema and the old Norman castle in the centre of town.

The acquisition of the castle then led to extraordinary worldwide publicity when Booth declared Hay and the former estate of the castle independent of Great Britain, crowning himself as king of the “Town of Books.” The antics associated with that publicity stunt continued to generate publicity for many years on behalf of Booth and especially for Hay.

Other bookshops began to establish themselves in Hay in the wake of Booth’s success at attracting customers. Some were former employees of Booth’s that set up on their own and some were shops Booth had to sell to accommodate financial difficulties he encountered. But most came from elsewhere to take advantage of the hundreds of thousands of book collectors, dealers and visitors that were each year being drawn to the town from all over the world. From the mid-1970s, when there were 12 bookshops in Hay, it grew to 18 within a decade and now there are 39. Forty years ago Hay had only two hotels and a few bed ‘n breakfasts, a couple of restaurants and a tea room. Today there are over 100 accommodation establishments and some 20 restaurants, cafes, bistros and the like. As for the number of books, I have heard estimates as high as 3 million and as low as 1 million.

In 1988, almost 10 years after Booth’s self-coronation and the surge of publicity that accompanied it, the first *Hay Literary Festival* was held. Despite Richard Booth’s vehement criticism and opposition to the festival, it grew in popularity (in 1998 Booth made his peace with the festival organisers and now supports it). No doubt the festival did feed on the existing fame of Hay as the Town of Books, but the concentrated publicity and sponsorship from the media in Britain has helped maintain and further build Hay’s profile as a booktown over the past 15 years. Up to 50,000 people attend the festival over 10 days in May-June to listen to and rub shoulders with (literally!) some of the world’s best contemporary writers.

#### MANAGEMENT & MARKETING

The history of this aspect of Hay is too complex to be recorded here, even if that could be done accurately. The influence of Richard Booth and the publicity coverage for his *Town of Books* was undoubtedly the basis for Hay’s rise to prominence. The media of most countries in the world still regularly run a story that mentions Hay as **the** booktown. But Booth’s constant battles with the Welsh tourism and development authorities (aside from some mutually beneficial publicity in the early years) and many others, meant that management of the Hay-on-Wye booktown as a project was fragmented at best. The marketing remained for a long time opportunistic, personality-based and sporadic. What the Hay Festival appears to have done is added an annual injection of topical publicity executed at a very professional standard to constantly bolster the town’s existing profile.

The other vital element in Hay’s marketing was that Booth acquired such huge volumes of books and often sold them relatively cheaply, partly because the frenetic pace of business did not allow time for proper valuations and partly to keep the cash flowing. Booth’s buying – whether it be whole libraries from monasteries or the collections held in the estates of the landed aristocracy who were being squeezed by taxes – yielded a treasure trove of literature and valuable editions. So during its first twenty-to-thirty years of existence, the Hay booktown proved to be a bargain-hunter’s paradise for dealers and serious collectors. Word-of-mouth through the antiquarian trade backed up the popular publicity and the legend of “Hay - Town of Books” was assured.

The growth of the international booktown movement during the past 15 years has also charged Hay with new significance. Invariably when one of those booktowns receives publicity in its own country then the inspiration of Hay-on-Wye is cited and its reputation is again enhanced. Publicity for Hay continues almost on the momentum of its own making.

For some years now, any influence Richard Booth had within Hay itself has been on the wane. He has declared publicly that his priorities are elsewhere now, but the after effects of a brain tumour that was operated on in 1995 also remain a physical burden for him. Other booksellers, most notably Mark Westwood, are now taking up a more active and cooperative role in the town but through the chamber of commerce rather than an association of their own. Because there is a general acceptance that booksellers form the backbone of Hay's economic strength and they make up a majority of the members, then their views are accorded weight within the chamber. Yet there is also a contrary opinion that the town needs a publicity engine like Richard Booth and that the minutes of a chamber of commerce meeting will not make good copy. Hay has many good booksellers but most of them would concede that the rich vein of library acquisitions that Booth tapped into during his heyday are no longer present - and perhaps no longer even possible - and the stock is now largely perceived in the trade as well picked-over. Furthermore, assiduous management and accurate pricing means that the astonishing bargains one could have once stumbled over in Hay are no longer commonplace.

#### SPECIAL FEATURES

Hay-on-Wye has been a source of inspiration for other booktowns. But as I point out in the conclusions, while it certainly inspires that does not necessarily mean that Hay's history makes a good **model** for developing a new booktown.

Some booksellers bemoaned the increased number of tourists as poking about and cluttering the place up without spending money on books, though they were happy to spend it on plenty of other things in town.

The other factor that may come to influence Hay's future is the absence of what has long been considered an essential element for a booktown – cheap real estate. Like many parts of the UK, Hay's real estate prices have boomed in recent years. Many booksellers who purchased property two decades ago in Hay are of an age when selling up and retiring is not far off. Based on the prices of their properties now – or the rents they could earn - it will be a struggle for a secondhand bookseller as a new tenant or owner to generate an adequate return on investment. There is some risk Hay may find in the future that it becomes a victim of its own success.

## Wigtown in Scotland, UK

#### LOCATION

Wigtown is situated on the far southwest coast of Scotland in the County of Dumfries and Galloway. It is 2-3 hours by car from northern England and Central Scotland. It was once a harbour for Wigtown Bay but gradual silting and changes in the economics of cargo transport saw that role disappear. Ferry traffic to and from Ireland (Belfast – 20 crossings a day) now takes place through Stranraer, which is about 40km away. Wigtown currently has a population of about 1600.

The town dates back to Norman times. While there is apparently little from that era remaining, the large main square that is one of its most striking features harks back to the earlier fortified design of the town. The square has the market cross at one end and an elegant county building with clock tower at the other; the latter was being renovated at the time of my visit. Wigtown was once an important seat for county administration but on losing that role, together with its train service and most of its banks, the town seemed destined for a slow economic decline that had been the lot for many similar places in the west of Scotland.

## BOOKTOWN OVERVIEW

Wigtown occupies a special position in the world booktown movement. It has been selected as Scotland's National Book Town from a competing shortlist of locations by an expert panel. Its establishment in 1998 was then subsidised, both financially and with management advice, by the local government authority (Dumfries & Galloway Council), Scottish Enterprise and the European Union. In virtually all other booktowns around the world, the location has been predetermined prior to the effort to create or promote one. *[The possible exception to this may be Kampung-Baku in Malaysia but even here its location on the island of Langkawi was already decided]* Wigtown has therefore been the beneficiary of formal management and planning prior to and during its establishment and development.

The selection criteria was based on the research conducted by Professor A.V. Seaton (then at Strathclyde University), who also chaired the assessment panel. Other members of the panel included Richard Booth (Hay), Noel Anselot (Redu), and Henk Reussink (Bredevoort). While Wigtown did not meet all criteria, in the view of every member of the panel but one – Booth disagreed – it was the best of all the contenders.

Wigtown now has some 25-28 book-related enterprises; prior to 1998 it had only one bookshop – though one of the biggest in Scotland - and a few home-based dealers trading by catalogue. Most of the bookshops are located within walking distance of the main town square, though a few are in nearby Bladnoch. I was told that the town's dealers had perhaps a few hundred thousand books in stock but many were in storage and not able to be displayed in shops due to space constraints.

My visit coincided with the start of the Fourth Scottish Book Town Festival. The staging of events has been an integral part of Wigtown's business plans. The logic has been that without a massive stock of books in the town, such as Hay can boast, then interesting, well-managed and promoted events are a more cost-effective method than advertising to increase visitation levels. Unfortunately my itinerary only allowed me to stay for the opening night and morning of the first day (Friday) so I was unable to gauge its success though I was told advance sales were encouraging for the coming weekend events.

## MANAGEMENT & MARKETING

The Wigtown Book Town Company has been formed as a result of the national selection process to manage the funding that was made available by Scottish Enterprise. This board has representation from the local council, the business chamber and the book trades association. At the present time a project manager is employed, though a trainee has also been employed to assist in previous years. The Company has administered a budget of several hundred thousand pounds since its inception.

Not surprisingly, there was some tension evident between the expectations of booksellers and those of the business community representatives. Increasing profit and turnover is a priority for a good proportion of the Wigtown booksellers as they seek the gains from being part of a booktown that attracts high visitation levels from quality customers. But the remainder of the business community is looking for the broader economic gains that a booktown promised and there was a level of exasperation expressed toward the booksellers.

The Book Town Company has annual business plans and spells out its objectives with an associated marketing strategy. This strategy was costed and attempted to estimate a return on investment. It now seems that the early business plans were too optimistic in their projections, especially of visitor numbers, though other measures appear to have been achieved.

## SPECIAL FEATURES

Booksellers in Wigtown – as independent as the rest of their ilk - have taken a while to adjust to working with government authorities. But they have had to organise within themselves in

order to participate in the Company and present a more united front to the business community and council.

There is also a commitment to better measurement and evaluation within the booktown, beginning with regular monitoring of aggregate turnover on an individually anonymous basis. Training and encouragement in the use of the internet is also seen as a way of improving bookseller profitability, especially during the usually slow winter trading period

The assessment panel recommended that thought be given to including some of the towns that did not succeed in their bid for selection in a Scottish **book trail**. This trail would link a triangle with Dalmellington in the north, Moffat in the east and Wigtown in the west. An apparently unofficial (and poorly produced) brochure does exist promoting such a book trail for the south west of Scotland but it does not do the idea justice.

The Wigtown Book Company also had a membership program to join the Friends of Wigtown. For an annual subscription of about AU\$18 this entitled members to a car sticker, priority bookings for festival events and a bi-annual newsletter.

## **Bredevoort, NETHERLANDS**

### LOCATION

A small, quaint tidily-presented town of about 1600 inhabitants in the province of Aalten, Bredevoort is located about 5 kilometres from the Dutch-German border in the part of East Guelderland known as De Achterhoek, or “the back corner.” As a fortified border town, it constantly changed hands over the centuries until Prince Maurits of Orange made it part of the Dutch Republic in 1597.

Bredevoort enjoys a central position between the two major population centres of the Ranstad in the Netherlands and the Ruhr in Germany. It is estimated that there are 35 million people within a 200km radius of Bredevoort and 15 million within 1-2 hours driving time.

### BOOKTOWN OVERVIEW

Henk Ruessink, a retired teacher and member of the local Citizens Union, was the driving force behind Bredevoort’s transformation into a booktown. Following the completion of the restoration of its medieval town centre as way to celebrate its 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Bredevoort was all dressed up but with no place to go. Despite its pleasant setting and historical significance, the village had very little in the way of promising commercial prospects. Ruessink had read a newspaper article about Hay-on-Wye and paid it a visit. He returned to Bredevoort enthused by the idea and obtained the support of the local authorities on both sides of the Dutch-German border.

Ruessink and the local *stichting* – a community corporate body that has the legal and taxation status to undertake projects of this type - began by simply advertising for booksellers and mailing direct to about 500 existing bookdealers in the Netherlands and Germany. They received 85 responses and held a special open day to present the town to prospective booksellers. There was not much in the way of incentives offered except the cheap real estate and a commitment from the *stichting* to promote Bredevoort as a booktown. In fact, Ruessink made a point of requesting that the booksellers be able to survive without guaranteed income for at least 3 years before agreeing to move to the town. It should be noted that Henk Ruessink and his wife gave several years of voluntary time to help make the project successful.

From the five bookshops that helped launch the Bredevoort Boekenstad in 1993, this number has now grown to over 20, along with half a dozen or so art galleries, a bookbindery and

cultural or craft exhibits. None of the shops are of a massive size, however, and the book stock of the village is estimated at around 200,000. There is good variety of Dutch and German titles with a reasonably sized English language bookshop

#### MANAGEMENT & MARKETING

The *stichting* has a part-time project manager and assistant whose salaries are partly subsidised by local government but mainly paid for by income from the book fairs. As well as running the information office these positions are responsible for overall marketing, promotion and management of the events. The information office is located inside the former school and the *stichting* leases the school and sub-lets part of it to bookshops.

There is a monthly book fair which usually has about 20 stands. The major events are a discount book fair at Easter (ca. 80 stands), a private sellers book fair in July (ca. 190 participants) and two international book fairs in May and August (ca. 170-180 stands). The stands cost 25 euro to hire and are rented to booksellers for 60 euro.

In 1993-94, Bredevoort captured a lot of publicity as the first booktown in the Netherlands (it is still the only one). Ruessink reports that after the flush of success from the initial publicity there was a tougher period for Bredevoort when many of its booksellers struggled but that recently the internet had begun to bolster their sales. That was confirmed by booksellers I spoke to also, though some were still disgruntled by their lack of success. But I also noticed that many potential customers were wandering around the village trying to browse and being frustrated by the number of closed bookshops, even after 11am. Ruessink concedes this is a problem for Bredevoort and damages the image of the town but I was to find that to be so in many other continental booktowns also.

There have been some conflicts between the *stichting* and the booksellers, with a couple of dealers having left the town as a result. One source of conflict was the level of representation booksellers had on the *stichting* but at root lay the usual issues of inadequate turnover.

Like many other European booktowns, graphic design has formed an important element in the marketing. In the case of Bredevoort, a logo was developed that incorporated the town's historical significance.

#### SPECIAL FEATURES

Due to the strict laws and religious conventions related to Sunday trading in the Netherlands, Bredevoort had to seek special exemptions from the Dutch government in order to do so. One drawback is that many events are held in the open air so the weather can be a determining factor in their success. As the summer preceding my visit had been very wet, the previous trading period seems to have not been so good for Bredevoort bookdealers with one of the major fairs having recently been washed out.

Ruessink believes that a booktown needs to ensure it has at least several professional booksellers with good management skills in order to succeed. There should ideally be at least one outstanding bookshop, a large feature store that can anchor the concept with an excellent selection of general stock. It also should be open long hours every day of the week. In Bredevoort this is partly achieved by the bookshops that are based at the information centre and open the same hours. Ruessink is also of the view that a booktown needs to be international in its appeal with stock in many languages.

One of the most successful events Bredevoort hosts is the private sellers market where anyone can come along and set up a sale stand for their own books. It is also very popular with professional bookdealers as an efficient way to make acquisitions from the public. *[At my suggestion, an event based on this concept was successfully commenced in October 2002 by*

*Berrima District Rotary Club in the Southern Highlands of NSW; the aim is to grow it into a major fundraising event]*

## **Redu, BELGIUM**

### LOCATION

Redu is a tiny and very pretty village in the heart of the Belgian Ardennes forest within a short distance of the border with France (Charleroi is only about 50km away). One distinct advantage is its proximity to the E411 motorway. It has population of only 300. Despite its small size, it has a history spanning more than a thousand years.

### BOOKTOWN OVERVIEW

Redu has a symbolic importance for all other booktowns. It was the first to attempt to emulate Hay-on-Wye when it began in 1985. It has also been a tremendous success, especially in its early years. Within a decade of the launch of Redu as *a village du livre* it was attracting an estimated 300,000 people annually. The relationship between Richard Booth and Noel Anselot, who provided the leadership for Redu's transformation into a booktown, was to also later help in the creation of Europe's third booktown in Montolieu, France.

Anselot met Booth in 1979 when he visited Hay, while on a fishing holiday in Wales. His initial contact with Booth was as a customer, buying an entire library that Booth had just acquired from a chateau near Redu. The books from this library that he did not want for his personal collection he then used to stock a bookshop in Redu itself. A few years later, a local community group in Redu was working on ideas to foster economic and cultural redevelopment and the notion of establishing a booktown was adopted. Anselot used his connections and knowledge of the book trade to help steer the fledgling efforts. As there was no external funding available, the booktown began as series of book fairs. Gradually, the local council and landlords were persuaded to offer incentives and rent holidays to bookdealers who promised to renovate premises.

Anselot, who had been both a journalist and business executive in his career, used his skills and network to maintain a high profile for Redu. In its second decade, Redu appears to have plateaued and tapered off somewhat compared to the rapid strides it made in its first ten years. But compared to a single retail operation in the village back in 1984, it now has some 35 bookshops, artisans, boutiques, restaurants and cafes. And renovation work for bookshops continues by booksellers that have made a long-term commitment to Redu, so the future continues to look prosperous for the world's second booktown.

### MANAGEMENT & MARKETING

Aside from the extensive publicity that was largely engineered by Noel Anselot, the use of signage has been a key promotional tactic for Redu. Some 150 signs were erected within a 50 km radius of the *village du livre*. A tourism information office is prominently positioned in the centre of the village but there is no separate paid staff for promoting Redu as a booktown

There is an association of booksellers that promotes and organises events for the village.

There are three main dates in Redu annual calendar:

*Fete du livre* – a book festival held at Easter

*Nuit du livre* – a night book fair held on the first Saturday in August that is in the form of a carnival extending into the small hours

*Journees du Regionalisme* – a book fair with a focus on local and regional history held on the first weekend of October.

The booksellers association appears to function well, though the inevitable personality clashes exist. Publicity is not as easy to come by now, especially since Noel Anselot has retired from

active involvement in the Redu booktown. This underlines the need for the involvement of an individual or group within the booktown that can sustain a public relations campaign over a long period of time.

Redu also benefits from the proximity to the Euro Space Center, which is a major tourist attraction.

#### SPECIAL FEATURES

As mentioned above, what is particularly special about Redu is that it was the first to replicate the appeal of Hay-on-Wye and in doing so began a trend that has spread across the world.

Noel Anselot became a *de facto* foreign affairs minister for the international booktown movement and offered more refined diplomatic skills, in contrast to the movement's maverick monarch, Richard Booth. Despite his retirement, he agreed to meet me for an interview and we discussed a range of issues relevant to Redu and the growth of the international booktowns. In particular, he shared his experiences of advising the Malaysian government on the establishment of the Kampung-Baku (literally *village-books*) on the resort island of Langkawi in the mid 1990s. Anselot was also to play a role in the subsequent establishment of Montolieu in France and St Pierre de Clages in Switzerland and he was a member of the selection panel that chose Wigtown. Like Seaton, he has devised his own success criteria.

### Fontenoy-la-Joute, FRANCE

#### LOCATION

Fontenoy-la-Joute is perched on the edge of the Parisian basin before the steeply climbing slopes of the Vosges massif, just 5-10 minutes drive from the world-famous "crystal town" of Baccarat and 40km southeast of Nancy. The typical Lorraine village dates back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century with the chapel to St Peter as its major historical landmark. With only 280 inhabitants living in largely unrenovated 18<sup>th</sup> century houses, it has an authentic flavour of a provincial French agricultural community – and a working one – that other French booktowns did not have.

#### BOOKTOWN OVERVIEW

The idea for a *village du livre* was that of a local politician, Francois Guillaume, and an academic, Frere Bonnet, of the CNRS Catholic research institute. Having no bookshops of its own, the community formed the *Les Amis du Livre* (Friends of the Book) as an association in 1994 to promote the booktown and attract booksellers. Fontenoy-la-Joute was then launched in 1996 with 16 booksellers.

There are now 23 booksellers in the village but most with quite small stocks. During its early years it claimed 90,000 visitors annually though these numbers have apparently fallen sharply in recent years, by as much as 50%, including at the monthly book fairs. Most of the bookshops were closed during my visit reflecting the seasonal nature of the tourism but also I suspect the level of commitment of some booksellers.

#### MANAGEMENT & MARKETING

Due to the political and business connections of the founders, there was good support from sponsors in the early years, such as the Credit Mutuel Bank, and especially from government-based French cultural funding bodies. The quality of the design and production for the printed guide was consequently high, and it included text in French, English and German. The level of integration for the *village du livre* into the general tourism brochures of the region was also good. The road signage was another positive aspect.

As well as the crystal museum and shops at Baccarat, there are another half dozen tourist drawcards (a chateau, churches etc) within a half hour drive of Fontenoy-la-Joute. This makes the *village du livre* a convenient stopping point for self-drive visits as part of a larger itinerary – there appears to be little public transport and perhaps just a couple of B&Bs for accommodation.

There was tension and conflict in working relationships between the booksellers and the Mairie (Mayor's office), especially given the *Les Amis du Livre*, which promotes the town, operates from that office. A number of the booksellers and other tourism-based businesses subsequently formed the *Association Culturelle et Artistique du Village du Livre*, to better represent their interests. This group has 12 members, three of whom are not booksellers (eg. the local restaurant). Aside from assistance from the mayor's office, there are no separate paid staff for the booktown.

Ironically, while the tension and conflict existed, so did promotional activity as each group upped the ante in effort and initiative. Now the relationship and interaction has all but ceased so the activity – especially funding support from external sources – has also declined. In part, this appears due to the election of a new mayor, who more strongly represents the agricultural agendas in the district and is not seen to be interested in promoting the booktown idea.

#### SPECIAL FEATURES

While the authentic provincial aspect of the village was appealing, aside from the generous carpark there did not appear to be adequate facilities for large volumes of visitors. This may not be an issue if almost all visitors are self-drive and stopping for a relatively brief time.

Many new booktowns, especially those with small bookstocks and low turnover, make it very unlikely that repeat visitors will be generated. Fontenoy-la-Joute was pleasant to wander around for a short time and browse among the bookshops. But it is hard to see serious bookbuyers justifying multiple trips, though the monthly book fair may tempt them to make the effort at least once.

Like many other French booktowns, there is a strong emphasis on the artisans as well as the booksellers. In the case of Fontenoy-la-Joute there was a papermaker, Jean-Pierre Gouy, who conducts public exhibitions of his craft.

## Cuisery, FRANCE

#### LOCATION

Cuisery is situated on a promontory overlooking the Burgundy Bresse plain and the Seille River, said to be one of the most beautiful navigable rivers in France. It is about 100 km directly south of Dijon. The region is very popular for cruising by barge or small boat through the rivers and interlinking canals, and also features fine food, wine and provincial art and craft in an idyllic French provincial landscape.

The town features a medieval quarter surrounding the 16<sup>th</sup> century church of Notre Dame de Cuisery. Another new attraction that opened in 1998 is the Eden Centre, a discovery museum for the regional ecosystem.

#### BOOKTOWN OVERVIEW

In 1999 Cuisery launched itself as the 4<sup>th</sup> book village in France and the 9<sup>th</sup> in Europe. It was the first of three locations in France that I visited that exploited the medieval quarter of the town as the site for the *village du livre* (see also Montmorillon and La Charite-sur-Loire below). Apparently there had been a few different attempts to utilise the largely empty

premises in Cuisery's medieval quarter prior to the current branding as a *Village du Livre et Metiers du Livre et du Multimedia* (village of the book and arts of the book and multimedia).

Prior to launching the *village du livre*, there was only a market trader in paperbacks and cheaper secondhand books operating in Cuisery. Creating a book quarter in the town was the work of M. Raymond Rener and M. Etienne Moulron of the *Livres en Campagne Association* and the then Consular General of the Saone-et-Loire Departement, Maitre Paul Perrault, (his son, Pascal, is the President of the *Village du Livre de Cuisery* association despite residing in Paris) and the Mayor, M. Faivre.

The *village du livre* in Cuisery is primarily based in and around the medieval pedestrian street, *Grand Rue*, that winds from the main square up to the Notre Dame church. There are currently around 10 booksellers and 4 book artisans (old printing presses, engravers and calligraphers, genealogists and local history exhibition).

The most popular attraction is the book market held on the first Sunday of each month.

#### MANAGEMENT & MARKETING

Once again, publications, publicity, posters and signage, appeared to be the main tools used to promote Cuisery.

There is a substantial bulletin (12x A4 B/W pages – 2 colour cover but a print run of only 500), *La Casquette*, published quarterly by the association. As well as announcements on upcoming events and reports on previous ones, it included articles about famous authors, bookshop profiles, other booktowns and historical aspects of Cuisery.

Cuisery employs a full-time coordinator, a young graduate, Nathalie Broux. Her role is primarily promotion and event organisation. The *village du livre* currently receives a good deal of support from the Mayor, who was one of the original enthusiasts for the project. The relationship between the booksellers and the town is good at the present time, perhaps reflecting the fact that it is still early days in the project

#### SPECIAL FEATURES

Florine & Richard Jaillet, who are relative newcomers to the bookselling trade, were welcoming and generous with their time, despite being in the midst of packing books for a major book fair in Paris over the coming weekend. They pointed out that while being located in a book village was of benefit, it was also necessary to maintain the business's own promotion and selling activities. This included internet trading, catalogue selling, attending book fairs and advertising. They believed one of the biggest positives of being located in Cuisery was the easy and constant access they had to other booksellers. Their interesting point was that booktowns are great places for apprentice booksellers to learn the trade because it was not a profession where ideas were commonly shared or communicated (eg at conferences or in trade journals and the like).

## **St Pierre de Clages, SWITZERLAND**

#### LOCATION

This village of about 630 people is located in the French-speaking Valais region of Switzerland, at the foot of the imposing snow-capped *massif Haut-de-Cry* of the Swiss Alps. The soil of the spectacular Chamoson plateau nurtures hundreds of acres of vineyards within which are set tiny villages such as St-Pierre-de-Clages. Since Roman times, the area has seen the constant traffic of men and ideas whether as an ancient trade route between Milan and Lyon or the Orient Express rattling its way past from Geneva to Venice. The Gt St Bernard

and Simplon Tunnel/Passes through to northern Italy are within an hour's drive away; Lausanne (72km) Geneva (112km) and Lyons (220 km) are all within easy driving distance.

### BOOKTOWN OVERVIEW

The idea for rejuvenating St-Pierre-de-Clages as a *village du livre* came about during a reunion celebration marking the centenary of a large group of families from Chamoson who had migrated to Argentina due to the declining economic prospects in that region of Switzerland. That reunion brought to focus concerns similar to those of a century before as there was little in the way of employment opportunities for young people. Someone had read an article about Hay-on-Wye and an association was formed, *Les amis du Livre*, to investigate and promote the idea.

In 1993 St-Pierre-de-Clages launched itself as a *village du livre*, inviting Richard Booth and Noel Anselot to the ceremony, the latter having actively advised the community on their project. In the beginning, there were only weekend booksellers and the approach was to organise a series of book fairs to gradually begin building the village's profile as a booktown. Booth opposed this approach, preferring the strategy of establishing one mega-shop.

There are currently nine (9) *bouquineries* (booksellers) with 2-3 recent closures occurring. All the premises tend to be smallish in size, though the *Maison du Livre* has several floors each occupied by a different bookseller. The book village's organisers would ideally like at least another ten (10) booksellers to establish themselves in St-Pierre-de-Clages.

There are four main annual events staged by St-Pierre-de-Clages.

*Vin Gastronomie at Litterature* [Wine, Food and Literature Festival] – (mid-May) This spring event combines the splendid wine and food reputation of the Valais with the book village. The literature of wine and food is featured along with wine tastings and culinary demonstrations. Usually attracts an estimated attendance of 5,000-6,000.

*Les Journees et Nuit du Livre* [The Days and Night of the Book] – (June or July)  
This summer event is a weekend and all night festival in the streets of the medieval market. Usually attracts an estimated attendance of 2,000.

*La Fete du Livre* [The Festival of the Book] – (last weekend in August)  
St-Pierre-de-Clages's major book festival which attracts some 20,000 visitors and 100 booksellers over Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

*Le Marche de Noel* [The Christmas Markets] – (first weekend in December)  
Sixty arts and craft exhibitors, together with artisans, gather in the old village to create the warmth and spirit of Christmas. Usually attracts an estimated attendance of 5,000-6,000.

“Meet the Writer” events also take place on a Friday each month from January-April and September-November inclusive. Four “Music & Wine” concerts are also held during the year.

### MANAGEMENT & MARKETING

The *Bureau Terroir de Chamoson* provides a full-time coordinator to assist promotion for the *village du livre* but this assistance must be shared with the wine industry also. Balancing the demands and expectations of each is not easy, especially as the vigneron compare the established nature of their own commercial operations with the fledgling book-related enterprises. The booksellers have one representative on the nine-member board of the *Les Amis du Livres Association*.

A priority for the village is not just attracting visitors and book-lovers but also persuading more booksellers to set-up or relocate to St-Pierre-de-Clages. To that end, and to lift the profile of the village, the Association takes part in major trade fairs (eg. the Frankfurt Book Fair and the *Salon du Livre* shows in Geneva and Paris).

One problem for St-Pierre-de-Clages, and one shared by many booktowns, is that their dealers do not make enough use of the internet. It is felt that this affects their commercial viability, particularly during the winter. There is no strategy to address that problem, which is one both of user-education and technology-access.

#### SPECIAL FEATURES

The real estate in St-Pierre-de-Clages (and Switzerland generally) is not cheap, even for vacant rental properties and especially compared to the remoter villages of France. Partly to address this, the village offers lease incentives to new booksellers: the first two years are free; year three is half price; and year four is discounted one third off the normal rent.

Switzerland is heavily demarcated by the language barriers when it comes to cultural tourism. Relatively few visitors to St-Pierre-de-Clages come from the German-speaking cantons of Switzerland itself. A significant number of French currently visit but the increase in the number of French booktowns is perceived as a worrisome trend as it may draw potential customers from St-Pierre-de-Clages. The Swiss are involved in talks with other international booktowns to try and agree on a buffer of 600km as the minimum distance between European booktowns, though it is not clear how this could be mandated.

## Montolieu, FRANCE

#### LOCATION

Spilling over a rocky outcrop at the base of the *Montagne Noir* (Black Mountains) in the Aude region of France - also known as Cathar country - Montolieu maintains the high standard of scenic settings for booktowns in Continental Europe. Although the weather was less than favourable during my visit, the beauty of the surrounding landscape was apparent, in spite of the wind and overcast skies.

The main part of the village is on a summit that is a steep climb up from an encircling river through a maze of narrow medieval streets. Parking a vehicle is therefore difficult and an obvious constraint for the town, although a small recently constructed area on the outskirts is alleviating the problem. Montolieu has need of parking spaces as an estimated 100,000 visitors a year flock to the village, almost all by car. Admittedly, many are just considered sightseers rather than bookshop customers, as one of France's most popular tourist drawcards, in the form of the walled city of Carcassone, is only 17km away. In addition, Montolieu is only 80km away from the metropolis of Toulouse to the northwest and a within reasonable driving distance from Provence, which provides a source of expatriate English customers.

#### BOOKTOWN OVERVIEW

Montolieu and Becherel ran a close race for the honour of being the second booktown established on the Continent, with Montolieu just being shaded for the prize by officially opening in 1990. Both Richard Booth and Noel Anselot were active partners in the project – each purchased property and were the first to establish bookshops in the village – but the driving force was an elderly but energetic Montolieu bookbinder, Michel Braibant.

Braibant desired to see a printing museum established as a centrepiece for a *village du livre*. His enthusiasm was matched by the then Mayor, Madame Claude Courriere, who continued the project after the death of M. Braibant. She used her influence to lobby for millions of francs in funding to have restoration and renovation work undertaken around the town.

Today, the *Musee Michel Braibant* is the organisational heart for the booktown. In addition to its exhibits of old printing presses, the museum conducts a popular program for school students with workshops in the arts of the book: courses that demonstrate the theory and practice of printing, calligraphy, typography, papermaking and bookbinding. Fees per student range from 10-20 euros depending on the type and duration of class taken. This program attracts school groups from all over France as it can form a day's activities for a week-long excursion in the district.

In fact the town supports two programs of this type. In the *Manufacture Royale*, a sprawling former textile factory dating back to the reign of Louis XIV, there is *L'Atelier du Livre*. This program is not so fixed on historical accuracy or high production standards in its teaching but rather on building interest and appreciation in both children and adults for the techniques of book production. Each participant actually completes their own book from writing and illustration through to binding with an emphasis more on fun than education.

In a similar manner to the other European booktowns that have been operating for 5-10 years, there has been a slump in activity after the initial post-launch successes. There are about a dozen booksellers in Montolieu – the same as for the past 5-7 years but the composition has changed. Anselot and Booth have both withdrawn from the village. For a time the *Galerie des Bouquinistes*, also located in the *Manufacture Royale*, offered another dozen booksellers from outside Montolieu shelf space on a consignment basis. This boosted the variety and volume of books stocked in the village. But the *Galerie* owner, the much-respected Dutch bookseller, Laurens van Baardewijk, has been stricken with serious illness and has closed that operation.

#### MANAGEMENT & MARKETING

The *Syndicat d'Initiative de Montolieu* has offices and staff in the Museum. As well as manning the museum and coordinating the educational activities, this office provides tourism information and promotional support for the booktown. Tutors are drawn from the artisans present in the village such as the graphic designer, Astrid Burchardt, and the bookbinder, Marc Rogez.

In a reaction against the *Syndicat*, the booksellers formed their own association but rumours of factionalism even within that group were being aired to me. With the passing away of the original leadership among the booksellers in the village, it seems that Montolieu is entering a restless phase in its development with new personalities carrying new agendas.

#### SPECIAL FEATURES

One element of European business life that gradually became clearer to me, but no where clearer than in Montolieu, was the overwhelming influence of bureaucracy. The entrepreneur is saddled with many obstacles, permits and cultural conventions, especially in France. One example relates to the difficulty of having employees. For many occupations the registered individual owner of the business must be the only person who works on those premises. It is apparently not possible to have casual labour in the sense we have it in Australia. A colleague, friend or family member cannot work for you, even in an unpaid volunteer capacity, unless the business is, in effect, incorporated and special employment permissions obtained.

The imprimatur of officialdom, through the complexity of French municipal and regional government, is almost mandatory as otherwise private initiatives are viewed with suspicion. This perhaps explains the similar way booktowns developed on Continental Europe, particularly the almost essential feature of favourable political patronage.

## Montmorillon, FRANCE

### LOCATION

Nestled in a valley on either side of the banks of the Gartempe river in *the Haut Poitou* region, the town of Montmorillon has a potent mix of history and idyllic location. With evidence of human occupation since Paleolithic times, the town is one of the oldest in France and features many architectural treasures including the *Maison Dieu*, a hospital founded at the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century by Lord Robert du Puy, a pilgrim returning from Jerusalem.

The river divides the town into two parts – the new town and the renovated medieval quarter – and they are connected by a 15<sup>th</sup> century gothic bridge.

Only 50km or so from the city of Poitiers, Montmorillon also has the advantage of close proximity to the *Futuroscope*, an audiovisual theme park and discovery centre that is one of France's most popular tourist attractions.

### BOOKTOWN OVERVIEW

Montmorillon brands itself as the *Cite de l'Ecrit at des Metiers du Livre* (city of writing and the arts of the book). Although one of the most recent booktowns, having been officially launched in 2000, its credentials extend further back. One of France's most famous and popular authors, Madame Regine Desforges, is a native of Montmorillon. In the late 1980s she was instrumental in creating a writers festival that is held every two years with a different major theme each time. In the mid 1990s she was on the town council and suggested the booktown theme be adopted for the restoration of the medieval quarter of the town and as a logical extension of the highly successful *Salon du Livre* festival. Her proposal was supported enthusiastically by key political figures, not just on the town council but by levels of government extending all the way, it is said, to President Jacques Chirac.

As a consequence, funding of more than six million euros was allocated to an extensive restoration of buildings, drainage, paving and signage for the new booktown. The objectives of the project were explained to me as follows:

1. Save and restore the medieval heritage-listed precinct
2. Develop the tourism image and reputation of the town
3. Create employment (aside from construction some 30 people are directly employed in the bookselling enterprises)
4. Complete a cultural project that would in turn have positive political benefits

The restoration has transformed the town and no other booktown I saw could boast the splendid quality of built environs that Montmorillon has achieved. Aside from elaborate signage, each shop front has been funded to design colourful but elegant facades. Similarly, the quality of graphic design and print production is quite lavish. Dedicated carparking areas for the booktown quarter have also been provided.

There are 17 listed booksellers and galleries plus 9 artisan enterprises. Montmorillon's printed guide also lists around 30 hotels, restaurants and bars. The existence of such ample facilities is the advantage of having the new town just across the river.

### MANAGEMENT & MARKETING

In order to attract booksellers, rental incentives were offered with premises being made available for 100-200 euros per month. Applications were made to the Council for these premises and the leases awarded after a screening process.

It seems that at least some of the booksellers awarded the leases have not proven to be assets to the new booktown. One condition attached to the special leases required mandatory hours

of opening due to frequency of shops being shut, even during the summer. A group of the booksellers rebelled against this after a time; as many were sole proprietors they sometimes needed to be closed on occasions when they were travelling to acquire stock or to attend book fairs.

The county council did employ a coordinator, Laurent Salmon, and office staff but the booksellers concerned also took up a petition seeking the removal of the county council's influence in the booktown. The county has now recently withdrawn its involvement, leaving the project back in the hands of the mayor, the town council and of course, the booksellers. But in the process, an important source of finding was also lost, not to mention the coordinator and the promotional skills. Efforts are now being made to secure alternative funding from other levels of the French government, including for a *Musee du Livre*.

#### SPECIAL FEATURES

The Montmorillon booktown is an exceptional location and ideal architectural setting. In all probability it will succeed as a tourist attraction. But the lack of books – both quantity and quality - and the absence of enough committed booksellers may prove to be its Achilles heel.

### **La Charite-sur-Loire, FRANCE**

#### LOCATION

The majestic Loire River occupies a special place in the hearts of the French and to combine it with a cultural attraction about 200km or so south of Paris via the *autoroute* seems a certain formula for success. In 2000, La Charite-sur-Loire became the most recent of the French booktowns to launch itself. Its location in the very heart of France is seen as a decisive drawcard. It was once a renowned stop-over destination on the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. Just as the faithful travellers of the past once sojourned within the Clunian monastery admiring the Romanesque friezes, it is hoped in the future that La Charite-sur-Loire will attract a new type of pilgrim, but this time browsing walls of books.

La Charite-sur-Loire bears many similarities to Montmorillon. Both are larger communities concentrating bookshops in the historic quarter of the city, clustered around a heritage-listed church. So they differ from the small villages and towns that typify most other European booktowns. La Charite-sur-Loire is about to see major restoration of the medieval streetscape begin; Montmorillon has had much of its work completed.

#### BOOKTOWN OVERVIEW

Also like Montmorillon, La Charite-sur-Loire has prior credentials for its booktown claim: For the past seven years it has hosted a highly respected and popular antiquarian bookfair organised by the bouquiniste, Christian Valleriaux. On the basis of that success, bookdealers began setting up or relocating to La Charite-sur-Loire from other places, such as Paris.

In April 2000, there were 8 bookshops and now there are 15. Almost all line the *Rue du Pont* between the Notre Dame Church and the bridge over the Loire. Most are relatively small in size though the quality of their stock, especially antiquarian holdings, seems of a higher standard than most other French booktowns.

There were only three events scheduled in 2002: A Spring Market in April; an Antiquarian Book Fair in July; and a Night of the Book in early August. Increasing attendances at both events and rising weekly visitor numbers are being noticed, though the Book Fair was referred to as attracting only several thousand. Poetry readings and meet-the-author events attract up to 50 locals at a time. It is considered a good sign that more dealers are travelling to La Charite-sur-Loire to make purchases.

## MANAGEMENT & MARKETING

The Mayor's Office supports the communication program by assisting with graphic design and having the promotional brochure printed. The booksellers have their own association and their membership fees include a contribution for advertising.

With that apparent French predilection for staging revolutions, there recently was an overthrow of the booktown founder when he was voted out of office. He subsequently withdraw from further involvement in the association.

## SPECIAL FEATURES

La Charite-sur-Loire is not only 200 km from Paris but also 220km from Lyon. As it happens, St-Pierre-de-Clages is also almost the exact same distance from Lyon, so the growing concentration of Francophone locations positioning themselves as *village du livres* is beginning to be more obvious. There was a hint that a number of other substantial Parisian dealers were contemplating a move to La Charite-sur-Loire both for the lower business costs and lifestyle benefits. Should that happen, the city may rapidly bolster its reputation as a mecca for bibliophiles. On the other hand, the volume of trading currently being done in La Charite-sur-Loire would not suggest it is proving a goldmine for resident booksellers.

In the case of La Charite-sur-Loire, the tourism promotion attempts to embrace other selling propositions for the city in addition to books. According to Professor Seaton's views, departing from a unique selling proposition and not maintaining consistency of the marketing message when promoting a booktown is a risk to its success.

## Becherel, FRANCE

### LOCATION

Becherel is situated in the northwest of France about 30 km from the city of Rennes in the centre of the Armorican Peninsula, the region better known as Brittany. Although relatively sparsely populated and geographically remote, the region attracts a steady flow of visitors, particularly to the nearby walled river city of Dinan. Further to the north, Mont St Michel is a tourism magnet on both a national and international scale, though there is probably relatively little overflow to this part of Brittany.

The town of Becherel itself also boasts ancient ramparts and a beautiful church, along with a classic chateau and other attractions. Its attributes have earned it a designation, along with a cluster of other towns in Brittany, as a *Petite Cite de Caractere*.

### BOOKTOWN OVERVIEW

The first booktown in France, the second booktown on Continental Europe and the third in the world is Becherel's proud claim. Like Redu, it recognised the potential economic leverage it would give a town where the population had rapidly declined along with its rural industry during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The leading figure in the story of the Becherel booktown is Madame Colette Trublett. She created the cultural association *Saven Douar* in 1985. That association began to search for a means of rescuing Becherel from its economic plight and in doing so came across the stories of Hay-on-Wye and Redu. In the case of Becherel, however, there was an added urgency to the task and extra appeal in the booktown solution. Committed to maintaining the threatened Breton language and culture, the solution of rejuvenation via development of a booktown held out the promise of both an economic and cultural renaissance for the region.

Becherel made overtures to Hay-on-Wye and Redu but felt somewhat rebuffed by the lukewarm response. According to Booth's autobiography he was keen on the connection but

claims Noel Anselot dismissed Becherel with the comment “People do not buy books near the sea.” The nature of the response may also have had more to do with the joint commitment and investments being made by the Hay and Redu founders as they shifted their focus to establishing the Montolieu booktown a short time later.

Nevertheless, Becherel successfully launched itself in 1989 and eventually grew to 18 bookshops with 4 artisan enterprises or galleries. The town stages four regular events: monthly Sunday book markets; an Easter Fair; a night of the book and a reading festival over the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> weekends of October. Estimates for the size of visitation that the town attracts varies considerably from between 30,000 – 80,000 a year.

#### MANAGEMENT & MARKETING

Administration of the booktown is facilitated by a consultation committee. It is meant to meet once a month although they apparently have been more irregular than that of late. The committee comprises 3 members of the local council, 7 booksellers elected from their numbers, and 2 *Saven Douar* representatives.

Professor Seaton made the point following his visit to Becherel in the summer of 1996 that it seemed the least successful of the booktowns he had been to so far. I was told that around this time there had been a few dealers who had been in conflict over the management of the town but that they had since left and matters had settled down again.

There are now 18 booksellers but the *Saven Douar* would like to achieve numbers of at least 25. Turnover figures of 40,000 euro per annum were revealed to me as being a better than average result in Becherel so the incomes being earned by booksellers are not extravagant.

#### SPECIAL FEATURES

Although it is not unique to Becherel, but rather a characteristic of most booktowns, it was a bookseller here that made the point most strongly that one of the biggest concerns and major time-wasters for secondhand dealers is sourcing and acquiring stock. An advantage of being based in a booktown was the constant inflow of books as customers transported them by car knowing that they would be able to sell them for the best price they could. In a *village du livre* the cycle was usually that of buying the books from visitors during the week and then selling them on the weekend. With a bit of luck, the seller of the books would often turn around with the money in their hand and immediately begin browsing and buying.

## 2. Success Factors for Booktowns

Based on my own observations and extensive interviews during the Fellowship, but also utilising the existing research of Professor A.V. (Tony) Seaton and commentary by Noel Anselot, I feel it would be possible to adapt and develop a set of critical success factors for an Australian booktown. That needs to be the next stage of my work on this project. Comments by Richard Booth, Henk Reussink and other booktown identities are also relevant.

There are differences, however, that would need to be applied to Australia. Professor Seaton’s work provides a superb and comprehensive analysis of the booktown movement to date, with the one qualification that it has only examined European booktowns. There is a North American hybrid species that needs to be taken into account because I believe there are significant cultural, commercial and demographic points of difference to those in Europe. It is quite possible also that the Australian context would more closely parallel that of North America – or a mix of the UK and America - than that of Europe.

In many respects, the task would be made easier in developing such critical success factors for Australia by using specific locations as evaluation examples. In addition to the Southern

Highlands BOOKtrail as Australia's first fledgling booktown project, I shall proceed with this project to canvass the other possible locations for booktowns elsewhere in Australia. There is not the space here to fully elaborate Professor Seaton's ideas or to attempt an analysis of how his success factors would apply to Australian conditions. If funding permitted, it would be highly advantageous to have Professor Seaton act in a consulting capacity on such a project.

The critical success factors cover a range of issues: Location, including size of town, proximity to major conurbations and motorways or other transport options, comparative real estate costs and qualities of scenery/charm/curiosity; tourism versus bookselling motivations; bookshop critical mass and existing versus new sellers; supporting role of government and financial subsidies; social psychology of booktowns; attitude of host community; bookstock quantity/quality; bookstock – mix of general/specialised; pricing; promotional resources such as information offices, brochures, advertising, publicity, events, signage and merchandising; monitoring and evaluation; internet/catalogue trading; leadership and partnerships; national and international dimensions.

One success factor that may present an obstacle to an Australian booktown – given its distances from major book markets – is the issue of supply. Sourcing antiquarian/secondhand books is difficult in Australia. But to me that is simply a logistical question open to a variety of solutions, including bulk imports. The vital point is whether the demand exists and whether that demand is sufficient to make the supply – however it must be eventually delivered – a commercial proposition.

Perhaps the most critical factor is **recognising** the underlying motive for creating a booktown. Is it **primarily** to be an economic tourism rescue package for a town, village or region? Or is it a marketing technique to sell more books? In North America it is mainly the latter. In Europe the former view has prevailed except in the case of Hay-on-Wye. The original booktown in Wales has satisfied both motives, and this is what makes it so tempting to try and emulate.

### **3. *One Book – One Town Reading Campaign***

Although not forming a part of my original Fellowship schedule, the opportunity presented itself to do more research and extend my network on a related project to booktowns: the *One Book – One Town* Reading Campaign. This campaign was first staged in Seattle in 1997 and the simple idea was to try and encourage a single community to read a specific book during a particular period of time, usually followed up by an author visit. The program was picked up enthusiastically from Seattle and spread across North America. I coordinated the first one in Australia in the community of the Southern Highlands in NSW during April-August 2002. The title chosen was *Maestro* by Peter Goldsworthy, and this was announced on UNESCO World Book Day in an attempt to lift recognition of that celebratory day.

In Seattle I met with one of the original project creators and managers from the Washington Center for the Book, Christine Higashi. She gave me deeper background on the project and its evolution within Seattle, as well as commentary on other locations that had adapted Seattle's initiative.

In Paris I met with UNESCO representatives Maha Bulos and Mauro Rossi from the Division of Arts and Cultural Enterprise concerning the organisation's current activities and plans for future promotion of World Book Day. I discussed ideas for potential linkages between Australia and South Pacific nations linked to the event. I came away much better informed concerning the continuing priority and commitment to this event. In addition I learnt about existing UNESCO projects on translations, book illustration and the international childrens book competition promoting tolerance.

## CONCLUSIONS

Hay-on-Wye is inspiring but it is not a prototype that can be copied in the manner of its development. The path by which Hay became successful was too contingent on some exceptional international publicity that rolled on for years. That era, and the circumstances and conditions in the book trade that existed, are not likely ever to be repeated.

I have no doubt booktowns can be used as a technique to economically rejuvenate rural and peripheral communities through tourism. But effective long-term regeneration ideally requires **successful** businesses that are operating beyond mere subsistence and are more than subsidised shop facades. It is what I would label as the “Zoo” model of booktowns whereby tourists come to look, poke around, feel better informed or amused and then leave. Those behind the cage may get thrown enough scraps of food to keep them alive while the café or restaurant next door rakes it in, but unless they have clearly agreed in advance to their commercial captivity then it is hardly a sustainable model. Seaton proposes some radical but salient solutions to this dilemma that could form part of an Australian approach.

Ideally, the businesses that constitute a booktown need to be generating margins sufficient to fund growth and employment and that can also finance their own marketing without having to constantly rely on the often fickle favours of government.

Nevertheless, there is much that government can and must do - most particularly at local and regional level on the vital issues such as signage for instance - to help **establish** a booktown and ensure it has better prospects of commercial success. In essence, this is an absolute necessity. For a location to brand itself successfully as a booktown really requires the broad-based consent and active support of the local or regional community. This then forms part of the **unique selling proposition** that Professor Seaton advocates. The more controversial outcome of that conclusion is that other possible marketing propositions for the town or village need then to be set aside or be made secondary.

The critical success factors for booktowns identified by Professor Seaton are indeed the fundamentals that need to be addressed. The challenge now is to adapt those factors for Australia based on the primary objectives - social, economic cultural or commercial – motivating the booktown and the specific circumstances of the location being considered.

One obvious area of concern for any booktown is that of management. Even the secondhand and antiquarian booksellers I spoke with would readily concede that they and their ilk were not easy to work with. The typical bookseller is often a contrarian and independent individual who has a disdain for management or direction other than their own. So a sustainable and acceptable booktown management and marketing model is another essential ingredient.

Booktowns may seem a new idea but they are an extension of one of the oldest of human society’s creations: the **marketplace**. The point has already been made that huge numbers of books massed together have always been a magnet for mankind. Will the internet replace all physical marketplaces? The verdict already delivered on that proposition seems to be firmly in the negative. Will it replace the secondhand book marketplace? The answer to that is not as clear. But booktowns, certainly as destination retail/tourism venues, provide perhaps the best chance for that fate to be avoided. And they can be much, much more than just marketplaces.

The internet can be, however, a vital communication and promotional resource for the international booktown movement and facilitate further organisational links between them.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **That this report be publicised in such a way as to provoke discussion and responses from the public on the ideal location and makeup of an *Australian booktown*.** *[That publicity would include mention of the Churchill Fellowship and acknowledgement of the Churchill Trust]*
- **That a project be undertaken by the author to adapt the *critical success factors* for booktowns (identified by Professor Seaton et. al) to Australian conditions based on his Fellowship experiences, if possible with the benefit of Professor Seaton's professional expertise.**
- **That this report be placed on the BookTown Australia website and also circulated to the international booktown network.** *[Acknowledgement to the Churchill Trust would be included on that website together with a link to the Trust's home page.]*
- **That a version of this report and other work based on the Churchill Fellowship be presented at appropriate book trade conferences and in similar publications during the next 12-24 months** *[Acknowledgement to the Churchill Trust would be included in any presentation or conference paper]*
- **That a version of this report and other work based on the Churchill Fellowship be provided to Local, State and National tourism authorities during the next 12-24 months** *[Acknowledgement to the Churchill Trust would be included in any submission]*
- **That the author write a plan, based on his Fellowship experiences, for further developing the Southern Highlands as Australia's first booktown for presentation to local government, tourism bodies and community groups.** *[Acknowledgement to the Churchill Trust would be included in any submission]*
- **That the author maintain and extend the relationships that have now been established with international booktowns in order to ensure Australia can participate in future information exchange and cross-promotional opportunities.**