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Bahá'í Publishing

## New girl on the block

### Laura Barnes on the work of Bahá'í Publishing

JUST SIX MONTHS ago, my dad suggested it would be worth visiting the Bahá'í Publishing Trust, a short drive away from our home on the border of Northamptonshire and Rutland. Newly arrived in England and unemployed, I was looking for advice about breaking into publishing. My hope was that George Ballentyne, manager of the Trust, could help. Employment agencies in London didn't know what to make of my three years' experience in Haifa, working as a quality controller in the Correspondence Processing Office at the Bahá'í World Centre. They added my application to the pile of other hopefuls, said they'd call me if anything came up, and wished me good luck as they closed the door or put down the phone. I didn't know it at the time, but the Bahá'í Publishing Trust had a place ready made for someone like me, passionate about diacriticals.



*The Trust staff (left to right): George Ballentyne; Laura Barnes; (front) Victoria Grounds; Masood Habibi; Christine Higgins*

So my destiny in England was to work as an editorial assistant, but not under the bright lights of London. With time on my hands, I attended the Bahá'í Arts Academy in Sidcot, where George was tutoring a "Creative Writing" course. The Academy was terrific, the rhubarb crumble and custard served in the school dining hall excellent, and before the end of the week I had been offered a job. Once the National Assembly had approved, I became the newest member of staff at the Bahá'í Publishing Trust.

The Trust was established in 1937, and has a long association with the pretty market town of Oakham, in Rutland. The Trust is here more by accident than design. John Long was appointed manager of the Trust shortly after he and his wife, Vera, moved to Oakham as pioneers in 1964. During the decades that followed, and thanks to a variety of short- and long-term staff, the Trust has become the institution known to the friends the world over today. Among its activities, the Trust has hosted two international Bahá'í publishing

conferences: the first in 1987 in London to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary, and another in Oakham, 1991. It has also participated in international book fairs around the world, including Eastern Europe in the early 1990s. In the past few years, the Bahá'í Publishing Trust has gone through some major changes, in personnel and functions, as it seeks to serve the Bahá'í community better. In line with its "repositioning" or "rebranding" (to borrow

current parlance), it now trades under the name “Bahá’í Publishing”, with a new logo that appears on its books and other products. But to its staff and its customers, it is still known familiarly as “The Trust”.

Our premises are close enough to the railway line for the walls to be shaken by the passing trains. It is also in a prime position to proclaim the existence of the Faith to hundreds of thousands of passengers per year who use this main railway line across the middle of England. A space has been allocated on our building for a large, illuminated billboard, soon to be erected. We have combined office and storage facilities on the same site. The warehouse, packaging and mailing are ably run by Christine Higgins. Victoria Grounds, Masood Habibi and I share the open-plan office upstairs. Victoria deals with accounts and finances, and keeps the office ticking over day-today. Masood (as well as being a qualified gym instructor) handles order processing, customer services and stock control. George, the manager, presides over an intimidating pile of paperwork, books and manuscripts, buoyed along in his office by the sounds of Radiohead, Pulp and Miles Davis. We are an eclectic crowd, and I like to think we’re good company too, as people have found when they visit the Trust for a cup of tea and a look at what’s new on our shelves.



*Laura Barnes*

Thanks to unexpected and unpredictable circumstances, I joined the talented and dedicated team at Bahá’í Publishing. London can wait a while; Oakham is where the real publishing is done.

**The Bahá’í Publishing Trust**

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