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## An Interview with Andy Johannesen

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## **An Interview with Andy Johannesen**

Rob McGee: When did this whole thing get started with the George MacDonald books?

Andy: Well, it was the winter of 1988 when I was down looking on your bookshelf for something to read and I found an edited version of George MacDonald and asked to borrow it.

Rob: So that one book was enough for you to decide you needed to find out more about George MacDonald?

Andy: Yes; I was intrigued to think of unedited versions out there that would probably be more exciting than this already incredible edited paperback, and this motivated me to enquire for an original copy. We were informed that Michael Phillips was just coming out with original MacDonald facsimiles.

Rob: What happened after you read your first original?

Andy: I experienced awe and a sense of spiritual harmony with George MacDonald and wanted to find more originals but found they were rare and expensive. Also, at this time, I was looking forward to taking my family on a holiday adventure to Britain and the thought of finding out of print GMD books in the U.K. was a big factor in our decision to travel.

Rob: How did acquiring some originals motivate you to reprint them?

Andy: In the process of looking for books, I learned the extent of the demand for them. So one rainy day in May 1990, desiring to be creative with my natural abilities (mechanical engineering) and desiring to see **[end of page 14]** others illuminated by GMD, I presumed to recreate them myself.

Rob: How were you going to go about doing this with no previous printing experience?

Andy: I figured I could learn, so I read the local trade magazines and auction flyers to figure out the designs of the book business. After a month of study

and phone calls to experienced printers and dealers, my son Seth and I started to make moves.

Jonathan: What was your occupation before you made the change to book publishing and why did you make the complete change?

Andy: I've been working with Redwood Timber Products for the past twenty years and in the last 7 years I've also been the local pastor in our community. As I became more involved in church affairs my physical body lost the muscle tone required for heavy lifting in the wood business. The result being that my back suffered injury on several occasions. The last one, in Jan. 1991, kept me down for four weeks. During this down time, my passion for recreating GMD books was released by the doctor's advice to change my strenuous wood occupation.

Jonathan: What type of machinery did you find you had to obtain for the print shop and how did you get it?

Andy: We first remodeled my machine-tractor shop into a print shop and also built-on a dark room. The floor-plan lay-out was a challenge. I bought a camera, plate burner, Heidelberg printing press, Baum paper folder, Smyth sewing machine, end-sheet tipper, guillotine cutter and a 3-knife cutter. All of the equipment is used and dates from 1940-70. I shopped out of printing magazines in their used machinery ads [15] and also met printers either going out of business or selling off excess equipment.

Jonathan: What obstacles did you encounter?

Andy: Learning the artistic aspects rather than the scientific side of printing. Also adjusting the machines properly: eg. to cope with *What's Mine's Mine's* light print

Jonathan: What did you have to custom-build to make the whole operation work?

Andy: The collater, book press, rounding and backing press and a building-in device. Mostly in the book binding department because the modern process is unable or unwilling to recreate some of the strengths that the old book

processes had: eg. the French groove on the sides of the spine.

Rob: Do you make every part of the book?

Andy: Most all of the labour is done by myself and my family except making the copper engraving and the cloth cover material. We finish the covers in our shop by stamping the copper engravings on the factory-cut cloth. We first hand-typeset the lettering and draw the cover illustrations (on some, others are line drawings from other books). Then I make camera-ready negatives in the dark room and send them to the copper engraver who makes the mould for us to then mount on our gold-foil engraver. The covers are hot foil stamped and glued to the prepared book blocks by hand.

Rob: Can you tell us about the quality of the books you are producing?

Andy: I found out that high quality materials were not more expensive than average quality materials but **[16]** required more effort to handle. The main objective was to recreate my favourite publisher's editions—the red Kegan Paul numbered editions with frontispieces. The type of cloth, sewn signatures, recycled and acid-free paper, and the crown octavo format are the distinguishing marks of our books, which took a lot of research to almost match the quality and style of the old originals.

Rob: Why no fancy, high gloss, eye-catching covers? Wouldn't that be more profitable for you?

Andy: I felt it would compromise the integrity of the craftsmanship, but on the other hand I am unable to reproduce the heavily gilded covers of the Victorian era. And it's just not my style.

Jonathan: What plans for future books are you working towards?

Andy: Series 2, set of six: *At the Back of the North Wind*, *Paul Faber – Surgeon*, *The Vicar's Daughter*, *Guild Court - A London Story*, *Home Again*, and *The Elect Lady*. Series set cost is \$80.00 post-paid (or Sterling equivalent). Series 3 will have all the fairy tales.

Jonathan: In selling the books, what people or groups do you have contacting you?

Andy: First I hear from the people who really understand GMD, then the book dealers who can feel the demand for GMD, then I hear from libraries who want GMD available for their patrons, and then from people who are just tasting GMD writings.

Jonathan: Where do you see your publishing business going for the future?

**[17]**

Andy: I see having a catalogue that will list other publishers' works that will be uplifting to a greater reading audience. I also see publishing new works, but first want to prove my ability to get the old works out.

[Readers should not feel that this is an all-male venture. Andy's wife Debbie helps with the secretarial work and his young daughter helps with the binding. Ed.] **[18]**