



Turn to page six to read an interview with Claire Murphy, author of the astonishing autobiographical book *Too Much World*

Why small publishers might not long for best-sellers

In 2018, readers in the UK spent an astonishing £190.9 million on books: that's printed hardbacks and paperbacks, not ebooks. The book that brought in the most money for its publisher was Michelle Obama's *Becoming*; the top-selling non-fiction title was *This is Going to Hurt* by Adam Kay; and the overall bestseller of the year was the debut novel from Gail Honeyman, *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*.

Having a best-seller is every publisher's dream. Or is it? In fact, for small independents like Chaplin Books, modest sales over a number of years is the aim. Why? Because when large bookshop chains place

an order, they do so on a 'sale-or-return' basis. That means, if the book does not live up to expectations, they can return it to the publisher after a couple of months and only pay for the books they have sold. The average number of 'returns' is a whopping 30 percent of the total. So if, encouraged by the placement of a large order, the publisher prints 10,000 copies, more than 3,000 might well be returned. If indeed they DID actually arrive back at the publisher's on a lorry, this might not be so bad. But here's the catch: the bookshop chains don't have to send

the unsold books back at all: with paperbacks, they just tear off the front covers and send THOSE back to the publisher to prove that the books have been destroyed. So, for the publisher, it's a double-whammy. No revenue and no books.

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CHAPLIN BOOKS



www.chaplinbooks.co.uk

Our top five sellers



HMS Ganges Days by Peter Broadbent
The Wonder of Woolies by Derek Phillips
Dear Miss Landau by James Christie
A Singapore Fling by Peter Broadbent
Britain's Wartime Milkmen by Tom Phelps

Claire Murphy spent 30 years trying to 'fit in'. But constantly pretending to be just like everyone else placed an intolerable strain on her mental health. Then she discovered the truth: she was autistic. In this extract from her autobiographical book she gives an insight into what it's like to experience 'too much world'.



Autism is a curse: that's how Claire Murphy's book, *Too Much World*, begins. Yet by the end of the book she declares that autism is a blessing. Her journey from curse to blessing is told in this searingly honest autobiographical book. When she submitted the manuscript to Chaplin Books, it rocked us back on our heels. We already knew that Claire was a talented singer, musician, dancer, teacher, artist, writer, and much more. What we didn't know was that she has spent her whole life wearing a 'mask', in order to fit in with what seems to be 'normal' for other people. In *Too Much World*, she lifts the lid on her battle for survival as an autistic girl. It's essential reading if you know anyone who is autistic: and in fact it's essential reading even if you don't.

I experience the world in a different way from neurotypicals. For me, the world is intensified. Touch. Taste. Emotion. Noise. Smells. Lights. Pain. Temperature. Detail. Colour. Movement. The sense of what is happening inside the body. Autistic people experience everything much much more, and in some cases, much much less, making ordinary life much less ordinary. It seems like the sensory wires in our brains have been connected differently to those of other people.

It sometimes seems like my brain didn't get 'turned down' during the creation process.

At an early age I learned to mask sensory overload, which is very exhausting.

Since my official autism diagnosis, people have wondered how I manage to cope, as a teacher, with the primary school environment. Teaching isn't for everyone, but it is the most ideal job in the world for me. I follow a very strict timetable at work which rarely ever changes: I don't even need to think about when to take a break, have lunch or go to the bathroom because these break times are scheduled and are the same for everyone, everyday. My classroom is very functional and tidy and I spend a lot of time setting up the environment so that it gives us information but doesn't overwhelm us. It is a familiar space in which I spend the majority of my time, and I know what schools are like having been in them since the age of four. All of my anxiety regarding socialising and

communicating disappears when I am with the children: with them I am Miss Murphy the teacher, the professional, the one that knows what's going on. There is no doubt what the expectations are of me at work, there is clear direction and, most importantly, teaching, learning and human behaviour are intense passions and interests of mine. I get to talk, all day, about the things that I love. Words, numbers, patterns in numbers, religion, diversity, music and finding out how things work, whilst figuring out the behaviour of the children in my class. Fascinating. We explore, discover, create and invent as a team. The children appreciate my need to repeat things and to explain things in detail, they sense my excitement, they feed off it, and they respond when I indicate to them that their noise level is too high. The children enjoy that I cannot help but notice their tiny, personal victories, and the expressions on their faces reward me tenfold.

My sensory overload from the classroom is kept inside until I return to my home - the same as it was when I attended school as a child - but there are many circumstances in which the battle of social competency and sensory onslaught is too explosive for my brain to handle. This mainly happens when there is extra anxiety attached to the overload, when I am socialising with adults and navigating unfamiliar environments.

A sensory 'meltdown' is like an anxiety attack caused by too much world. It can be an outburst, or sometimes it can be silent. It can

TOO MUCH WORLD

How I survive as an autistic girl

Claire Murphy



stop me from being able to sense my own body's internal signals like fatigue, heat, cold, pain, hunger, thirst, the need to go to the toilet. It can make me physically sick. It can make me shut down like an overwhelmed computer, unable to walk, speak and think. It can cause physical pain. It can make me slur my words, stutter. It can make me hot, disorientated, faint. It can make me depressed. It can make some people hit, cry, scream. This is often labelled 'misbehaviour' in children or 'anti-social' behaviour in adults. But in fact the body is responding exactly as it was made

to (flight, fight, and freeze) in order to protect itself from perceived danger. The more I mask and work against my body's instinctive, autistic reactions in public, the worse the consequences will be at home, regardless of my passions and 'safe' places.

It has taken 30 years of coping and subconscious covering-up to realise that this is what has been happening to me, all my life.

How can I not have known?



It is my thirty-first birthday at the Bellemoor pub in Southampton and I barely have time for it. I have been working non-stop and organising fundraising events for a big dance competition at the Guildhall called the Rock Challenge. I performed in the Rock challenge as a child and want the children I teach to have the opportunity to experience performing on a professional stage to a live audience. I have been hyper-focussed on choreography, lighting design and making costumes for my dancers, but my daily living tasks have all been

neglected to the extreme. My best friend Lesley is too ill to come to the pub, last minute. She has warned me lately that perhaps I am doing too much, but I feel energised by my school work and my show preparations.

Someone speaks into a microphone. There's a band playing Beatles songs in the background and many close voices. Close yet indecipherable. Glasses clink together and clunk back onto the table. Laughter. Chair legs scratch the floor and my inner-ear, and the half-open fire-exit door bangs open, closed, open, closed, letting in the freezing January wind.

There is too much noise. Noise feels hot. It scalds the edges of my skull.

My pounding heart pumps lava-blood around my body hard and fast. I cannot breathe.

Suddenly I am a volcano, building up to a 'meltdown'. Shaking, sweating, faint. Where does 'loud' start? Does it start sooner in me than in other people? They seem to like the noise, they talk over the noise, they make the noise noisier and they don't even notice.



I am in the John Lewis department store, about to sing to shoppers with Sing Now Choir.

There are Christmas lights hanging from the roof through the centre of the store, flashing erratically. Stressed shoppers are going up and down the escalators, bustling left and right. There is Christmas music playing. Father Christmas is shaking a bucket of money. Choir members are jostling into lines and crowds are forming. Someone is making a store announcement as Jack asks me to "press play" on the tracks and the background din of the department store is vibrating my brain. I just don't know how the other choir members are coping.

I walk away from the choir.

I am not equipped for the world like the people around me seem to be. ■



Illustrations by Claire Murphy from her book



My Song is Gone

All of my life, I've been singing
From birth, until thirty-years-young
A lyric for all situations
A tune on the tip of my tongue

I sang, in the choir, as a schoolgirl
At church, at the top of my lungs
Never a moment of silence
A girl with a heart-full of songs

I sang because music inspired me
Throughout the good times and hard
When I sang, it was always uplifting
In the bath, down the pub, in the car

One day, the dark overwhelmed me
All black, like the octopus-witch
Stole the songs I'd collected inside me
Altered my mind, my spirit

Now there's no music within me
Now that the songs have all gone
I'm afraid if I sing just a little
I will let out too much emotion

These days are ever so empty
The weeks are ever so long
My heart is ever so heavy
Since darkness stole all of my songs

When most people think about autism, they think of boys, yet girls can have autism too. Why have girls been so overlooked?

The diagnostic criteria for assessing autism is based on the studies of boys' brains, and the media often focusses on autistic boys with stereotypical traits. My autism was overlooked because I don't fit the stereotypes and I don't have a learning disability. From as far back as I can remember (before starting primary school) I observed and copied other people's social behaviour, and I masked different traits that I wasn't witnessing in the people around me. Masking essentially means 'hiding,' or 'disguising' and I did this because I wanted friends. I wasn't aware that I was 'masking autism', I was just behaving in a way that the people around me expected, and that became so embedded, so early in life, that I wasn't aware (and I'm still not always aware) I was doing it. I thought everyone was like that. Everyone masks something to a certain extent, but masking a condition is extreme and would result in exhaustion and private 'meltdowns'. These 'mimicking' and 'masking' traits can happen in both autistic girls and boys, but they are more common in girls. Girls are more likely to meet up to socialise, whereas boys are more likely to meet socially to pursue a shared activity. In other words, girls generally 'hide' the autistic traits that are picked up earlier in boys, and autistic boys are more open to pursuing the activities they enjoy alone which adults then pick up on. The pressure for girls to 'just know' social skills and social expectations, increases as we grow into adulthood though, and it gets harder and harder to hide the fact that our brains are different. Inevitably, this can lead to complicated 'webs' of personality and mental health problems and many girls, including me, experience breakdowns and are diagnosed, misdiagnosed and medicated for mental health problems rather than appropriate autism support.



The subtitle of your book is 'how I survive as an autistic girl'. The word 'survive' is a strong one: does this accurately reflect your own experience?

Yes and it was particularly true for the thirty-one years before my official diagnosis. It was hard hiding the fact that I wasn't coping, in order to keep up with the social expectations for my age group, and I suffered suicidal ideation. Autism currently sits outside of society's 'boundary of acceptance and understanding' which means we are too different to be diverse, we are disabled. The world is not equipped to accommodate the way our brains work, and we cannot all easily communicate about it, because autism is an invisible condition which makes us communicate differently. The differences we can communicate (especially, for me, my sensory and emotional differences) sound so alien to people whose senses and experiences of the world are within the realm of 'normal,' and this is isolating. I can clearly see that society doesn't really have to be this way! It is obvious that an 'autism-friendly' world would benefit everyone and, if that happens one day, that will be the day we start living rather than surviving.

What made you decide to write this book?

When I was referred to the crisis team - and then the community mental health team - I struggled to communicate with them by talking. I have always had this difficulty, and avoid GP appointments and similar appointments for shame. But during this time of crisis, the problem I had with verbal communicating was severe and I had shutdown. It probably looks, to health professionals, that I am uncooperative, but this is not the case. I was desperate for help but there is/was a great big communication barrier called autism. It's like a language barrier. I started to write little notes and lists to take to appointments, to reduce the pressure of talking. Suddenly, I find I can connect better with certain, open-minded professionals by writing- and by drawing diagrams to express and dissect feelings and experiences - it made an enormous difference!

I see in their eyes that they are beginning to understand me, it's a spark, and it dawns on me that if I am struggling to communicate and be helped by the health services, then other autistic people must be too.

I find certain environments very bright, frightening and chaotic which impacts my ability to talk. Sometimes, at my previous CHMT, there were no free rooms, so, once or twice my appointment was in the corridor which would be traumatic for anyone. I saw a different practitioner every other day, for the first year and a half, which was

disorientating, and there was never a chance to build up the trust needed to share very personal things. My thoughts were difficult to process and order, and I didn't seem to fit into any of the neat boxes on the worksheets and questionnaires. I struggle to name and express feelings - it's something called Alexithymia - which many people find hard to understand. When I am experiencing anxiety or depression, verbal communication is one of the first things to go, but I respond well to visual resources. One of the motivations for writing this book, was to express the social and communication difficulties I was having in society, in order to help other autistic people access better help. Autism is a social and communication difference, but we are still often expected to be able to access services in the same way, and present with illness in the same way, as people that are not autistic. This doesn't work unfortunately, and has a greater, isolating impact on our mental health, especially when the difficulty is misunderstood, because we "don't look autistic."

Has the writing been cathartic?

Yes. The notes and lists I was making, to help me communicate in appointments, were also helping me with my own acceptance of the diagnosis. That progressed to me writing a few blogs and sharing them online. To my surprise, people engaged and interacted with the blogs, which encouraged me to write more and to share them on social media every Friday. These blogs were supported by many of my friends, especially my friends from Sing Now Choir, and writing became a routine, a therapeutic project, while I was signed off work. I experienced a feeling like a 'weight being lifted from my shoulders,' because I'd finally found a way to express to people why I am the way I am, and people were giving me praise for it! I think, being able to finally call it autism, gave me the relief and confidence to share, because, until that point, I had grown up with the belief that I am just 'bad' and that I needed to do whatever I could to keep the 'badness' hidden.

Where do you feel you are now, on your 'journey'?

I don't know. I find it hard to recognise things when I am in it and, regarding the mental illnesses I have as a result of masked autism, the recovery process is very 'up and down.' Looking back I can see how desperate things had become, and how little I knew and understood about myself at all, but I couldn't see this at the time. Neuro-developmental psychology has now become a special interest of mine, and I spread awareness when I can, but I am still under the community mental health team, and I am still learning to manage my combination of autism, mental health and personality. I lost a lot on this 'journey' including my job and my home, some friendships etc. so I would say that I am now working on getting it all back again and I am now back at work which I thought could never happen! Thanks to my writing and my incredible therapist at The Red Lipstick Foundation, I have the tools and knowledge to try and live as a successful autistic person, rather than a failing 'neurotypical,' living wisely as apposed to just "surviving." I also have a desire to help other people reach diagnosis before having to reach the point of crisis, and another desire, to help society make a few, small changes with regards to social and communication 'norms,' assumptions and expectations regarding autism. This would instantly make autism less disabling for many of us. Communication is a two-way exchange and there is responsibility on both sides in order for it to work.

Have there been particular people who have inspired you on this 'journey'?

Having spent a lifetime 'people watching' and analysing behaviour, I am extremely good at identifying inspiring qualities in most of the people I meet. I've been inspired to write by everyone who read my blogs and said "you should write a book." Anne Hegarty, Susan Boyle and Greta Thunberg are inspiring to me. My friend Jack inspired me when he shared my diagnosis with the choir I belong to and said that he was proud I was his friend. That was the first time I realised that this didn't need to be kept hidden and that it was ok to share because when he said that everyone clapped! I find anyone who strives to overcome something inspiring, no matter what it is, because life can powerfully test your ability to remain positive. Sometimes you need to go through hard times in order to be able to properly help and empathise with others, and that's been my life-line really, the 'silver lining' or 'point' to all of this.



Greta Thunberg, Anne Hegarty and Susan Boyle have all inspired Claire

Do you think your autism has been an asset or a hindrance in your career as a primary school teacher?

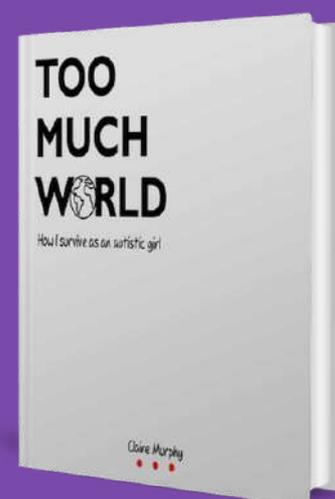
Such a fascinating question and practically impossible to answer. If I weren't autistic would I be a less successful teacher? If I weren't a teacher would I be a more open, authentic autistic in public? I don't know, both autism and teaching are enormous parts of my identity... but I can say that my life experiences as an autistic person have made me a more accepting, empathetic, patient listener and communicator in general. Teaching is my autistic passion, and the reason I call it that is because the way autistic people tend to pursue their passions and interests is with a heightened focus, intensity, attention to detail.

I get to talk, all day, about the things I am interested in: words, patterns, numbers, facts, links, religion, and finding out how things work. Somehow I have never forgotten what it feels like as a child, to receive information, so I can save misunderstandings before they happen; I am clear and repetitive and can simplify complex things and make them memorable, and, because I never deviate from routine, the children feel safe enough to be able to cope with the amount of movement, depth and creativity I pour into the lesson plans. I have empathy and am fascinated, rather than put out, by different behaviours, and, because of this, I open conversations with the children about why they behave in certain ways rather than make assumptions. This seems to make the children feel important and included and encourages the all the children to be non-judgemental. We function as a team, and I accidentally end up teaching all of the children as if they are autistic, because I am autistic, and it benefits everyone, which is a good message to send out to the rest of society. Teaching suits me too: there is structure, routine, rules, a clear purpose. I am in control of how my classroom is organised and I am also in control of the noise level there. Communicating with children is easy compared to communicating with adults because it is more straightforward, direct, honest; it is the only environment in the world in which I have control and confidence, and in which I'm the one that knows what's going on.

Tell us about your love of music and singing.

Something that sticks in my mind was being in a ballet lesson aged six; my ballet teacher told my mum that I had great rhythm and asked her if I play any instruments. This began my conscious love of music, and over the years I have had many music lessons and taught myself how to play many different musical instruments. My relationship with music is very natural - it's another language that I have been able to pick up easily and be creative with. It helps me give meaning to, and express, emotions in a more accurate way than I can in conversation which feels like relief. In my early twenties I auditioned to join Love Soul Choir and was successful; I found the rehearsals so energising because I was singing at the top of my voice amongst rich harmonies, surrounded by people I was connected to because of our shared interest. Singing worked for me because the lyrics of songs don't change - they are not unpredictable - so whilst I wasn't as socially able as some of my peers I could still fit in by singing with them. I then joined Sing Now Choir and it feels like a family for the same reasons and more. Although my depression somehow stole my ability to actually sing, I am still included as 'choirographer' and I believe their music and their friendships have played the biggest part in my recovery. Sing Now Choir is a community choir and anyone can join. To me it is representative of how the world should be: everyone there is different and everyone fits in. ■

If you enjoyed reading this interview with the author, and the book extract, you'll want to buy the book. Too Much World by Claire Murphy will be available in bookshops and through internet booksellers from March 26th 2020 but why wait? You can buy the book from February 17th onwards exclusively from the the Chaplin Books website (www.chaplinbooks.co.uk). It is a 160-page paperback (with illustrations by the author) and costs £10.99. Postage is free to UK addresses.

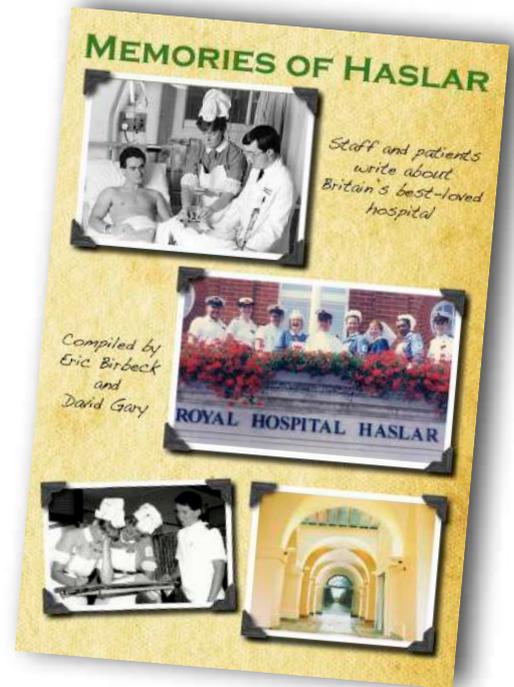


News Update

■ We commissioned artist Tracy Evans to make an original collage to illustrate *The Road To Apple Dumpling Bridge* by K L Knowles. Here's her fabulous artwork, which is now available on tote bags and mugs whenever we are out-and-about selling the book. Over the summer of 2019 we ran an Apple Dumpling Treasure Hunt that took people around Gosport, Portsmouth and Portchester hunting down clues. The winners are pictured below at the prize presentation, which took place at Gosport Tourist Information Centre.



■ Our best-selling book *Memories of Haslar*, compiled by David Gary and Eric Birbeck, is now available worldwide: until now it's been available exclusively from Chaplin Books and the Haslar Heritage Group.



■ No-one likes an editor, waiting to pounce on their well-chosen worlds and wield a blue pencil through them all. Amanda Field, Chaplin Books' founder, recently added up just how many words she has edited since the business began in 2010. She was somewhat astonished to find it totalled 13.4 million words. She had to lie down and have a large whisky to recuperate.

■ Chaplin Books author James Christie (*Dear Miss Landau*, *The Legend of John Macnab*, and *Differently Wired*) is hard at work on a new novel which he tells us will be a vicious satire ... the working title of which is unprintable and may require a series of asterisks. David Gary (*Going Over the Water: Memories of the Gosport Ferry* and *Memories of Haslar*) is also writing a novel. It's about a group of pensioners who decide to hijack the Gosport Ferry, in order to draw attention to their grievances about the modern world. If only they could agree on exactly WHAT they are protesting about, the hijack might stand more chance of success.



Print-on-demand: what's it all about?

Print-on-demand has been made possible by the advent of digital printing techniques that make short-run printing economical and fast. It enables publishers to avoid incurring huge bills in up-front printing of a new title because a book is only printed if and when an order is received. So, in theory, publishers no longer have to predict (a euphemism for 'guess') how many copies a new book will sell, pay for warehousing those printed copies, pay for postage each time a delivery is sent to the wholesaler, and shed a few tears when the book stops selling and the remaining copies or 'returns' from bookshops have to be pulped. Instead, the title is listed on book distributors' websites around the world, is able to be ordered by most bookshops, and is listed on Amazon. If an order comes in, the distributor arranges for a copy to be printed.

It's fast, too. Digital printers can handle in excess of 2,500 pages every single minute, so that books can be printed and despatched within 24 hours.

Sounds too good to be true? Some authors have reservations: in *The Author*, the magazine of the Society of Authors, one correspondent said that print-on-demand meant that publishers have no incentive to actively market a book, whereas when there are thousands of copies in a warehouse costing money to store, they would make more of an effort.

At Chaplin Books, we're not sure either of those scenarios is accurate. We are recent entrants into the print-on-demand market and are using it to complement - not replace - our traditional printing methods. Where print-on-demand is particularly useful is for 'niche' titles where perhaps only a hundred or so copies would be printed at a time. Printing small quantities is expensive, particularly when you take into account that wholesalers, or internet sellers like Amazon, take 60 percent of the cover-price. The 40 percent that the publisher receives often barely covers the price of printing, let alone author royalty, postage, storage, marketing and other factors. With print-on-demand, however, it is possible for a publisher to make a small margin on each sale of even the most esoteric title. So, rather than sitting back on our heels, print-on-demand gives us an incentive to keep marketing, because the return will be worthwhile.

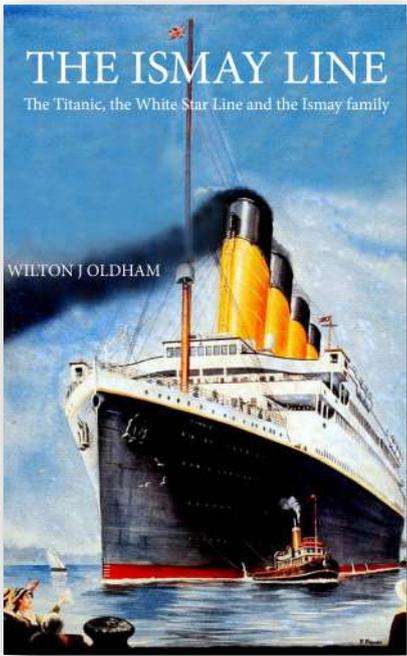


Is there a drawback? Yes, in that not every bookshop in the UK is signed up to Ingrams, the worldwide distributor who handles our print-on-demand titles, and when a title is listed on Amazon, it might be listed as being 'delivery in one to two weeks' rather than next-day availability. But what it does do, especially for a small independent like Chaplin Books, is to open up an international market which otherwise would be unavailable to us. The electronic files for a particular book can be sent to any country and printed on the spot. For titles like *Memories of Haslar*, we are finding former staff and patients who now live on the other side of the world - and print-on-demand means they can order the book without having to pay extra airmail costs.

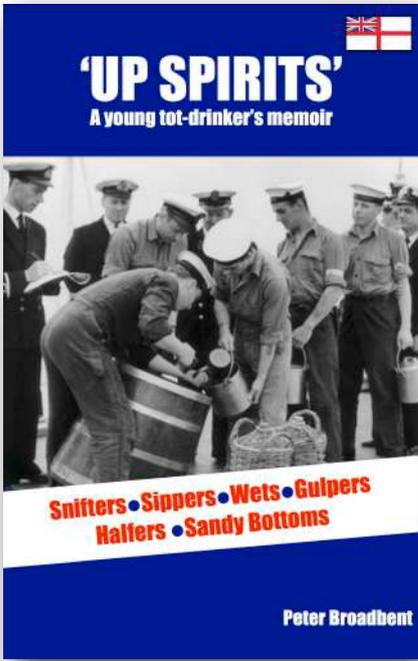
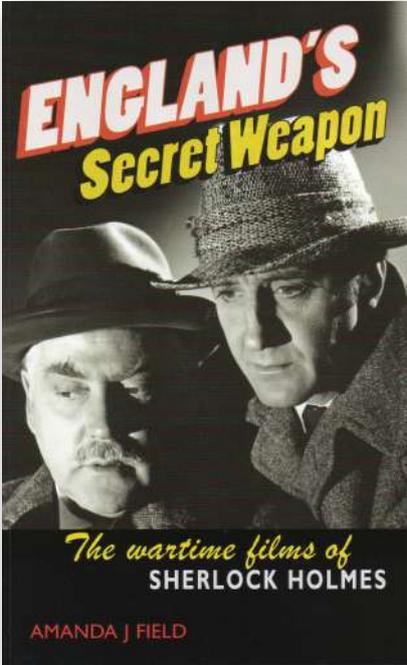
We still order a small number of copies of print-on-demand titles to keep in stock so that we can fulfill orders that come in direct from our own website, and to sell at book-signings, on stalls at local fayres. The quality is exactly the same as our traditionally printed books, with good paper stock and of course exactly the same design values.

For print-on-demand, we rely on the expertise of Andrews UK, a specialist company who have been converting and distributing our ebook titles for some years now. Having the right partner for print-on-demand is essential: Amazon would like to encourage authors to use their own service exclusively ... but why restrict yourself just to Amazon?

Is print-on-demand something that self-published authors should opt for too? It does mean less up-front costs and no need to find somewhere to store the books. But print-on-demand can seem a little intangible to a self-published author: there's no nicer feeling than having boxes of your book in front of you, just waiting to be marketed. So, on balance we don't think that print-on-demand will ever replace traditionally printed books, just as ebooks have not supplanted hardbacks and paperbacks, despite industry predictions. They co-exist happily. Mind you, much of this can seem completely irrelevant to many people. As a young warehouse operative sorting out boxes of our books said to us recently: "Does anyone read books any more?" We pointed out that over 180,000 new titles were published in the UK every year. "I am surprised," he said. "I thought no-one reads any more, now that we have this Interweb thingy." ■



Left: One of Ingram's 'Lightening Source' print rooms where each machine can turn out 2,500 book pages every single minute.
Below: some of Chaplin Books print-on-demand titles



ARRIVAL AT THE PAGODA ANCHORAGE

An extract from the final volume of the Felix Wild trilogy by Peter Broadbent

The Captain assembles his Officers. Felix, keen to understand what will happen when they arrive at Foo-Chow, is scrunched up in the farthest corner. Standing alongside the Captain is his wife, who searches the assembled faces for the Sailmaker, who has absented himself. Settling her gaze on Felix, she gives him a smile that Grindle, who is sitting on the front row, clearly understands. He turns to look at Felix who lowers his head in supplication.

'Lissern up, gentlemen. Tomorrow we'll enter the port of Foo-Chow. For those of yew who haven't been to China afore, let me tell yew what I knows of it. Prepare yourselves for sumpin different. Like foreigners, they's unable to speak our language. They have slits for eyes, they're much smaller than we are, more dishonest and by nature a totally unreliable bunch. They have lank black hair, which many wear pulled tight and banded at the back of the head like a horse's tail. Apart from all that, they are similar in some ways to ourselves ... most walk upright on two bandy legs!'

'The hair of many Chinese men is grown long,' Juggy Tugwell interrupts. 'Particularly by the Manchu people. When tight braided it's called a queue - not the same queue we have in England ... that means a line of people.'

The Captain removes his cap, smacks it into shape and puts it back on his head. He scans his Officers.

'Who are the Manchu people, sir?' asks Bacon, the self-styled Chef.

'Does that concern you, Mister Bacon?'

'No, sir.'

The Captain nods 'Well then. You're on a warnin' ... along with mi wife. Interrupt me aggin at your peril!'

Bacon stares at the floor.

Tanzy Tattoo gets to his feet.

'Question, sir.'

'Let's have it.'

'Do we know how many ships

'मुझे समझ नहीं आया'
say the Nicobars,
helpfully.

are in the race this year, sir?'

'Not sure. American ships are this year takin' part 'cos our cousins in America have eventually developed a likin' for tradin' the leaf.' explains the Captain. 'We'll be up against well-established racers, crewed by the most skilled professional English seamen. Although we'll take part, we'll not be competin' in a race that we have little chance of winnin'. I've already agreed a price in London for our tea, irrespective of how long it takes us to get there.'

'Do you know the name of any of the other racers, sir?' asks Grindle.

'I believe 'Ariel' under Captain

Keay will already be in Foo-Chow. 'Fiery Cross', a previous race winner, commanded by my old adversary Dick Robinson will no doubt also be there. 'Ariel' will be the favourite this year, said to be as fast as a racing horse when under full sail!'

'Is 'Serica' in this year's race, sir?' asks Grindle. 'I served onboard her under Captain Innes.'

'Not sure. But I do know that she's still captained by George Innes. We were on the same course many years ago and he remains a good and valued friend.'

'She was also a beautiful ship, sir.'

'A bit sluggish aggin the wind, I understand.'

'When are we due over the bar, sir?' asks Edwin Wyldeguste.

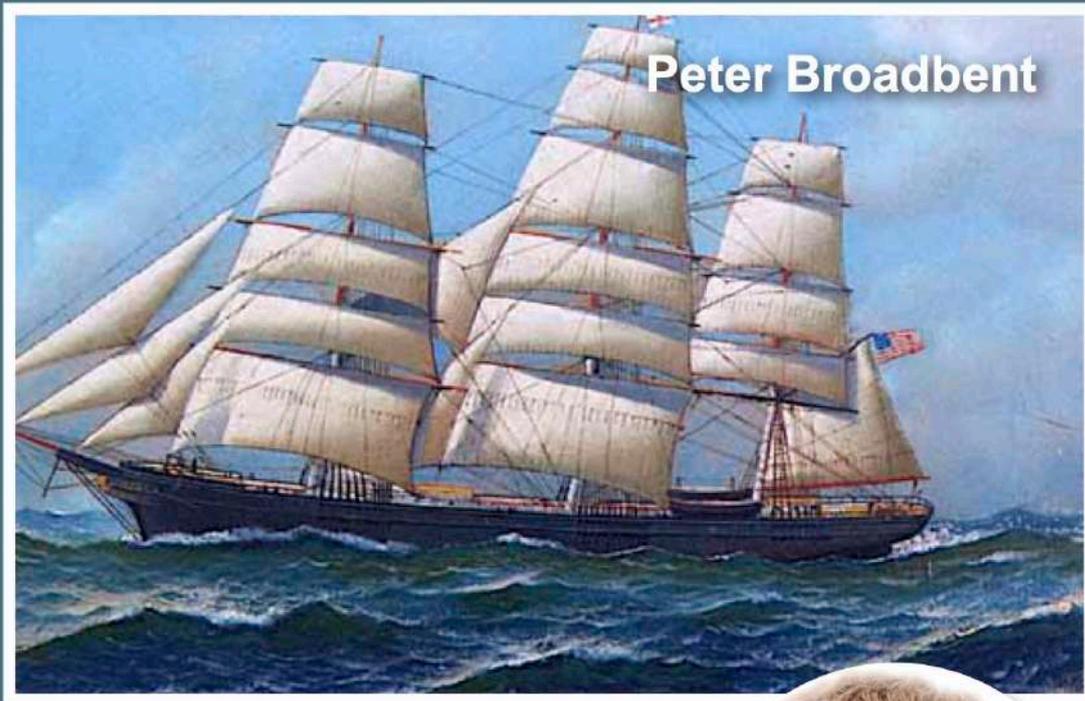
'We'll be at the Pagoda anchorage on the Min river this time tomorrow, our English God willing.'

The following morning is misty and Oriental damp. The distant mountains that Captain Tugwell last used to navigate the approach to the Min River are hidden beyond a mass of swirling dense cloud. *Attitude* wallows, awaiting a high tide in order to skim over the river's notorious sand bar, a relic of its ancient defences.

'We'll give it another hour before tackling the bar,' states Captain Tugwell to the Nicobars on the helm.

'मुझे समझ नहीं आया' they reply.

The mist slowly thins to display the mountainous terrain of Inland



Peter Broadbent

FELIX WILD AND THE GREAT TEA RACE



China. The Captain refers to the notes he made the last time he was here and aligns *Attitude* with a distinctive pair of conical shaped peaks that should take her safe over the bar's lowest point.

As soon as *Attitude* is safely over the bar, two steam tugs attach themselves. The Captain and the Mates relax. The Bos'n and his team shorten sail and tend the tow lines. Thick black smoke from the most elderly tug swirls and clouds *Attitude's* forepeak. The seamen, used to working in untainted fresh air, wheeze and rasp.

The journey up river is tedious. All *Attitude's* sails are furled and she's sluggish in the hands of the badly powered Chinese steam tugs, which appear to be competing with each other. *Attitude* passes many wooden buildings with short rickety wooden structures thrusting out into the river, all with sagging fishing nets. Wildly barking dogs scamper up river, keeping pace with the tugs.

Felix leans on the gunwale, searching for the sight of his first Chinese Human. There is an increasingly strong smell of fish and he is about to return to his cabin when he is joined by Edwin Wyldguste, the carpenter, his long, uncombed hair swirling everywhere.

'Horrible smell.'

'Yes.'

'Suppose that's China.'

'Terrible strong.'

'But you're from Portsmouth - you must be used to it.'

'Gosport. But that don't make me like the stench of fish.'

'There's a Chinese person,' says Edwin, pointing. 'Over there passin' that strange lookin' tree.'

Felix spots his first Chinese person. Walking slowly along the bank, followed by an obedient white-and-black mongrel of a dog, the person is clad head to toe in a shapeless wrap of grey with a wide-brimmed rattan hat on its

head: it's impossible to tell if it is a man or woman.

'Small in't it?' says Edwin.

The noise and clamour of Foo-Chow town is heard long before it is visible. *Attitude* is dragged past a fleet of Clippers anchored fore

Captain, Felix asks: 'English built, sir?'

'Near enough. She were built someplace in Scotland, I believe. They reckon that she can hoist over twenty thousand square feet of canvas. With a compliant wind



and aft and pointing downstream with the river's outgoing flow. A task force of small boats, low in the water, scurry up and down river piled high with wooden crates.

'They'll be the early arrivals,' says the Captain to nobody in particular. 'Racers, ready to make a timely get-away.' He points at a vessel distinctively different from all the others. 'That's 'Ariel', a perfect example of English shipbuilding.'

Felix is the only one within earshot. Thinking that he is duty bound to acknowledge the

she could outrun a new-fangled steamer.'

Felix tries to bring to mind what twenty thousand square feet of canvas would look like. Mathematically he knows it is almost half an acre.

Up forward, both *Attitude's* bow anchors are readied on their respective slips as the ship is tugged into Foo-Chow's busy Pagoda anchorage alongside the town proper. The tugs scamper about until she is positioned correctly near to a raggle-taggle stonework bridge. At a signal from the tug pilot, *Attitude's* anchors are slipped and tripped

immediately to take a good hold of the river bottom that is known to be unstable in parts.

'Latecomers are obviously placed near to the bridge,' states the Captain.

Grindle appears, holding a wodge of material to his nose.

'Both anchors deployed, sir,' he mumbles. 'Depth eight fathoms. We disturbed a bed full of town rubbish but both anchors are well tripped and holding firm.'

'Thank you, Mister. Have we have enough room to swing? No need for our stern anchors?'

'Plenty of room.' Grindle adjusts his wodge. 'Place stinks like nothing on earth, sir.'

Felix puts the Foo-Chow breeze at his back in the hope that the fish smell will lessen, but it doesn't. Chinese fish are obviously different to those found in Gosport – or Singapore. He tries to memorise his surroundings. To starboard is the bustling town of Foo-Chow. The river meanders away to the north-west under the raggle-taggle bridge; its ancient structure is crumbling in places, held together by a stout covering of well-established and unsightly plant life. Hordes of people, many pushing loaded carts, shuffle along the bridge top. Nothing larger than a row-boat could pass under the bridge's eight low-slung arches: the arch nearest to the town looks like it caved in many years ago. Wooden hulled vessels, each with an identical wedge-shaped stern and a strangely shaped lateen sail slung from a single mast, are anchored in an untidy heap on both sides of the bridge. A barrage of craft with curved rattan tops are moored side by side along the western shoreline. The surface of the river is littered with debris.

Felix is entranced by the complications of Foo-Chow town: higgledy-piggledy is a term he remembers from childhood. It perfectly describes the muddled mass of curved-roofed buildings that snake away into the far

distance where seven conical shaped mountain stacks rise purposefully to the sky. There appears to be no particular arrangement to the town and no open spaces. On the riverside directly opposite, hundreds of gawping men stand between the shafts of wheeled carts.

The Captain drapes himself over the bulwark alongside Felix.

'Rickshaws, Felix,' he says. 'That's what they calls those carts. Men called Coolies pulls 'em instead of beasts.'

They both watch with interest as an elderly, spindly-legged man takes payment from his passenger before lowering the ends of the shafts onto the dusty ground. He places a raggedy cloth over the shafts, crawls underneath and curls himself up.

'That'll be his sleepin' place,' says the Captain.

'Mud pies!'

'What?'

'An expression of surprise in my younger days, sir.'

'Fish pies would more appropriate!'

'Agreed, sir.' ■

If you enjoyed this extract, then you'll love Felix Wild and The Great Tea Race by Peter Broadbent. It's a 328-page paperback, priced at £10.99, and you can order it, post free to UK addresses, direct from us at www.chaplinbooks.co.uk or from your favourite bookshop or internet bookseller. It is also available as an ebook for all platforms from your usual supplier.

Ten facts about the Great Tea Race of 1866

1. The passage from Foo Chow in China to London was more than 14,000 miles.
2. It was a close finish: Taeping was only 28 minutes ahead of Ariel.
3. Taeping shared the prize with the runner-up.
4. It was the last time that a premium of 10 shillings a ton was paid for docking in London with the first of the new crop.
5. Newspaper interest was high, and bets were placed around the world, including by the captains and crew.
6. More than 57 clippers competed in the race.
7. Taeping and Ariel were both built in Greenock, Scotland.
8. Clippers carried iron and shingle for ballast
9. Ariel carried 1,230,900 lbs of tea.
10. Felix Wild's ship, Attitude, is entirely fictional ...

Five good reasons to read books
(but why would you need a reason?)

Fact 1:

Reading can make you
a better conversationalist.

Fact 2:

Neighbors will never complain
you are reading too loud.

Fact 3:

Knowledge by osmosis has not yet
been perfected, so you'd better read.

Fact 4:

Books have stopped bullets.
Reading could save your life.

Fact 5:

Dinosaurs did not read.
Look what happened to them.

