

# Publishing Progress

As part of our continuing series of interviews, John Triggs talks to people who are working towards getting the ideas of Henry George and economic justice more widely understood and accepted. In this issue we meet **Anthony Werner**, managing director of book publishers Shephard-Walwyn

AMONG THE barrage of television and radio programmes, magazines, text messages, blogs and Twitter updates, one ancient information medium is still working remarkably well to get its message across—the humble book.

Today, centuries after its emergence, and despite the continuing development of new technologies, nothing has yet been invented to compare with the pleasure, ease and usefulness of reading a beautifully published book.

That fact must come as some comfort to Anthony Werner, who has spent his life immersed in the world of books, firstly as an employee of Pergamon Press and Oxford University Press and later as a partner and chief executive of the small publishing company Shephard-Walwyn.

The company was set up by Christopher Shephard-Walwyn in 1972 and from its inception, began producing beautifully produced books.

Werner took over the company in 1979 and became interested in publishing books on Henry George-inspired economics when he agreed to publish an early Fred Harrison book, *The Power in the Land*, in April 1983. Today, aged 70, he continues to publish books by a wide range of authors writing about the injustice and folly of conventional economics.

Ironically, he is working in an industry increasingly being squeezed by the same flawed economics his authors are protesting against.

"Our economy is ruled by this absolute obsession with constant growth," he says. "That creates an economic pressure many companies simply can't cope with."

The publishing and bookselling industry is no exception. Not only is it facing enormous competition, with more than 200,000 books published in the UK each year, but the emergence of two dominant players – Waterstones on the high street and Amazon on the internet – is making survival for

the smaller publishers and booksellers increasingly difficult.

"An independent book store will want a 35 per cent discount to sell a book on spec but a chain like Waterstones is so large they can demand a 40 per cent discount. Amazon are able to demand a 52% discount," explains Anthony. "To compete with that and with the big publishing companies and their huge advertising and publicity budgets is very difficult. It can be like pushing a very big rock up a hill for very little financial reward."

But Anthony believes the technological revolution has also brought opportunities. "The internet is like an index in a book; it makes it very easy to find things that couldn't be found before," he says. "The bookshops that survive will probably have to move out of the high street to places where the rent is cheaper and start their own websites so that the shop itself only becomes a small part of their business. There is also an opportunity for specialist book publishers to sell their books on websites, that also become discussion forums for their subject."

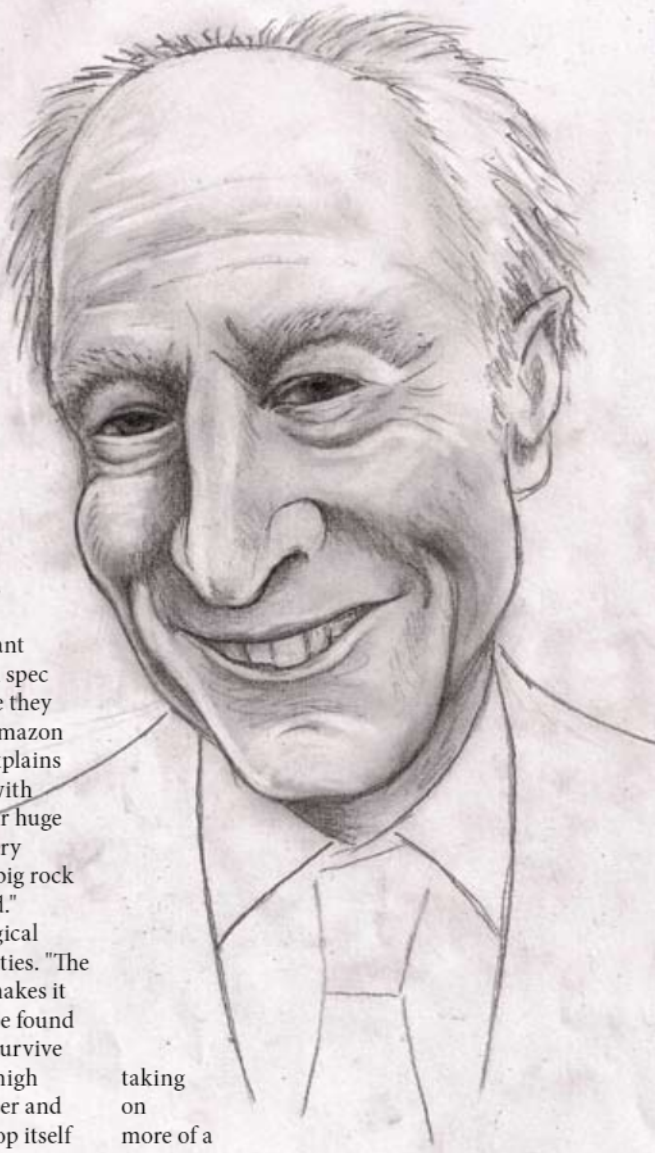
This is exactly what Anthony hopes that Shephard-Walwyn's brand new economics website, [www.ethicaleconomics.org.uk](http://www.ethicaleconomics.org.uk) will do. The site, which has only just been launched, features all the Shephard-Walwyn economics titles in one place but also includes a blog and forums for comment on the titles.

It is one part of Anthony's battle to draw the attention of the public to books that are, after all, not related to orthodox economic thinking and can be harder to promote.

"If a bookshop is offered a book on conventional economics by a known author, they are likely to stock it because they know that economics professors are likely to recommend it to their students," he says. "Our job is more difficult because we are promoting a different idea so bookshops feel they are

taking on more of a risk."

However, he says, progress often can be made by approaching the problem from a new angle. "One of the books we are selling, *The Secret Life of Real Estate and Banking* by Phillip J Anderson, explains how property investors can make money by playing the 18 year cycle of boom and bust in the housing market that other economists have missed because they have ignored the land question," he explains. "It is selling quite well and the people buying it are investors with plenty of money interested in making more of it, but if people wake up to the significance of what Anderson is saying the land question may creep back in to mainstream economics. The long term gamble is that sometime, hopefully before I'm dead, there will be a recognition that modern economics is deeply flawed. When that happens and people really start wanting to know more, we've got a lot of interesting books to show them."



# NEXT ISSUE

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