

# Profile: Jane Carr



Jane's continuing ambition has been to write books, in particular one about her ancestor Sarah Siddons. However, every time she tries to take time off from working to do this, another job comes along that seems so challenging, she has to do it. At present she is Chief Executive of ALCS (The Authors' Collecting and Licensing Society, which monitors use of authors' works in print, broadcast and digital media and collects royalties from their reproduction).

Jane's family are all creative, with her elder brother starting his working life as an Assistant Stage Manager at the Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury and, having served in many branches of the Army around the world, is currently working in Colorado Springs in a security capacity while completing his MSc in Computer Science. Her younger brother has ended up in the logistics business, having satisfactorily combined his love of the sea with managing shipping and cruise businesses. Jane started her creative career at school, producing a spoof of *The Merchant of Venice*, which greatly amused Laurence Olivier who happened to be visiting his friend the headmistress (during a spell at the Chichester Festival Theatre as Othello to Maggie Smith's Desdemona). Before going to university Jane had spent a gap year teaching English in Algeria, in the

mountainous region of the Grande Kabylie. This certainly broadened her 17-year-old experience, as a war developed, her passport was impounded by the Chief of Police, she was rescued by nuns and had to be evacuated by the Swiss Embassy whilst pretending to be an invalid in a wheelchair! Her creativity really blossomed at St Andrew's University where she was reading joint Modern and Medieval History and was involved in the first year of development of the now royally-favoured History of Art course with Richard Steer. (The next time she saw Richard Steer was as an eminently respectable director of the Theatre Museum, some 20 years later.) One of the highlights of her course was being shown the complexity of European history by using a Diplomacy board game, which really developed her lateral thinking.

After St Andrews, Jane had a place at Royal Holloway to do her PhD, but needed to work to support herself. Her father, who was a 'fixer' (he had, himself, been a frustrated academic who was obliged by an unyielding Victorian father to go into the family business instead of staying at Cambridge), got Jane interviews with Rayner Unwin and the famous Nora Smallwood at Chatto (the former nearly putting her off publishing for life by the bells which rang in the building to signal break times, and the latter by telling her to

go off and do a secretarial course first). But Jane was now hooked, and determined to work in publishing, so she bought Cassell's *Directory of Publishing* and wrote to each publisher on the list and by the time she got to C she had been offered a job by Collier Macmillan, which shortly merged with Cassell. Having been hired as Publicity Assistant, her manager left after two weeks and she was promoted to Publicity Manager, but with little or no experience. Thrown in at the deep end, she found herself doing all the marketing for Macmillan's American lists, preparing cataloguing and receiving puzzled print buyers laden with cases of whisky or crates of chocolates. This lasted for only 18 months, as Jane had a car crash which left her with a stammer and the doctors told her she needed a restful job.

So in 1973, Jane became PA and designer with Laura Ashley, based in a large house in Rhayader in mid-Wales where she lived with the family: Laura, Bernard and some of the children. Laura was very keen on country living and one of Jane's occasional jobs was to attempt to take Laura's daughter Jane to school on an unbroken Welsh pony. At other times she could be found sitting with Bernard and a bottle of Mouton Cadet late into the night setting up the New York and Paris shops over the telex machine. This was a mad time, and not the hoped for restful experience. So Jane came back to publishing and joined Penguin working with Trevor Glover who was then Marketing Director. For the next seven years she handled UK and International marketing, including liaison with all the subsidiary companies. This involved setting up world tours for Richard Adams, Shirley Conran and J P Donleavy, and accidentally being given (and querying) Peter Mayer's expenses claim for a highly secret Concorde trip to be interviewed as the new Chief Executive.

After seven years of flat-out mayhem, Jane decided to go round the world for a year and gather experience to start writing 'The Book'. However, on her return in 1981, she was offered the job as Head of Publishing at the British Library, which had just separated from the British Museum. The first problem handed to her as the "Hot Shot from Penguin" (so called by Brian Perry, Stephen Green and others) was the backlash from an order from the British Council for 13 copies of the *General Catalogue of Printed Books*; unfortunately they had

ordered (and paid for) 13 sets of 13 volumes, which had duly been shipped and had completely overwhelmed the Polish office of the British Council, instead of one set of 13 volumes. (Jane claims that the metadata was confusing!) It got better from there, and the now much missed 'canteen culture' in the British Museum building also introduced her to her husband Mike Crump. They collaborated over the ESTC (*English Short Title Catalogue*) and ping-pong tournaments in the old BNB building in Rathbone Street. Her remit continued to be expanded, even including a year to set up and run the National Preservation Office. She remembers battles with the Chief Executive over the need for educational programmes to make the contents of the library more widely available and in the late 1980s she produced image and text-based CD-ROMs, such as *Inventors and Invention*, which were trialled in schools. In the trials the kids loved them, but the teachers didn't know what to do with them, she recalls.

All through her time at the BL she was publishing, setting up bookshops and licensing the collections for microfilm and then digital reproduction.

The Chief Executive then asked her to be Director of Public Affairs, and to add fundraising, front of house and public relations to her existing brief for public programmes; and she started working in earnest on the new St Pancras building, then due to be opened in 1993. Part of the job was to plan the exhibitions programme and halls. This proved to be unexpectedly challenging and exciting. For example in 1990 she went on a trip to Serbia to negotiate for the first time ever the loan of national treasures of Byzantine art with the government, Orthodox church, museums and galleries. Priceless icons were brought into rooms full of cigarette smoke and coffee cups. Frescoes and decorated stonework were viewed in churches accessible only by bullock cart. Needless to say, they never came to the Library and, two years later, some of them were no longer in existence. Jane is very proud that everything that the public sees in the new British Library, she helped to create, and her greatest professional achievement is the exhibition galleries at St Pancras. And two of her fondest memories of that time are of the moment when all the staff were waiting in the front entrance at St Pancras for the doors to open to readers for the first time (her husband Mike being by this time the Director responsible for the

reading rooms and collections) and of being invited to the Nobel Prize ceremonies in Stockholm when Seamus Heaney won the Literature prize.

After spending four years in a Portakabin fending off criticism of the new building's costs and structure, and with the new building open, she decided to take time off and get on with *The Book*. But fate stepped in again and a friend showed her an advertisement for the Director of the Institute of Masters of Wine. Now Jane is fond of wine (in the nicest way possible) and has her own 'cave' in her house in France, so she wrote to the Institute explaining that she didn't have any wine trade qualifications but loved wine, and, of course, she got the job. It was very different from the Library, no bureaucracy, things happened quickly (sometimes before you had closed your mouth and put brain into gear) and she was able to set up educational programmes and develop the infrastructure for the qualifications. Some of the perks were visiting the major wine-growing areas of the world and arranging wine tours around the world. After four years of sheer enjoyment, she decided not to spoil it by staying and was beginning to think of *The Book* again when she was approached by head-hunters about the ALCS job. Again, she could not resist the challenge, as ALCS had not had a Chief Executive in over a year and authors needed a proper voice in this digital world.

Over the years, Jane has had a wide variety of professional activities, serving on PA Council, chairing *The Book Trust* (now taken over by Trevor Glover), the first female Chair of the

Society of Bookmen, and she is still chairing the steering group of a project very dear to her heart – *Book Start*, which brings books to babies.

Having been born in Margate (accidentally I am told) Jane has remained a 'Maid of Kent' and has returned to live near Ashford, convenient for the Eurostar to the French vineyards. Apart from books, Jane's main hobbies are cars, wine, gardening and making and building things with her hands. Her other house, in a small village just outside Angoulême, shows evidence of her talents, and her most recent project has been to rebuild the old village beehive bread oven in her grounds. The opening party is expected to be this summer, after consultation with Madame la Maire, with the entire village (in theory at least) able to use it, and bring their bread and pizzas to be baked as they would have in the past. She had previously built the cave on the property with her own hands. During her time at the Institute of Masters of Wine she took the opportunity to take all the examinations and qualifications, so she was more than able to undertake the delicious job of stocking it with the pick of the local wines. And if she has a secret wish it is to own and run a vineyard.

Jane's father had always had an interest in cars, and she was one of the only girls at her boarding school in Sussex who never knew what car her parents would turn up in. Her mother usually drove an old MG, her father an even older Bentley (coincidentally at one time Jane, your co-Editor and Sir Charles Chadwyck-Healey all had the same model of 1930's 3.5-litre Bentley). Having done various driving and racing courses, including at Brands Hatch, Jane still has the ambition to race her Morgan

Plus 8 – maybe in the annual *Circuit des Remparts* in Angoulême in September.

What will Jane be doing in five years' time? She hopes to have helped ALCS on the road to a digital future; maybe working on *The Book* or even building a house. More than likely, though, she will be approached with an interesting challenge which she can't possibly turn down.

