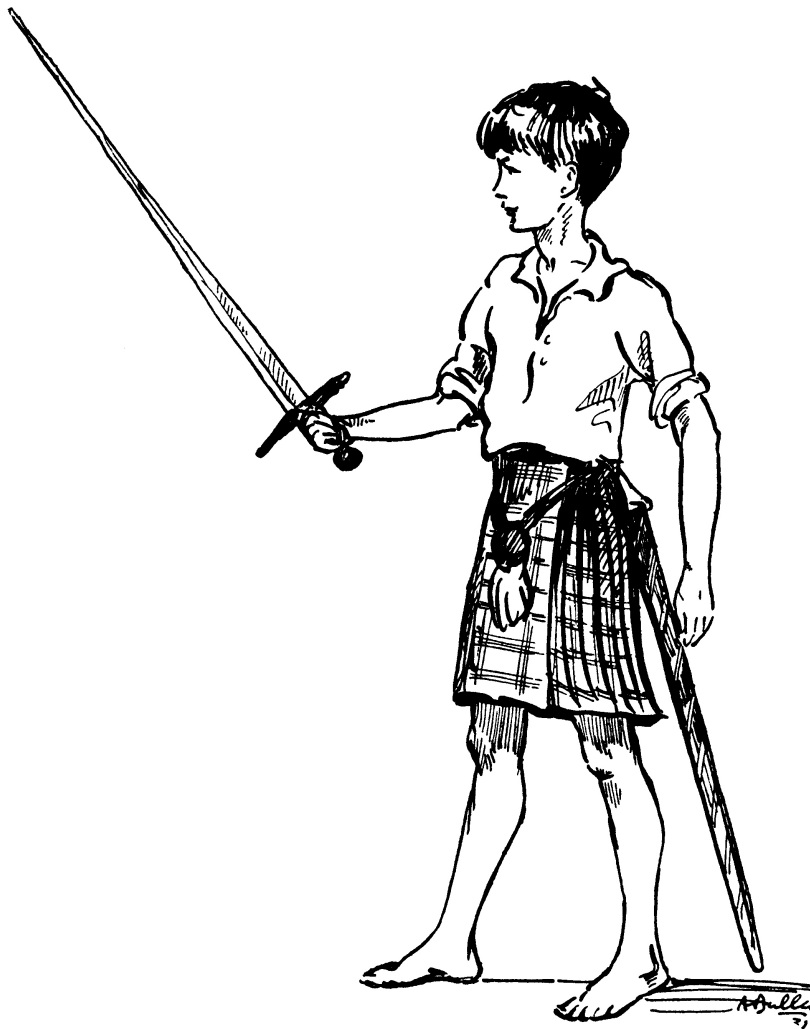




fidra books

Newsletter

No. 2



We Met Our Cousins by Joanna Cannan



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Welcome to the second Fidra Books Newsletter. Our first was an resounding success and we soon ran out of copies despite having printed what seemed to us to be a vast number! Consequently, we've printed rather more of this edition. If you missed the first one, which contained a little-known short story by M Pardoe about her irrepressible hero, Bunkle, it can be downloaded from our website at www.fidrabooks.com. Alternatively, if you've received this via Souvenir or the New Chalet Club journals you will need to let us know if you wish to receive future copies.

It has been a busy few months since our last newsletter! We have published two more books and signed contracts with two new authors – Victoria Walker who wrote the incredibly hard-to-find books: *The Winter of Enchantment* and *The House Called Hadlows*, and K M Peyton – author of over 60 books. Initially, we will be publishing two of Kathleen's pony books – *Fly-by-Night* and *The Team*.

At the back is a list of stockists, some of whom are traditional booksellers who issue regular catalogues, some of whom have on-line shops and some who have shops. In addition, in response to many requests it is now possible to order directly from Fidra Books – an order form is at the end of the newsletter.

In this issue we have an article about Victoria Walker, author of our Christmas title: *The Winter of Enchantment*, details of our forthcoming books, some excerpts from Mabel Esther Allan's autobiography, a description of my trips to meet Elinor Lyon and to the Persephone book launch for their Joanna Cannan title and this issue's featured bookseller is Jane Badger, a specialist in pony books and equestrian non-fiction as well as general children's fiction.

Best wishes,

Vanessa Robertson

Fidra Books – about us

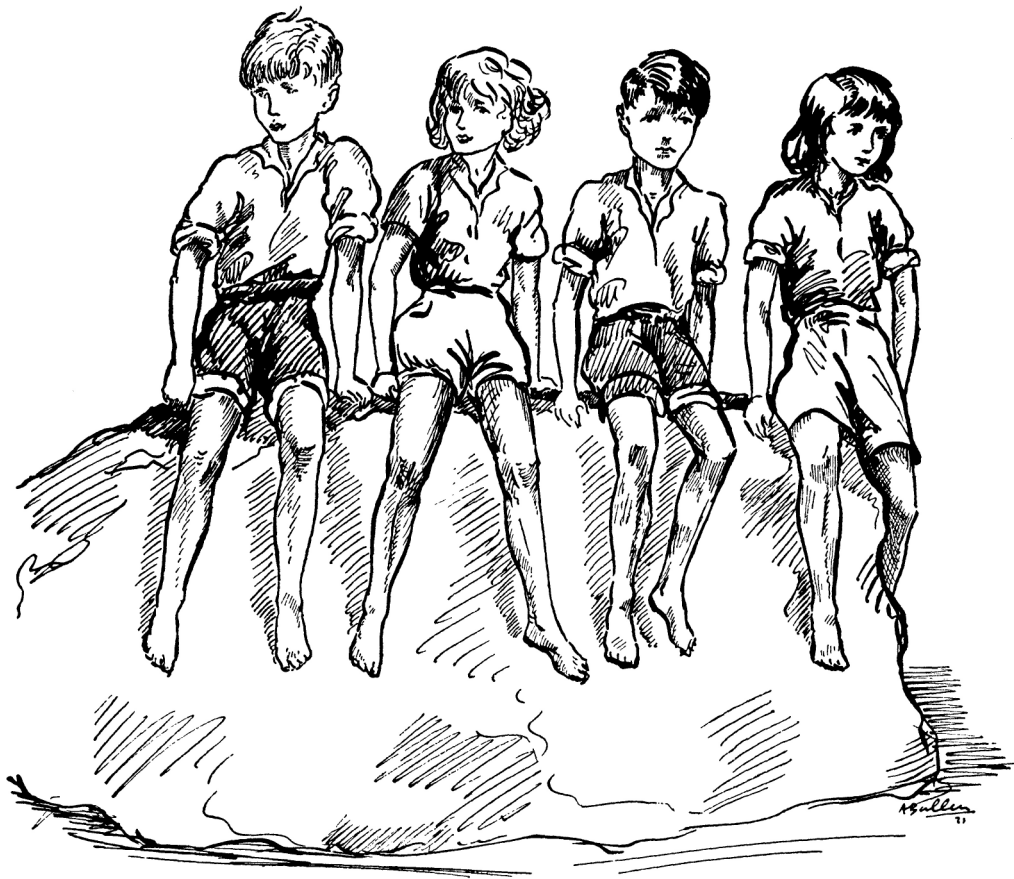
In the last few months lots of people have asked about us and our background so, whilst not appearing to be vain, I thought I'd introduce Fidra Books properly.

Prior to becoming a publisher I was a bookdealer specialising in rare and collectable children's books – I still am actually, my website can be found at www.robertsonbooks.co.uk – and I knew that there were plenty of books that collectors and readers had little chance of finding unless they were incredibly lucky or had very deep pockets – sometimes both! Fidra Books grew out of a belief in the work of certain authors, the knowledge that there is a demand for their books and a rash declaration that 'It can't be *that* difficult!' If pressed, I would have to admit that, when the aforementioned rash declaration was made, alcohol may have been taken...

Without this somewhat cavalier attitude I would never have taken this project on, and at times it was only sheer bloody-mindedness that kept me going. Tracking down the families of our mostly deceased authors was an interminable job, involving poring over records and Wills, and searching electoral rolls. The relative who inherited the rights to Mabel Esther Allan's work has an unusual name and in the end, I used the on-line directory enquiries and simply rang everyone I could find with that name. As it happens, I didn't find him, but I found someone with that name, who knew someone else with that name who knew the right person with that name! We also agreed terms with Olivia Fitzroy's husband only for him to sadly pass away before we had signed contracts, leaving me to start from scratch trying to find the new copyright holder.

Although Fidra Books is mostly me – Vanessa – in true Hollywood manner I couldn't do it without my husband Malcolm who deals with typesetting technicalities, designing and maintaining the website and all the other technical bits that I don't understand. I also have an accountant friend who patiently keeps my record-keeping on the straight and narrow, a meticulous friend who proof-reads for us and another friend who is a talented designer and does our covers for us – squeezing us in between much more high profile commissions. That explains why I regularly refer to 'we' rather than simply 'me'. I am also lucky in that the printers we use are very patient about answering my daft questions and very speedy to rectify any errors. There are also a number of people who have rallied to the cause copying text, scanning dustwrappers and tracking down authors.

And the name? Fidra is an island off the East Lothian coast which struck me the first time I saw it as having all the qualities of a classic children's fiction island – a natural granite arch, rare seabirds and a lighthouse. As you look at it from the vast empty beach at Yellowcraigs, smugglers and secret passages seem completely feasible. Every time I look at Fidra my heart lifts and that makes it seem a highly appropriate name for a venture that similarly thrills me.



Forthcoming Titles

Fidra will be publishing five more titles this year. Two are by authors whose work we have already published and three are new to the Fidra list.

We Met Our Cousins by Joanna Cannan (late June 2006)

First published in 1937, *We Met Our Cousins* concerns John and Antonia who are sent from London to spend the holidays with their Scottish cousins who live with their grandfather at Roid House in the Scottish Highlands. The children are initially incompatible, with John and Antonia (from whose perspective the book is written) cosseted and rather precious whilst Angus and Morag and the younger Hamish are wild and scruffy and spend their time riding and sailing. Despite a prickly start, when John saves wee Hamish from a maddened bull, friendships are firmly cemented, especially when they manage to discover the truth of the MacTavish and MacAlister feud. A favourite of mine, enlivened by Anne Bullen's wonderful illustrations.

When it was first published, a reviewer said of this book: "Cannan can write the heads off almost all her rivals. Here is a book that neither child nor adult can set down, bubbling with humour, packed with adventure, marked by the keenest observation"

The first chapter of We Met Our Cousins can now be read on our website at www.fidrabooks.com

The School on North Barrule by Mabel Esther Allan (July 2006)

Voirrey and Andreas Quilliam, react very differently when told that they are going to Barrule House, a co-educational boarding school on the Isle of Man. Voirrey is thrilled that she will be living on her late father's native island while Andreas hates the idea of boarding with girls, and is horrified that Barrule House does not play cricket or 'footer'. Both tread a dangerous path once on the island: Andreas's rebellious behaviour causes problems, and Voirrey's determination to discover her father's sister, Mona Quilliam, estranged from Voirrey's parents since their marriage, leads her into some difficult situations. How Voirrey learns the truth and how Andreas becomes reconciled to Barrule House form the exciting and entertaining plot of *The School on North Barrule*.

Bunkle's Brainwave by M Pardoe (Autumn 2006)



By the author of *The Far Island* (published by Fidra in 2005), this is the tenth title in the Bunkle series and very hard-to-find. Billy de Salis (nick-named 'Bunkle' as a small boy by his elder brother and sister who said he talked such a lot of bunk) is looking forward to a rather dull summer holidays at home, because his sister Jill is now married and his brother Robin is on military

service abroad. Instead, however, a chance encounter with a Scottish cousin leads to surprising developments, and once more Bunkle, his mother and father and his Scottish cousins get involved in an exciting adventure.

We Daren't Go A'Hunting by Elinor Lyon (Autumn 2006)

This is the second title in the Ian and Sovra series, following *The House in Hiding* which we published earlier this year. On the shores of Loch Fionn, a chance remark overheard one winter afternoon arouses Ian and Sovra's suspicions and sets them on the track of a gang of sinister deer-poachers. With their friend Alastair Gunn, now living at Kindrachill, they plan to outwit the gang and soon find themselves in a pursuit packed with adventure.

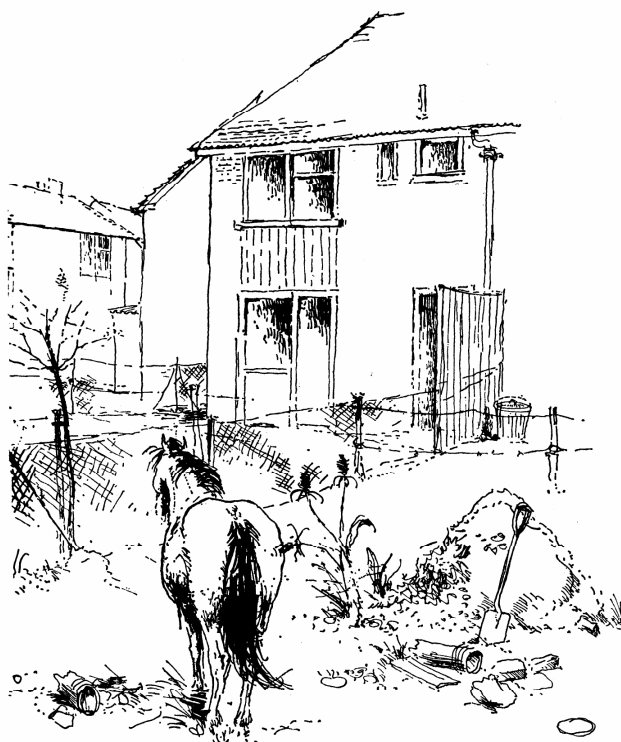


The Winter of Enchantment by Victoria Walker (Winter 2006)



An iconic and elusive book written by the author when she was just 21, it tells the story of Sebastian who travels back from his Victorian world to a magical world of Melissa, Mantari and the wicked Enchanter. This book has been out of print for thirty years and its reissue has been clamoured for by many. We will also be publishing the sequel, *The House Called Hadlows*, will be published next year.

Our titles for early 2007 will include one of Elinor Lyon's rarest titles, another Bunkle story and K M Peyton's *Fly-By-Night*. These will be announced on our website in the autumn and the next Newsletter in November.



Elinor Lyon

Back at the beginning of April, whilst staying with family in Worcester, I made a trip over to Harlech on the Welsh coast to visit Elinor Lyon. Naturally, what looked like a fairly reasonable distance on the map when planning this turned out to be just over three hours each way along winding roads! Elinor's cottage is up a terrifyingly steep driveway and requires a ferocious handbrake turn at the top – too slow and you don't make the bend, too fast and you could embed yourself in the garden wall. However, when you get there and take the few steps up to the front door, the view over the bay and towards Snowdon is absolutely stunning, and it is easy to see why Elinor and her husband Peter fell in love with this spot 30 years ago when he retired from teaching.

Whilst Malcolm and our little boy set off along the footpath to explore the castle, I talked to Elinor. A bright and lively lady, still very busy with reading group, Women's Institute, church and many family activities, she is delighted that her books are being republished, but slightly bemused and surprised that there is still demand for them and by the fan mail she has received.

Elinor was particularly interested that St George's School in Edinburgh had acquired a copy of *The House in Hiding* which was proving very popular with the pupils, and explained that she had actually attended the school for a year or so around 1930 when she was living in Edinburgh, having previously been educated at home by a governess. I am planning to deliver our next book to St George's in person so that I can take some photos to show her how it has changed. I shall also be trying to discreetly photograph her old home in Inverleith near the Botanic Gardens!

Unsurprisingly, we talked a great deal about books, both those that we were currently reading and her own. *Dragon Castle* is a title that many people have contacted me about and she is happy for Fidra to publish this. We will do so next year, after *Run Away Home* – so many people are looking forward to this that I would hate to put it off! Elinor also tantalisingly mentioned that lurking in the attic are the unpublished manuscripts for another two novels in the Ian, Sovra and Cathie series...

Magnus and Malcolm joined us for tea, and the homemade chocolate cake was much appreciated by them, given their long walk and climb up to the top of Harlech castle. As Magnus seemed to be keen on counting steps, when he became a little restless, Elinor sent him out into her terraced garden to see how many he could find there 106 apparently! He was very impressed to be meeting a real live author.

It was a long trip to visit Elinor but I am so glad that we made the trip as she is fascinating to talk to and one never loses the thrill of meeting an author whose work you love. I look forward very much to meeting her again in the future.



Draw for Signed Copies

Before we left, Elinor signed some copies of *The House in Hiding*, two of which were prizes in the draw we held among the members of our mailing list. The winners were Christine Ward of Stilton, near Peterborough and Jon Gill, a teacher in a British Forces school in Germany. Elinor Lyon was a new author to Christine and I'm pleased to say that she greatly enjoyed the book. Jon is a lifelong fan and was very pleased to receive a signed copy, and he has also read it to his appreciative class of 9 and 10 year-olds.

Victoria Walker

We are delighted to be able to announce that our Christmas title this year will be *The Winter of Enchantment* by Victoria Walker. First published in 1969, this is a magical tale and one of the most sought-after children's books, with copies selling for over £1000. I first read this 25 years ago, and loved it and I'm delighted to be reprinting it. We will be publishing Victoria's second book, *The House Called Hadlows*, next year.

"Thirty-five years ago, when I was twenty-one, I was idling away time at my parents' house in the country, wondering what to do next. I had been living in London and taking music lessons and it had dawned at last that I had no musical talent whatsoever. So with no particular end in view I found my mother's portable typewriter and wrote a story for children. Of course I wrote it for myself, really. I may have looked grownup - a heavy Juliette Greco fringe, so much eyeliner that my father complained that it was like looking down the barrels of the guns of Navarone over breakfast, reeking of Shalimar and French cigarettes (rolled in papier mais for super sophistication) - but I was extraordinarily naive. It simply never occurred to me to get a job or to think of a career. Instead I spent eight months, off and on, writing this story just as it came into my head, sentence by sentence, with no idea of how it would finish or what I would do with it when it had.

"One evening I went out to dinner with a friend in London. In the late Sixties the Bistro D'Agran - I'm not sure how you spell that - was a well-known Hooray Henry haunt behind Harrods. It was unlicensed so customers had to bring their own bottles of wine. I can't remember who the friend was but at the table next to us were two men who asked to borrow our corkscrew. During the conversation that followed one of the men revealed that he was a publisher. Without a blush I told him that I was within days of finishing a manuscript. It did not occur to me that he might be constantly bothered by people asking him to look at unsolicited manuscripts. Generously he said I could send it to him for appraisal. I did. A few weeks later, during which I had heard nothing and had practically forgotten about it, he sent me a contract. That was Bill McCreadie of Rupert Hart-Davis (now of Aurum Press) and the story came to be called *The Winter of Enchantment*."

(Excerpt from May 2004 Ibooknet Newsletter – Ibooknet is the Independent Booksellers' Network – over 50 booksellers with over half a million rare and collectable books on-line.

Joanna Cannan – a diverse career

Although we are publishing some of Joanna Cannan's children's novels, beginning with the imminent *We Met Our Cousins*, she was predominantly an adult novelist, writing both literary novels and detective fiction. Joanna is widely credited with creating the pony book genre with *A Pony for Jean*; earlier horse stories had focussed on the pony, whilst Jean was the first child heroine. We're delighted to be republishing these children's books and *Princes in the Land*, one of Joanna's best adult novels has now been reprinted by the marvellous Persephone Books.

Persephone's books are beautiful to look at and handle, quite apart from the contents. They are paperbacks but they have dustwrappers in the same subtle grey with vibrantly coloured endpapers taken from fabric designs contemporary to the book. In their own words:

“Persephone prints mainly neglected fiction and non-fiction by women, for women and about women. The titles are chosen to appeal to busy women who rarely have time to spend in ever-larger bookshops and who would like to have access to a list of books designed to be neither too literary nor too commercial. The books are guaranteed to be readable, thought-provoking and impossible to forget.”

I love their books and was thrilled to be invited by Josephine Pullein Thompson (one of the imitable P-T sisters and the daughter of Joanna Cannan) to the launch of the Persephone edition of *Princes in the Land* at their shop and offices in London. It was wonderful to meet Josephine and Diana and I am pleased to be able to report that I managed to be professional and not rave about how much I treasured their books when I was young – still do actually! There was a glorious mix of people there – I met writers whose books are now on my 'to be read' pile, discussed hen-keeping and discovered what inspires people to become armourers.

Princes in the Land is a marvellous novel about a woman who, having brought up her children and seen them follow paths diametrically opposed to those she would have chosen, is left considering the purpose of her life. I enjoyed it enormously. More information can be found on the Persephone website at www.persephonebooks.co.uk and the book can be ordered from any bookshop or directly from Persephone

Princes in the Land by Joanna Cannan
ISBN: 1903155533



Fly-By-Night by K M Peyton

Book Fair

Saturday 21st October is the date of the Illustrated and Children's Book Fair in Harrogate. Open from 10.30 to 4.30, this is the only specialist children's fair in the country and is organised by the PBFA. There will be around 30 specialist bookdealers and it is being managed by one of Fidra's stockists – Lou Harrison of TP Children's Books. For more information, call Lou on 01943 830095.

Hopefully, I'll see you there!

Titles in Print

All of these can be ordered using the order form towards the end of the newsletter or via our website at www.fidrabooks.com

Orders to Poach by Olivia FitzRoy

Our latest book, this was Olivia's first novel, published when she was just 20, and written to entertain her younger sisters whilst they lived in the remote Highlands of Scotland during the early part of World War Two. It tells the story of the Stewart family, displaced from their family seat by a tenant while their father is posted to Burma, and now staying at the Lodge. The new tenant, despite his assurances when taking on the tenancy, does not understand the need to control the game on the estate and so the children's father instructs them to do what they can to poach the estate. In between sailing, swimming, camping and exploring, they spent time outwitting the tenant and his henchmen and the setting that Olivia knew so well is marvellously portrayed in all these adventures.



The House in Hiding by Elinor Lyon

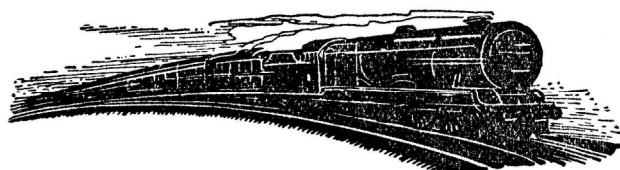


Ian and Sovra are thrilled when their father, Dr Kennedy, buys them a boat of their own. Exploring the loch, they discover a stone stairway hidden behind a waterfall and an abandoned shieling – the perfect place to camp. The arrival of the awful Mrs Paget and her irritating daughter, Ann, interferes with their plans to a degree, but Ian and Sovra still manage to explore the abandoned village of Kindrachill on the isolated Fionn-ard peninsula. There is a legend that when the village is left empty, the heir of Kindrachill will only return when a fire is kindled in

the hearth of his own house. But the last heir, Alistair, was reported killed in the Far East some years before...

The Far Island by M Pardoe

The Far Island was Margot Pardoe's first book and concerns Dick and Jane Fraser who, newly orphaned, are sent by their great-grandmother to live on an island in Orkney which she owns. Having been brought up at expensive and fashionable school and being used to spending their holidays in luxurious foreign resorts, the isolation of Mora is a shock for the children but soon they learn how to entertain themselves and to enjoy the activities available to them, culminating in the discovery of the secret of the island. Dick and Jean later reappear in the Bunkle series of books for which the author is best known.



This Issue's Bookseller –
Jane Badger Books



Fidra's books are mainly sold by booksellers specialising in collectable children's books – in each issue we feature one of our stockists and their business.

Jane Badger Books was started in 2001. I have always loved second-hand books. New book shops I regard as slightly alien places. There is no thrill of the chase in a new book shop; no need to go and do deep breathing behind a convenient door to calm yourself before you bear your magnificent bargain off to the counter to pay for it, or any need at all to quell that tickly feeling that the book before you, which you have never heard of before, is Something Good.

A love of bookhunting and running a shop single-handed do not go together, which is why for the moment I sell books over the Internet and via catalogue. I do four catalogues per year, and list books on my own website and on the major book-selling sites, particularly Ibooknet, a co-operative of independent British booksellers.

My speciality is pony books. I was a pony-mad child, and read every pony book I could find in our local library or Boots, who in the 60s and 70s used to sell books. I was a catholic reader though: any book with an animal in it was good, but I would read anything that came my way, suitable and unsuitable. I still feel bereft without a book. If I have a spare moment my first instinct is to read and I have had to get better at moving firmly on from interesting sounding blurbs while cataloguing.

Although I come across many books that I would love to keep, I do now sell without too much heartbreak a wide variety of pony books ranging from the beautifully illustrated Country Life titles of the 1930s through to today's Heartland series. I also stock good technical horsey non-fiction (though my own riding now is restricted to pottering about on a friend's elderly pony who lives with us for half the year), general non-fiction and a reasonable stock of children's titles, including, of course, Fidra!

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Ordering Fidra Titles

Our books are stocked by a wide range of booksellers, from shops specialising in rare children's books, to dealers selling on-line and via catalogues. In response to frequent requests, it is now possible to order directly from Fidra Books if you prefer.

Orders can be emailed to order@fidrabooks.co.uk or complete the order form overleaf and send it with a cheque for the appropriate amount made payable to 'Fidra Books'. Cheques must be in sterling and drawn on a UK bank. Please write the titles of the books ordered and your name and address on the reverse of your cheque. Cheque is our preferred option, but if you wish to pay via credit card let us have your email address and we will send an invoice via Paypal.

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If you're only ordering titles that are yet to be published we will hold your cheque and won't bank it until the first is ready to be sent out. If you wish you can send separate cheques for each book – I know I would be annoyed if I'd paid for a book that I wasn't going to receive for a few months!

Already published and imminent books can also be ordered and paid for on-line at www.fidrabooks.com using the link marked 'shop'.



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