



The Letterpress Project

# An Interview With David Macphail

**Q1. What are your earliest memories of books and reading? For example, did you have a favourite or inspirational book?**

Without a shadow of a doubt, the earliest has to be *Haunted House* by Jan Pienkowski. I still have the very copy I used to read when I was a nipper. I have taken very good care of it. All the little pull-out tabs still work. I've passed it on to my daughter. She loves it too. My favourites included *Washington and the Marrow Raiders* by Tessa Krailing, *Witch Week* by Diana Wynne Jones, and *The Watch House* by Robert Westall. I got a lot of my reading tips from a fabulous TV show we had in the 1980s called *The Book Tower*. A lot of people my age will remember it well.

**Q2. What inspired you to become an author / illustrator?**

Probably my mother, Catherine Macphail, who is also a writer. I used to write at her knee when I was a child. I wrote my first full length novel when I was about 8. An epic set during the American Civil War, it ran to 8 full pages of A4 (front and back!). Mum said it was a masterpiece. As yet it has remained unpublished, but I still hold out hopes! We also used to write and record sitcom episodes together based on *Hancock's Half Hour*. I'm so glad we got the chance to work on *White Feather* together.

**Q3. For you, what makes a successful book or illustration?**

Tricky question. Is it book sales or winning awards? Or one single child, just one, who is hooked on every word, reading under the covers with baited breath when they're supposed to be asleep. I'll go with that!

**Q4. Do you have a specific audience in mind when you write your books / plan your illustrations?**

Sadly, only me. I write for myself. Each time. Every time. But of course I do want readers (and publishers obviously) to like it.

**Q5. What future do you think the physical book has? For example, do you think the electronic book will replace the physical book?**

I write e-books for children too, so my view is that anything that gets them reading is a good thing. I don't think e-books will ever replace physical books. I don't see why they both cannot exist together, side by side. There's a place for both.

**Q6. Are you a book collector? Is there a special book you'd love to own?**

Yes! I collect books about World War Two, about Vikings and the Dark Ages, about Philosophy. I'm also interested in The Marx Brothers and Bob Hope. Does all this sound strange and a little bit geeky? It probably is. I was recently invited to appear at the book festival in Wigtown, a tiny place with about 14 bookshops. I was in heaven! I went round each and every one checking out their Viking sections. If someone could track down a genuine copy of Aristotle's lost book on Comedy I'd be most grateful, but alas I think it is unlikely!