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Oregon Trails-Make Mine Ham-on-Rye!

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“Solomon,” they named him “Sol,” after the sun, from Spanish. The first house he remembers, in fact, ran on solar power, and had no radio, no television, no bathroom, no running water.

But there was a kiln and always plenty of clay around, since his parents were skilled potters. Sol began to experiment. One year his father brought Sol to the Oregon Country Fair, a long-running crafts event and site of a legendary 1972 Grateful Dead concert, in Veneta, a small city near Eugene. Sol brought a supply of incense holders, and by the second day of the event, working from their small booth, he’d sold out. A distributor left his card and asked Sol if he wanted to put his incense holders into retail stores.

Sol said no, he didn’t need the help. He tried calling on stores himself, but “selling is hard,” he found. Not many storekeepers would pay attention to a peddling teenager. He went back to the distributor and made a deal. Sol would produce holders by the gross. The distributor took all he could make. Sol hired friends to help make more. He sold to the distributor at \$2-\$4, the distributor sold to stores at \$5-\$7, and in the end, enough store customers had brought home an incense holder, at \$10-\$20, that at age 17, Sol was able to buy a Mazda MX-3, brand new off the lot. “I could have grown so much bigger,” he reflects today.

Instead he left incense behind and went off to college to study computers. As a boy, Sol had had his hands not just on clay, but on a keyboard too, since his grandfather, a Cal Poly physics professor, had taught him to program at a young age. His first job in the computer industry was to test video games for a Silicon Valley company. A couple of quick promotions later and Sol was a software engineer for the company.

Then the .com bubble burst. The business was sold and Sol found himself working in Pennsylvania as a senior engineer for a company making a video-voice chat system. While they had deals with companies like Verizon and Comcast, the product didn’t take off. Sol did take off, however, to a company making audio-books. Ingram acquired that company in 2008, and today Sol has moved on from audio-books to eBooks. He’s now head of a development team responsible for the MyiLibrary eBook platform, meaning he is responsible for well over 400,000 eBooks used by over 100,000 readers from over 50 countries around the world.

Developing software, it turns out, is something like working in clay after all. You start with an idea. Then through trial and error you get the bugs out and bring your creation to market. In his ceramic days, Sol began by gluing a real seashell to the crest of his incense holders. But the shells would fall off, so he molded the clay to look like a shell. The glaze caused bugs too, since at 2400 degrees Fahrenheit, if you weren’t careful — if the glaze ran down the incense hole, for instance — you didn’t end up with a holder, but with “a piece of stone.”

Today, then, when students from the UAE to the USA to the Ukraine open an eBook and get what they need, that may be due to lessons learned years ago in clay and incense. For Sol, it’s been a long strange trip from that old Grateful Dead site. Seashells and glaze aren’t the puzzle today, but in working on pricing models, or archiving, or new methods for file ingestion or for accepting orders, or a user interface, just some of the projects Sol’s team has had their hands on, there’s always plenty of work, before the glaze finally holds. 🐉

Oregon Trails — Make Mine Ham-on-Rye!

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“Hay-on-Wye lies on the Welsh side of the Welsh/English Border in the County of POWYS, Wales. Although as far as the Royal Mail is concerned, it is better, apparently, to use the County of HEREFORDSHIRE, not to be confused with the county of HERTFORDSHIRE; a very popular mistake! You will notice, after browsing our Hay site, that the majority of the postal addresses are either ‘via Hereford’ or ‘Herefordshire.’ It is purely for postal reasons!”

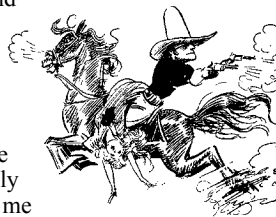
— Hay-on-Wye Website: <http://www.hay-on-wye.co.uk/info/hay-on-wye.htm>

Just once, before I die ... I’d like to visit Hay-on-Wye.

Why Hay-on-Wye (a bookseller wag calls it Ham-on-Rye)? I can give you at least 25 reasons, each one a second-hand bookseller except for one who specializes in maps, surely including atlases, and atlases are books after all.

Last October my hopes were high while visiting my wife’s brother in Yorkshire. As the crow flies, it isn’t that far from the Harrogate area to Hay-on-Wye, but we were not traveling on a crow but in a car and over 200 miles of roads that the Romans didn’t build. The Romans preferred straight roads going from point A to point B, but the natives were mostly farmers and even after the industrial revolution set in, villages were connected by roads that wandered along rivers or as the terrain dictated. So instead of spending an entire day traveling and figuring another for our return, and since we were there for only two weeks, we decided to visit some shops in York and plan a trip to Wales when we had more time.

So instead of ham-on-rye, I had to settle for Welsh rarebit at the Wensleydale Creamery, home of Wensleydale cheese. But at the bottom of the hill from the creamery where the village of Hawes lies, there is a second-hand bookshop. The owner seemed more inclined to talk to himself about where to place the books in his arms than to greet and welcome prospective book buyers. I didn’t really care whether he wanted me there or not, I was there for the books. Time was limited so I settled on a single book, **Iris Murdoch’s** *The Good Apprentice* (Chatto & Windus, first edition in dust jacket). I handed the book and £20 to the bookseller who, without emitting a sound or making eye contact, wrote out a receipt and handed me my change. I picked up my **Iris Murdoch** and walked away, keeping silent, too, but pleased with my purchase and, moreover, I kept to my rule about buying at least one book in a second-hand shop. My rule



now had an addendum: Buy at least one book even when encountering a silently crabby bookseller.

A few months later, I was back in England, this time for a month, with the promise that we would depart for Hay-on-Wye early one morning so that we could arrive around noon time and spend the afternoon browsing in those magical bookshops where I hoped to find some English editions of the authors I collect and maybe an item or two that I knew not of. We would spend the night and perhaps, after an English breakfast of fried eggs, fried bread, fried bacon, fried tomatoes, and beans, I would have a couple more hours of book hunting before we had to hit the road.

Sparing the reader the details, suffice it to say that early in the second week there Hay-on-Wye as a dream come true became just a dream, a dream that lingers and that will not die, at least not for a good while, I hope. But it was well-established that I liked “a good browse,” so my weakness was accommodated whenever possible.

Knaresborough, North Yorkshire. I was let out of the car in front of **Abbey Antiquarian Books**, 3 Abbey Lane. It was 8:45 a.m. so I figured that I had a fifteen minute wait. I peered in the windows of the shop where antiques were also on display. Nothing I saw through the windows piqued my interest; it was what I couldn’t see that set my imagination on fire. Somewhere on those dark shelves was a languishing, undiscovered copy of *The Eighth Sin*, **Christopher Morley’s** first book, published in 1912 by **B.H. Blackwell**, Broad Street, Oxford, a collection of poems issued while **Morley** was a Rhodes Scholar attending **New College**.

Nine a.m. came and went, and at half past nine I gave up and began walking up Briggate towards the main part of town, planning to return at 10 a.m. when I was confident I would find an “Open” sign on the door.

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At ten a.m. (a little after, actually), the “Closed” sign was still evident, but I could see someone in the kitchen in the rear of the shop. A lanky, unkempt man was clearing his breakfast dishes but refused to look towards the door and make eye contact with me. He then disappeared and so did I, walking across Briggate to Waterside, retracing my path back to Rascals, a café situated between the River Nidd and (below) the Knaresborough Castle.

I had been deprived of another “browse” so I sat outside and treated myself to a rascal (fruit filled scone) and a very large coffee that came with a pot of heated milk. There is more to life besides books and it was hard to stay disappointed in such a setting on such a beautiful, sunny morning.

A few days later, while in York, I wandered off by myself to Fossgate, in the heart of the city, where there are three second-hand bookshops, two of them sharing a wall and the third a stone’s throw across the street.

The **Barbican** specializes in theology, railway, aviation, and Yorkshire. Take away theology and you have the specialties of many another bookshop, new and used, that I have peeked into over the years. But not being interested in any of those subjects and wanting to buy at least one book, I poked around in the most promising section, theology, looking for something that I might enjoy reading. I own a few small volumes suitable for packing in one’s carry-on luggage and am especially fond of **Oxford University Press’** series, *The World’s Classics*. Not only are they small (6” x 3 3/4”), they are hardbound, attractively printed on good paper, and come with a bound-in bookmark. So for £3 I acquired a copy, in a faded blue buckram binding, a nice, tight copy of *The Diary of a Country Parson: 1758-1802*, by **James Woodforde** and formerly owned by **John Paul Burbridge, New College, Oxford**. Having fulfilled my obligation to support, in my own small way, second-hand book shops, I wandered next door to **Lucius Books**.



Lucius Books was most promising and carried modern first editions and an array of rare books. But when I entered the shop, the shelves were almost empty. My eye caught a couple of titles that interested me, *Shoal Water* and *Gale Warning*, by **Dornford Yates** but at £60 and £90 respectively and, although in dust jackets and in very good condition, were beyond my threshold. I enjoy reading **Dornford Yates (Cecil William Mercer** and cousin to **H.H. Munro, aka, Saki**) and own several of his Chandos novels, but I didn’t pay £60 for the lot of them. The Chandos novels are thrillers, much like **John Buchan’s** (1st Lord Tweedsmuir and former governor general of Canada) **Richard Hannay** tales (*The Thirty-Nine Steps*).

The young woman at the desk greeted me in a French accent and apologized for the empty shelves. She pointed to a number of large, aluminum packing cases and explained that most of the stock was in them and ready to be shipped to London for its antiquarian book fair. I accepted a business card, thanked her, and walked out without a purchase, breaking my own rule but rationalizing that had the shelves been fully stocked, I would have found something in my price range. I’ll be back one day to test my hypothesis.

Across the street was **Fossgate Books**, the most interesting of the three that day, but I could find nothing in my areas of collecting. Still, were I not having to worry about the weight of my luggage, had I been a local, I would have left the shop with an armful of good reading. It was a joy to see all of those **Penguin** paperbacks arrayed like a prism, if shelved together, reflecting **Allen Lane’s** color scheme:

- Orange – Fiction
- Green – Crime novels
- Cerise – Travel and adventure
- Blue (dark) – Biography
- Red – Drama
- Purple – Essays
- Yellow – Miscellaneous (none of the above)

As it turned out, the only book I bought there, after much agonizing, was a copy of *The*

Intelligent Heart: The Story of D. H. Lawrence by **Harry T. Moore**. It is a **Penguin**, printed in 1960, and it does not have a blue cover. The top three fourths of the cover is pink with both white and black letters and at the bottom is the **Penguin** on the left side (black background) and on the right side, “Penguin Biography” printed in white on a gray background. I was drawn to the **Lawrence** book not by the color scheme but by the subject, a recent interest because of what I was reading while in **Lawrence’s** native country: *Love Among the Haystacks*, *The Ladybird*, *The Fox*, *The Captain’s Doll*, and *The Virgin and the Gipsy*. I left those stories behind and am not starting to collect **D.H. Lawrence**, despite a growing interest in his writings but I did, just the other day, buy a copy of **Lawrence’s** *Mornings in Mexico* while fulfilling my bibliophilic honor at **Browser’s Books** in Albany, Oregon.

My story would not be complete without another visit to **Hawes**, lunch at the Wensleydale Creamery and then down the hill to the bookshop. It was market day in Hawes, the weather was beautiful, and I had plenty of time. The grouch at the desk had been replaced by a cheerful young woman ready to answer questions and be as helpful as possible. To reward the young lady and myself, too, I bought eight paperbacks (mostly **Penguins**) and a hardbound copy of *Randall and the River of Time*, by **C.S. Forester**.



I subtract the four bookshops that I visited from the 25 shops in Hay-on-Wye that I did not visit and come up with a deficit of 21. So should I arrive in Hay-on-Wye some sunny day in the future, and should I only make the rounds of 21 of the 25 shops, I will call it even. In fact, I will call it a bonus. But I won’t promise to buy a book in each of the shops. 🐾

Rumors from page 63

Derek Law — our special Scottish Tartan friend who debated **Rick** last year — will not be with us in Charleston this year! He says he is doing well, keeping busy interfering in other people’s work by doing reviews of various kinds. He says he has booked a big holiday in Cambodia and Vietnam starting on 5th November. Oh well. I am sure he won’t have as much fun as we will!

Tom Leonhardt may be retired but he is still very much a librarian — a librarian who

loves books! He talks about **Hay-on-Wye** in this issue. (We had an article in *ATG* about it a while ago but I can’t find it right now!) I do keep meaning to ask **Tom** if he has read the novel, **Mr. Penumbra’s 24-hour Bookstore** by **Robin Sloan**. (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012). It’s about an eccentric bookstore owner and his few clients who don’t buy anything. Quite a literary adventure!

Reminds me. Have you seen the reviews (saw one in the *Wall Street Journal* and another in *The New Yorker*) of **Hothouse: The Art of Survival and the Survival of Art in America’s Most Celebrated Publishing House**, **Farrar**

Straus by **Boris Kachka**. I can’t wait to dive into it!

As we go to press, just learned via the *Atlantic* that *American Medical News*, the in-house newspaper of the **American Medical Association** “will cease publication next month because of continued advertising declines and changing readership habits in the digital age.” The first incarnation of the newspaper — *AMA News* — was launched on September 22, 1958. <http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/09/tracing-a-casualty-in-medical-journalism/279260/>

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