

THE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF BEING A DN PRINTER



One thing is certain, the DN's duplicating machine does not like holidays! While we enjoyed the festive season and a month's leave from printing, he pined in his dark dank corner. How then can he express his displeasure, except by giving us a hard time when we pull him back into the light? First, he refuses to accept the first master copy. Next he crumples virgin sheets of paper and when we empty him, he holds on to yet another trial master and makes us peel it off manually. For our guidance he then lights up a picture of a spanner, indicating that something is very wrong with his tummy. Now we are patient people. But patience alone does not print the DN. After half an hour of sulking he gets cracking and never falters until all 1100 copies have been printed. He really is a most sensitive individual and deserves our love and

respect. Perhaps visiting him during the next long break in the summer will soothe his hurt feelings!

2003

Thinking of my grandmother while struggling with various computer and laptop printer leads, trying after a two-month break, to remember which went into which socket, probably did not help solve the puzzle. My colleague luckily kept her mind on 21st-century techniques and to our great relief the cues for committing the *Deddington News* direct from laptop to printer showed up on screen. A few clicks here and there with the mouse, a rather anxious wait while the printer digested information and we were in business. Printing 14 pages each of 1070 copies for the month of February had begun.

So where does my grandmother fit in? Maybe it is whenever I am overwhelmed by the quick march of time, which puts me into situations I hardly dreamt of just a few years ago, that I fleetingly remember grandmother when she was nearly as old as I am now. She appeared to enjoy her old age by letting the younger generation do the worrying. She had done her bit in life and was now entitled to sit back and watch eagerly what sort of a fist we made of it. All the same, I do not envy her, except for the fact that she embodied the perfect picture of serenity, a trait hard to attain when new inventions and teachings tumble ceaselessly about us.

Meeting new challenges has become the norm in the 21st century, and keeping up with them excellent therapy. It means, of course, concealing from everybody but oneself, handicaps like slightly rusty brain power and forgetfulness for which there is but one cure. Commit all that needs to be remembered immediately on paper and train yourself to remember where the various crib sheets are stored! And as for printing the *Deddington News* the 'modern' way, the assistance of my fellow printer is the greatest comfort. We encourage each other to cope with whatever befalls the unsuspecting volunteer printer and really quite enjoy seeing another month's issue piled up on the shelves, ready for the collating team.

During our last print-run we were visited by a friend who deposited a red box full of papers with me, saying that the contents might be of interest to *DN*

readers. Because she found the rhythmic noise of the printer rather deafening further explanations were impossible at the time but I have since glanced inside, and, provided that I receive no objections from past members of the Deddington Society, I will be very pleased to share with our readers their aims and achievements in the years of their active involvement in our village in the 1970s.

2007

*'That what we have we prize not to the worth, Whiles we enjoy it;
but being lack'd and lost, Why, then we rack [exaggerate] the value'.*

Monday 1 June: No truer word written by William Shakespeare! Our Risograph printing machine is on the blink. The DN has to be printed before Wednesday when the collating team puts it together. Pat and I struggle to rectify the fault. We peer inside the printer's complex bowels, we switch off, then on again, that sometimes does the trick. We clean its reachable innards, we exchange the master roll. We turn off again, give it a loving word, pat and rest, then turn it on again. Not a thing – the master unit has given up the ghost. We ring the engineers who talk us through all the possible moves to set it in motion. Nothing. We ring editor Mary, in charge of this June edition. She arranges for the firm to loan us a second-hand machine.

Tuesday 2 June, 9.30am: Having missed our usual printing slot in the Windmill yesterday, Joyce kindly lets us use the committee room. I push our old printer into the corridor because the upstairs room is booked. I still hope that its malady can be diagnosed. An engineer has now arrived with a heavy replacement machine which he manages to slide on to a trolley but neither of us is strong enough to heave it from trolley to base. Fortune smiles on us: Max, the steward arrives and with his strong-armed help the printer is in position. Work can begin? Not just yet, our engineer has to programme it and as it is an updated model we have to learn the ropes, and our ink cartridges do not fit. Luckily the engineer has brought replacements. We ply him with tea and cake to have him stay until we get the hang of it all.

Now on our own, we finish the printing of 16 x 1050 sides! It is lunchtime, a heavenly smell of cooking wafts through. The playgroup has gone and we can move the old computer out of the corridor. I needn't have bothered to push it there, as it is beyond repair. We carry the stacks of loose pages up the stairs ready for the collators. Easier said than done: no, we didn't drop our precious loads climbing the stairs, it was a swooping bat that nearly made us drop the lot! A kind gentleman eventually persuaded the frightened little black devil to leave via the open window. I do hope our readers enjoyed the June issue which, thanks to our editor's quick thinking, Joyce's help with alternative printing accommodation and Max's willing help did see the light of day on Wednesday 3 June.

2009



RUTH'S INKY PAST

This is the story of how a trail of ink led from messy, old-fashioned duplicating machines at the village school in 1988 to digital cleanliness at the Windmill Centre today.

My diary refreshes my memory of when I accepted the challenge to join the production line of the *DN*. Back in 1988 I was approached by Angela Stone, wife of Norman and co-editor with him. They wanted me, along with friends, Jo Mace and Roy Berridge, to form a new printing team

even though I knew absolutely nothing about the craft. Jo, Roy and I were thrown in at the deep end, luckily near the well-earned retirement of the old Gestetner, used to print the *DN* since its first edition in 1976.

By January 1990 the ink-splashing Gestetner had been replaced by a Ricoh duplicating printer, financed for our use by Deddington Parish Council. Angela was now able to print the master copy on paper instead of on delicate inky 'skins', which made the secretarial side of her editorial commitments much more pleasant.

With the Ricoh came a voluminous instruction book which Jo and I generously allowed Roy to peruse, hoping that we would get by with a bit of common sense. It was not always Ricoh printer common sense though. The most excellent remedy, suggested by Jo, to get the complex printer going after an inexplicable breakdown, was to switch off all power, give it a jolly good rest, an encouraging talk, then switch on again! After all, our printer had to cope with one massive workload once a month, up to 16,000 pages, in just three hours. Jo's method worked well enough, though when all was lost an SOS was sent to an engineer who always lived miles away. Waiting for him often gave us and our editors near heart failure because we had a deadline — the collators who put the pages together for stapling and distributors who deliver each copy to your homes were waiting, every one of them a volunteer on the *DN* with a timetable to follow. Changing would cause untold difficulties.

Roy retired from printing duties in 1991 but remained as stand-in and first call when in printing trouble. Jo and I soldiered on until Jo retired at the beginning of the new millennium but not before she had introduced her young friend, Pat Swash, to the team.

Over the years, editors too bowed in and out, each helpful and patient, particularly in times of stress. Deddington Primary School remained our printing home. We had to fit in after classes and with after-school activities. The latter found us often printing in a tiny space behind a curtain in the school hall, sometimes while a step class was in progress — the music unfortunately not in step with our printer's rhythm.

We were thankful however when we could leave the locking-up of the school to whoever was still there when we left because the school had to be secured and the alarm set by a member of staff. We seldom finished printing until well after 7.00pm or later. No staff member could be expected to wait on us. Once my car was inadvertently locked into the school yard but to my rescue came a guardian angel in the guise of Marilyn Simons, the school caretaker. She was normally the last of the school's staff to leave the premises at about 5.00pm but when she heard of our problems she offered her help.

For many years I fetched her from her home, often disturbing the family supper, drove her back to school to lock and alarm the premises securely before I took her back to her evening meal. Without her help, we would have had to end printing when the last teacher left and resume printing at cock crow when Marilyn opened the school the following morning. Thank you Marilyn.

Six years into the millennium, editor Canon Christopher Hall, thought it high time to move our printing process into the 21st century. All well and good, Pat and I approved, but we needed to be taught, almost by rote, how to work the new system of a laptop linked to a printing machine. After much trial and error, plus advice from computer literate villagers, it was realised that our old printer was simply not compatible with the new laptop. A newer printer model

solved that problem immediately. Pat and I now had two complex machines under our command, their precise tuning vaguely grasped, but we were quite confident in searching on-screen for further instructions and navigating our way to the editor's pages for the right month.

During the coming and going of editor, printer and occasional technicians, we realised a busy school building might no longer be quite ideal and we were becoming a burden to teachers needing extra space for ever-expanding classes. Though the thought of a move was born then, it was not fulfilled until February 2009 in the reign of editors Jill Cheeseman and Mary Robinson. Mary was the first editor, at the birth of the *DN* in 1976, followed by Jill from 1979 to 1982. Throughout the years they remained staunch supporters and now, in part retirement, they took up the challenge.

Quite by the way, and without Pat and I getting wind of it, Jill had arranged the great *DN* move from the school to the Windmill Centre, which gave us a set time, a wonderful open work place in the upper hall and plenty of space to store our equipment.

As I recall, this great move took place on 21 February 2009, early morning, and was carried out by a few community-spirited, strong-armed friends of the *DN*, particularly John Parkinson (Parkie). All I had to do was meet the helpers outside the school, check that none of our stuff was left behind and follow the van transporting our precious printing-machine and clutching its colourful dust cover. A brief note in my diary on 2 March 2009 reads: 'First printing session in upstairs hall of Windmill Centre. Pat and I delighted, sun pouring through windows. Printer behaved beautifully!'

Yes, we were indeed happy and thankful to all who made the move possible. We even had the time to work out that a problem-free print run of 1,050 pages took 12 minutes. That, multiplied by 16 or 18, plus time for setting up and clearing away, would just about give us a rough idea of the time needed to print our monthly edition. However, the stress here is on 'problem free'. Human errors cropped up occasionally, but those were considerably easier to put right than computer or printer malfunction.

Miraculously, help was to come very soon. I say miraculously, because Pat and I met our 'soon to be third printing partner' at the 2010 *DN* Christmas party in the Windmill Centre. Neither of us had met him before and by doing what is usual at parties, got chatting and heard that he had recently retired from work on a national newspaper. I, for one, never quite hear clearly what people say at noisy parties, but the word 'newspaper' struck home. Surely anybody working on a newspaper must know a lot about production?

Our new friend, John Price, was kind enough not to dampen our spirits by explaining that there are untold different jobs in newspaper production and that printing had not been his metier and I left in good Christmas spirits thinking he might, just might, be interested to see us in action. Maybe our editors, Mary and Jill, gave us a helping hand. John joined Pat and me at our next printing session, the end of January 2011.

From the start, printing with Jo Mace and Roy Berridge in 1988, we came to treasure the fact that work shared among three avoided the worry or hassle when one was unable to be present. Now, in 2011, we were back to the same magical number and are most grateful to our latest volunteer who, always most helpful and cheerful (quite surprisingly), has shared our task to this day. Reading through my ramblings to date I realise that some trouble, be it with location, printer, duplicator or laptop, overshadows all the many times

we actually printed without anxiety or delay. That of course, wasn't exciting enough news to store for posterity in my diary. But the very fact that only one serious printer problem delayed the monthly distribution of the *DN* to the village since 1988 is indeed splendid news. For that I want to thank all my editors, Apple Office Equipment and its individual engineers, and foremost all my past and present colleagues with whom I enjoyed some never-to-be-forgotten *DN* printing hours.

I am unwilling to give praise to our presently very willing Risograph printer before our next job is successfully ended. We printers are greatly superstitious and never relax or compliment our printer until the last page has passed over the drum. As for the laptop, Pat, John and our editors are more expert than I am as I belong to the generation who, at primary school, scribbled and scratched their first words on a slate board with chalk.

2016

The complete collection of Ruth Johnson's writings, which originally appeared in Deddington News between 1990 and 2010, can be found [here](#)