

Briefs

Indie high street shops under threat

More than 25,000 shops have closed on the high street in the first nine months of 2009 according to the Local Data Company. LDC tracked 705 town centres across the UK. It found that 25,090 shops had closed, 16,264 of them independent businesses. Banks, travel agents, and specialist clothes shops had fared the worst. But the data also showed that 731 independently run shops in the category "Books, Arts & Crafts, Stationery, Printers" had shut, with a further 321 multiples closed. In total this was a reduction of 13.2%, the fifth worst performing sector of those tracked by the LDC. It could not break out figures for bookshops alone. According to the BA, 34 new shops have opened so far this year, while 69 have closed.

The Times joins Crimefest

The *Times* is to become the media partner for Crimefest in 2010, and will again provide press coverage for the Crime Writers Association (CWA) Dagger awards. Crimefest is to take place from 20th-23rd May 2010, and the newspaper will carry a feature on the Bristol-based event in March. Following CrimeFest, the *Times* will also review the winners of its Sounds of Crime Awards for best abridged and unabridged crime audiobooks, sponsored by Audible. The convention will also host the announcement of the CWA Dagger shortlists.



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Poetry corner: Poetry publisher Carcanet celebrated the launch of *A Century of Poetry Review* at the Tate Modern on 22nd October. The evening featured readings by poets David Harsent, Elaine Feinstein and Alan Jenkins. Pictured: Poet and anthology contributor Elaine Feinstein.

Rubin in at Macmillan US

Steve Rubin has joined Macmillan US imprint Henry Holt. Rubin joins on 2nd November as president and publisher of Holt, one of the oldest publishing names in the US. Rubin left his post as executive vice-president and publisher-at-large of Random House Inc at the end of September.

Bertrams looks to grow business

Graeme Neill

Wholesaler Bertrams is looking at acquisitions to grow its book and library supply businesses, after it posted a small profit in its most recent trading period.

Bertrams reported a profit of £500,000 for the five months until the end of August, according to results released by its parent company, Smiths News. The wholesaler recorded sales of £53.5m during the period. It has also been buoyed by recent contract wins to supply books to the *Daily Mail* and two library supply contracts in Scotland. The deals are believed to be worth around £3m.

Bertrams managing director Michael Neil said "the business performed very well", especially given how precarious its future seemed when its previous parent company Woolworths collapsed last November. Bertrams was finally acquired by Smiths News in March in a deal worth £8.6m.

Neil said there were three



Neil

main reasons for the business' recovery. One was that it built its stock levels back far quicker than expected following the takeover. The wholesaler had experienced supply difficulties while its future looked unclear at the beginning of 2009. The big five distributors were trading with it on a pro-forma basis at one point.

Neil said: "When Smiths News bought us, we were running at around half capacity. I thought it

would take around four months to get it right, but our stock situation was sorted within six weeks."

He added that the business was "very lucky" customers did not desert the business while it was experiencing problems. The final reason was that he felt the recession has not hit the book trade as heavily as other retailers.

Neil was bullish about the year ahead. "There are a lot of very good books for bricks and mortar and online bookshops." Particular focus will be made on building its Independent Buying Group business for indies as well as "acquisition opportunities". "There's lots more we want to do," he added.

In the trading statement, Smiths News said year-on-year sales at Bertrams were "flat" but the business was trading ahead of expectations. Profit before tax at Smiths News fell £2.5m to £30.5m over the trading year. Sales increased 6.4% from £1.24bn to £1.3bn.

thebookseller.com/bertrams



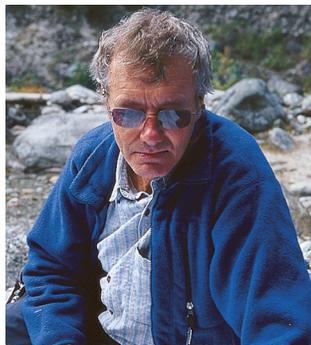
Sound relations: Fourth Estate held a launch at the Ivy in London last week for actress Phyllida Law's book, *Notes to my Mother-in-Law*. The memoir features notes Law wrote to her deaf mother-in-law to inform her of the latest family gossip. Pictured from left: Fourth Estate editorial director Clare Reihill, Law, and her agent Caroline Wood.

Lonely Planet not for sale, says BBC

BBC Worldwide said it has "no plans" to sell Lonely Planet after rumours circulated this week that its founders Maureen and Tony Wheeler (right) were planning to buy it back.

A statement released by the BBC said: "BBC Worldwide has no plans to sell the highly successful Lonely Planet travel information business. It is not up for sale."

Speculation started after it emerged that the Wheelers had been allowed to extend a "put option" they have to sell their share to the BBC. It was suggested the founders wanted to keep hold of their 25% share in the business because the BBC was keen to offload the travel publisher. The BBC refused to disclose details on the new time limit for the option.



Tony Elliott, chair of the rival Time Out group, said that sources had told him that the BBC was undergoing a strategic view with the sale of Lonely Planet "top of the list". Elliott added: "There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that we are going to see it sold, it's just a question of when."

Lonely Planet refused to comment and referred all enquiries to the BBC. When BBC Worldwide bought 75% of the travel publisher for £89m in October 2007, there was a huge outcry.

There has since been a select committee held by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. A report called the purchase of the travel publisher the most "egregious" example of the company's expansion beyond its existing remit.