

Visit to Ralph Allen Press Limited

Following my visit earlier this year to our Journal printers, Henry Ling Limited, as reported in my editorial in the previous issue of the Journal (Number 101, Autumn 2007, pp. 2–3), I decided to pay a similar visit to Ralph Allen Press (RAP), who print all our leaflets and booklets, distribute quantities over 50, and are situated in Bath, close to my home.

The company was established in 1926 and is currently the oldest independent printer in the Bath area. It is a family-run business, and the current management partnership of Stuart Neathey and Jason Hindle, the joint managing directors, started 4 years ago. It is a successful business and turnover last year topped £1.4 million.

The 21 staff are a great bunch. At least four of them have over 20 years of experience at RAP, with two of them each clocking up over 25!

In 2006, the Press moved from the centre of Bath to newly refurbished premises on the outskirts, providing 8500 square feet of factory space (Fig. 1). There is constant re-investment in the most up-to-date machinery to maintain their edge in a competitive market-place (Fig. 2).

The studio employs five designers, who work on the latest Apple Macintosh computers, allied to a fully calibrated colour proofing and computer-to-plate system. Mikey Watson, the senior designer, handles ACPWH leaflets, seeing them through from the original rough drafts to the beautifully designed and professionally produced leaflets we all know. The company



Figure 1. The new premises of Ralph Allen Press Limited.



Figure 2. The print room of Ralph Allen Press.

operates an 'open house' policy, encouraging clients to view their work on the presses.

The Press draws its customers from a broad spectrum of local and national companies, dealing with requests as diverse as business cards and annual reports.

I first visited Jason back in 2000, wondering whether RAP could reprint our *Fit for Motherhood (FFM)* leaflets, which had previously been sponsored, as well as produce revisions of the *Aquanatal Guidelines* and *Rotational Handbook*, thus having all our publications dealt with under one roof. Knowing that there was a backlog of *FFM* orders, I tentatively asked Jason if RAP could pack up and distribute orders for over 50 of the leaflets for me (I was the ACPWH book and leaflet secretary then and worried about storing large numbers of a leaflet). He agreed and we decided on our first print run of 10 000 *FFM* leaflets. Jason took an enormous gamble at this point and placed a great deal of faith in the Association, since he could have been left with thousands of leaflets on his shelves if this initiative had failed (RAP are paid directly by trusts when they order). Happily, *FFM* has proved to be enormously popular, and armed with increasing confidence, we have commissioned more and more leaflets over the years – we now have a total of 13 leaflets and two booklets printed by RAP. The Press deals with all distribution for us, saving the poor book and leaflet secretary from an impossible amount of work. Of course, they also make a profit from this, but after 7

successful years of business, I have negotiated a deal that means that we can generate a percentage of income from all leaflets sold. Considering that 1 756 266 leaflets have been sold so far, the gamble has more than paid off for RAP.

Alison Jones, the financial controller, deals with most of the trusts who place orders and Lisa Byrne, the dispatch manager, is in charge of sending out all these leaflets.

I have been the representative who has worked with RAP. Mikey and I have spent many an hour hunched over his computer while I watched him put our text and diagrams into the right format! It puts my computer and graphic skills into the shade!

Figure 3 shows Jason, Lisa, Alison and Stuart with a pallet of 25 000 *FFM* sheets awaiting trimming.

Ralph Allen Press have been a pleasure to work with over the years. They have given our organization a consistently personal and reliable service, and shown an unfailingly responsive and helpful attitude. As I write this, we are coming to



Figure 3. *Fit for Motherhood* leaflets on a pallet awaiting trimming at Ralph Allen Press: (left to right) Jason Hindle, Lisa Byrne, Alison Jones and Stuart Neathey.

the end of 2007 – I hope there will be many more happy years of this working partnership.

Ros Thomas
Editor