EDITORIAL

They are relationships of interdependence: writers need publishers, publishers need writers and both need readers who are themselves eager for quality publications. Often, however, there seems to be dissatisfaction all around. Writers find it difficult to get published, publishers have trouble finding authors whose work they believe they can successfully market, and readers find a decreasing range of books that suit their particular tastes on the shelves of stores. Why?

This issue of Historic Environment examines the Australian publishing industry, focussing particularly on academic and heritage-related texts, in an effort to find answers to this question.

Who better to reflect on the publishing industry, its needs and requirements, than the publishers themselves? Individuals from six Australian publishing houses were approached on their views of the above and asked to provide advice to prospective authors. Attrition, deadlines and the Demidenko controversy each took their toll and finally just three publishers made a contribution.

Their responses are varied, but all make clear that publishing is an expensive and delicately balanced process. While it is possible to have an harmonious relationship with a publisher, to do so authors must be more highly aware of the pressures and demands of the market place, better organised and better informed about the legal and practical aspects of the publishing process.

The publishing industry is of course rapidly changing and authors can now look beyond the traditional publishing house for the dissemination of their ideas to the PC and modem sitting on their own desk. The popularity of electronic publishing is growing rapidly. Janet McCalman, renown historian and author, examines a number of issues and problems related to this publishing medium. They are of particular relevance to academic authors.

Ian Evans, a writer turned publisher, relates his experience of establishing Flannel Flower Press. Hard work combined with ingenuity and creativity has seen Flannel Flower Press gain both the attention of the popular market and possibly the highest sales in the country for any one heritage book. In so doing, Ian Evans has played a role in increasing public appreciation and respect for heritage houses and places.

Al Knight and Anne Godden from the publishing firm Highland House emphasise the business aspects of publishing and make an impassioned plea for writers to become more aware of the publishing process. Their article makes it plain that profits in the publishing industry are hard won, and supports Janet McCalman’s argument that universities are contributing to the demise of academic publishing.

In this issue we also introduce our new book review section. This should give all those who are feeling cynical about specialist publishing in Australia a little heart; terrific books of general interest, and even some which are decidedly esoteric, are still being produced......though whether it is possible for authors to profit fiscally from their writing remains a moot point.

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