

## THE HISTORY OF INCLINE PRESS

*Graham Moss and Kathy Whalen*

**W**E CALL INCLINE PRESS a private press. Eric Gill, at the founding of his own printing firm, explained that “a private press prints solely what it chooses to print, whereas a public press prints what its customers demand of it”. But, of course, it takes more than that to make a private press different from the usual printing or publishing company.

We have spent a lot of time thinking about what Incline Press means when it claims to be a private press. From the beginnings of the Press, we have been inspired to share our enthusiasm for books and all aspects of bookmaking with those who buy our books. Each book is a deliberately designed craft object, as thoughtfully designed as a hand-thrown pot or a hand-woven rug. Just as the weaver must choose her yarns, her colourways and her pattern before she can set about weaving her rug, so we select the typefaces, the illustrations and the paper which will complement the text that has first engaged us. For us, a book is more than an interesting text, some lovely wood engravings or a fine binding. By virtue of its bookishness a successful private press book will be more than the sum of its parts. Every aspect of making a book comes under consideration. We work as closely as we can with the author or illustrator when determining the presentation of the final text. We enjoy choosing and setting type, selecting the paper and treading the foot powered press or feeding each sheet to the Auto-Vic. It is a pleasure planning page layouts and deciding how the binding should look. And watching the printed pages begin to pile up in boxes around the workshop as a printing job gets underway is undeniably gratifying. We take pride in the fact that our books are both printed and bound by hand. Hopefully the satisfaction we get out of seeing a completed book that has been months, or even years in the making comes through when a reader opens an Incline Press book. That satisfaction, the desire to see a book through from beginning to end is, perhaps, what started the whole thing going when Graham Moss began the Press in the late eighties.

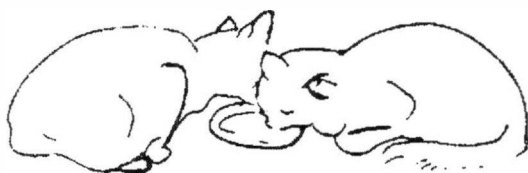
As a time-served history teacher, Graham had a professional interest in paper conservation that slowly and rather casually developed into a book-repair business. The preservation of books and documents required an understanding of the long-term effects of the materials used for repair, and bookbinding was a natural adjunct to that

knowledge. In 1990 he acquired a small printing press to print labels for the acid-free paper wrappers and spine labels. Of course, a printing press requires metal type, and soon the allure of the type case, and the intricacies of typography became an inspiration to try more than simply printing labels.

Printing stationary and cards for friends and relations was the next step. Graham's growing understanding of the mechanics of printing engendered an awareness of the limitations of a small table-top press. When an Arab press, albeit in pieces, was offered for sale, he bought it, blissfully uncaring that it wouldn't fit in the dining room. The backyard shed, once the home of his three-wheel motorbike, was transformed into a printshop, its entrance onto Incline Road conveniently providing a name for the Press.

By 1993, Graham decided to leave teaching, nudged by the success of the archival book repair business. That year Incline Press found its first publishing project when a chance meeting with a local professional illustrator and artist Pete Carter coincided with the purchase of a first edition of Oliver Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village*. Carter's modern-day interpretation of Goldsmith's poem provided the title-page illustration, and a parting gift from Graham's colleagues at school provided sufficient funds for a large fount of Baskerville type with the "long s" from John Eickhoff's Acorn-type Foundry – enough to set by hand a type facsimile of *The Deserted Village* including all the errors and differences that Goldsmith was to change for the forth printing. While Graham was still setting and printing this, his friend the designer Enid Marx asked if he would like to produce a new edition of her 1938 set of wood engravings for *Nursery Rhymes*, which had only recently been returned to her from the original publishers, Chatto & Windus. Thus the first book from Incline Press became its second, and Graham learned about some of the detours and distractions which are both the curse and the reward of the private press printer.

Since those days, the Press has grown. We just finished printing our fortieth book and the single fount of Baskerville has been transformed into



probably too many cabinets of type. The table-top Adana and the Arab treadle press have been joined by two other presses, the workhorse of the shop, an Auto-Vic, which runs on electricity and serves as our 'tip of the hat' to the twentieth century and more recently a large Wharfedale cylinder press that is still under repair, but, once running, will allow us to print books more efficiently, as well as larger broadsides and posters. And Graham has acquired a partner, Kathy Whalen, formerly the Manuscripts Librarian at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania, who has been working with the Press since early 1999. Her background in Art History and Classics, as well as her library skills, have made her a valuable partner for everything from proof reading and layout ideas to manipulating the newfangled computer-technology that remains a bit of an anathema to Graham.

All this expansion has long outrun the confines of the backyard shed, requiring a move to larger quarters. The two-storey brick building built as a joiner's workshop in the 1820s that now houses the entire workings of the Press—paper, ink, bookcloth, type and machinery—is located on the aptly named Printer Street. There, with the help of two small heaters and an even smaller dog, we plan and print each book.

We try to produce up to six books a year, but what with one thing and another we've never managed to make so many. Each one is designed and printed at the press by the two of us. The books are sewn on tapes with linen thread and bound with cloth for integral strength. Some of our books are bound at the workshop, others in the workshop of Stephen Conway, a craft bookbinder and fellow of the Designer Bookbinders with whom we have forged a partnership that allows us to spend more time printing and less time binding without having to sacrifice our commitment to quality hand-work.

Our books tend to be illustrated, often with illustrations we've commissioned to suit the text. Each copy is numbered and usually signed by either the author or the artist. A prospectus, letterpress printed, precedes each book, giving relevant details of the production. When possible we make our books available in sheets, for those folks who like to bind their own books to their own taste. Typically we make a special edition of each title, usually around twenty to thirty copies, as well as a standard edition of about 200.

Our most recent projects reflect our commitment to eclectic publishing. Last November we completed a major project of several years: *The Decorated Books of Thomas Lowinsky* is one of our larger books. Lowinsky worked for most of the major British presses in the inter-war period of the twenties and thirties, including the Nonesuch Press and Shakespeare Head Press. The book includes facsimile pages from every book Lowinsky worked on so that his skill at integrating his illustrations with the over-all design of the book could be appreciated to the full. We are pleased with how it turned out—it does full justice to Lowinsky’s style and art, and we have also been pleased with its reception, including its selection as one of the five best books of the Oxford Private Press Book Fair in 2001. This year has seen the publication of Bert and Molly Eastman’s *Book of Indian Toys*, Bert’s linocut interpretations of the small wooden toys that he and Molly have been collecting for years and a bit about them. We were worried about the difficulty of printing the two five-colour linocuts, but it printed like a dream, and we think the finished product was worth the difficult job of producing multi-coloured lino cuts. Forthcoming projects include a book on William Pickering, the nineteenth-century publisher, a new book of linocuts and relief etching by Bert Eastman, *Garden Relicts*, and our next project, which hopefully will be out in the autumn, *Woodcut Courts and Pochoir Pips - A Brief History of Playing Cards*, including Simon Wintle’s woodcut interpretation of a seventeenth-century pack of cards and a text written by Mike and Daphne Tregear, officers of the International Playing Card Society.

Those on our general mailing list receive prospectuses for each book, usually including a pre-publication discount, so long as we have a firm order. Being perpetually under-capitalized, pre-publication orders are as great a boon to us as they are a value to our buyers. We also encourage subscribers to the Press. Our subscribers are our financial security blanket. In return for a guarantee to purchase every book that we publish, we give subscribers a twenty percent discount on the published price of the book and a free copy of our annual New Year Booklet, along with occasional mailings of ephemera, keepsakes and, for instance, a specially numbered and bound copy of this text, lavishly illustrated. Incline Press can be reached by telephone: (44) 161 627 1966; post: 11A Printer Street Oldham OL1 1PN, and by email [books.inclinepress@virgin.net](mailto:books.inclinepress@virgin.net). We also work quite hard to keep our website up to date with latest publications and other news.