



The Federation of Children's Book Groups Newsletter

Summer 2012

Inspiring. Invigorating and Very Enjoyable

Three reasons why I'll be returning to conference next year!



Matt Dickinson leads us on an expedition up Everest. © Candy Gourlay.



Eileen Browne. © Candy Gourlay.



Candy Gourlay proudly displaying her book covers at the publishers stand. © Candy Gourlay.

This year was my first time at conference and it was all I had hoped for and more!

It was inspiring to spend the best part of three days surrounded by people so enthusiastic and knowledgeable about children's literature. It was invigorating; discovering new authors and seeing and hearing "old" favourites made me fall in love with books and great stories all over again. And it was so enjoyable. Everywhere you turned there were people talking about books in a very relaxed atmosphere; it was easy to strike up conversations with strangers and great to catch up with old friends over cake or wine, or both!

One of the highlights for me of this year's conference was Matt Dickinson's session. It may sound unbelievable but he took all of us up Everest! It was exhilarating and exciting and left me waiting impatiently for the first opportunity to reserve his *Mortal Chaos* series at my library. Eileen Brown's engaging presentation about the portrayal (or not) of non-white families in children's books was shocking in revelation and great on detail and resources. Wendy Cooling and Piet Grobler's conversation about illustrating poetry had me wanting to pick up a book of verse for the first time in years. Guy Bass got us all holding our sides laughing, whilst Candy Gourlay dosed us up on enthusiasm and energy.

If you've never been to conference before I'd strongly encourage you to do so even (or perhaps especially) if the sessions are by authors and illustrators you don't know, or are representing a genre that isn't your main interest. This was exactly the situation I was in this year but it turned out to be a gift for I learned so much and came away excited by books I might never have noticed before.

Why else should you attend? Apart from picking up some "insider gossip" from the book industry (who's writing what, which books are being made into films, which author is best company at the bar and so on) conference is also, simply put, a whole lot of fun. It may not be the cheapest way to spend a weekend, but it will certainly be one of the most enriching ways anyone interested in children's literature could spend a few days.

If you've never been before to conference here are some tips:

- Before arriving read a book by as many of the authors/illustrators at conference as possible. I didn't know

every speaker at conference before I went but used this as an excuse to update my book knowledge. I'm so glad I did as it made the talks even more enjoyable.

- Pack as lightly as possible - you'll probably have quite a lot to bring back with you, whether its books, posters or other goodies from publishers and the bookshop.
- Bring something fun to wear for the gala dinner - not at all essential, but it's an opportunity to dress up a little if you like to.
- Visit the publishers' stalls as early as possible in your stay at conference - lots of the best stuff (ARCs, cloth bags, stickers, sweeties) disappear quickly so do timetable enough time early on to really enjoy going around the publishers stands.
- Don't miss the bookshop - run by Marion Brocklehurst an independent bookseller from Norfolk Children's Book Centre, this was easily the best stocked children's bookshop I have ever browsed.
- Pace yourself - Conference is always overflowing with wonderful sessions and if you have the stamina to attend every single one, I admire you! Don't be afraid to take time out to relax, catch up with colleagues, publishers and friends, or maybe even find a quiet corner to start that new book you have been inspired to read...

I'm already saving for next year's conference outside Norwich - I do hope I'll see you there!

Zoe Toft joined the National Executive in February this year, having previously been a member of the FCBG as a child. She spends all her free time reviewing children's books on her blog <http://www.playingbythebook.net/>

Candy Gourlay's first book, *Tall Story*, was published by David Fickling Books in 2010, her website is www.candygourlay.com.

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Korky Paul celebrates 25 years of Winnie the Witch!

Sincere Thanks!

From Sinead and Martin Kromer

A Q&A with Geoff Rodkey



Korky Paul celebrates 25 years of Winnie the Witch!

We were all delighted to join Korky in celebrating *Winnie the Witch's* 25th birthday at the FCBG conference earlier this year, and were somewhat dazzled by his stripy socks, that are a perfect match for Winnie's!

As it is such a landmark year, we at FCBG news put our heads together and came up with a few questions to ask brilliant illustrator Korky Paul about his work and influences, and Winnie of course! Here are his answers:

What has inspired and influenced your brilliantly detailed style?

As a teenager in the sixties I was inspired by the satirical MAD Magazine especially Al Jaffee, Sergio Aragonés, and Mort Drucker. As a boy in the fifties I had three large cardboard boxes filled with Marvel and DC comics – much treasured and very expensive imports in to Zimbabwe.

Whose work do you most admire?

My Grandmother Edith Christie was a brilliant artist who worked in pen and ink with watercolour washes. Her work was filled with beautifully drawn details using black pen and ink. Her work was all over our house (and her own, of course) and I used to study it constantly and closely.

Would you describe the place you draw?

In the basement or the cellar of my house. It's the best room in the house – most warm, comfortable, and the centre of Winnie's Universe.

What are your favourite materials to work with?

Pen and black Indian/Kandahar ink with Schminke watercolours on Saunderson's watercolour paper 90gsm.

What was your first ever illustration job?

Doing posters for teenage parties.

What do you feel is the most important thing you have learnt since then?

Drawing in your own voice, and developing your own unique style.

What is the best piece of advice/feedback/fan mail you've received?

When I told a teacher that *Winnie the Witch* was now 25 years old she said, "I don't believe it! It can't be!" *The illustrations just haven't dated!*

2. That I took as the highest compliment I have been paid by anyone.

How did you go about creating the visual character of Winnie?

It was twenty five years ago so it's hard to remember. As she lived in a black house and went about waving her wand at Wilbur to change him into a colourful cat, I made the decision to make her clothing equally colourful. (This would also help to make her stand out visually in her black house).

Where the red and yellow stripy socks came from I have no idea, but it was an inspired choice. (I have twenty pairs myself).

The bendy and crumpled tip of her witch's hat was a result of me running out of paper when I drew the initial Winnie with the traditional witches peaked hat. I reached the edge of the page, so just drew Winnie's hat bending down to be accommodated.

Was it a conscious decision to go against what could be considered the grain in picture books (ie simplicity), by creating such vastly detailed and intricate images in the Winnie books?

Not a conscious decision at all. Drawing is my passion, and to tell a story through pictures.

What is your personal favourite from everything you have worked on?

Captain Teachum's Buried Treasure and *Winnie in Space*.

Jessica Knight



Above:
Korky in his basement workplace.



Left:
Korky celebrating at the FCBG conference earlier this year.



Martin and Sinead, displaying their new glassware.

We would like to express our sincere thanks and gratitude for the wonderful presentation which was made to us both at Conference. Thank you to those who came up with the idea, thank you to those who organised it and thank you to all those individuals and Book Groups who donated.

When Korky Paul called us forward on the Friday evening at Conference it came as a total surprise! Everyone had somehow managed to keep it a complete secret. It was so appropriate that Korky should make the presentation as he has been a real friend to both of us, as well as to the Federation, for many years.

Sincere Thanks!



The two pieces of glassware are simply stunning. We will cherish them always. All we have to do now is to find a suitable spot to display them where the light brings out their beauty and they are well out of the reach of dogs' tails and grandchildren's little hands.

After all our involvement with the Federation, it was extremely heart-warming, and moving, to realise just how much so many people appreciated all we have done over the years. However, our involvement with the Federation has not come to an end. We have joined the Editorial Team at Carousel and will still be here ready to help whenever and wherever we can.

Sinead and Martin Kromer

Reviews

Black Heart Blue

Louisa Reid, Razorbill, £6.99

For older teenagers.

The story of twin sisters, Hepzibah and Rebecca, this is a beautifully told tragedy, the sisters' lives gradually heading towards a sense of inevitable sadness. The mechanic used, of alternating chapters telling the sisters' individual tales, one leading away from and the other towards a cataclysmic event, lends the story a drive for the discovery of truth about the past, and hope for the future, particularly that history won't repeat itself. It is impossible not to be drawn in to the struggle for freedom that both girls feel.

Black Heart Blue is not an easy read. Emotionally it is very difficult and at times heart-breaking. Its themes are dark, with characters feeling the despair of living through some deeply unpleasant situations. In places this made it an uncomfortable read, as the truth of what was happening slowly dawned, but in the end I found it incredibly gripping, and one of my favourites so far this year.



The Mystery of Wickworth Manor

Elen Caldicott, Bloomsbury, £5.99

Younger Readers

Paige is in her final term of Primary school, and has joined all her future classmates on a week-long trip to get to know each other, and make some new friends. But there's a mystery at Wickworth Manor; stories of a ghost that wanders the halls at night, looking for something or someone. Is the boy in the painting that her new friend Curtis finds his hidden under his mattress the mysterious Wickworth Boy? Are the stories they've heard about him true? The two set out to find out, encountering strange goings on, awkward classmates and angry teachers along the way.

The Mystery of Wickworth Manor is a good, fun read, inspired by the 18th Century painting 'A Negro Coachboy' of a boy who lived in North Wales, and exploring a rarely talked about time in Britain's past, when slavery was still legal. The story has just the right amount of intrigue, with clues turning up in expected ways at unexpected times, and the tension between Paige and Curtis, who don't get off to the best of starts, feels very real.

Elen Caldicott will be answering some questions for us in the next issue, including about how she had to start writing to avoid becoming a master thief.

Reviews by Rebecca Knight



A Q&A with Geoff Rodkey



Geoff's book, *The Chronicles of Egg: Deadweather and Sunrise* tells the tale of a boy named Egg, whose family is neither particularly charming, nor particularly lucky, who suddenly finds himself in a lot of danger when he meets Mr Pembroke, who is particularly charming. The story is well-paced, a whole lot of fun and a perfect summer adventure.

Geoff, who also penned the films *RV* and *Daddy Day Care*, has answered a few of our questions, talking to us not just about the book, but also about the writing process.

1. Did you read a lot when you were growing up? And what did you really enjoy?

I read constantly as a kid. I think that's pretty much universal for people who grow up to be writers—to be a writer, you first have to be a reader.

I liked a lot of different books, not just fiction but non-fiction. My elementary school library had a biography of Geronimo, and I must have re-read that at least three or four times. As far as novels go, I loved Judy Blume and Lloyd Alexander, and both Ellen Raskin's *The Westing Game* and Jean Merrill's *The Pushcart War* were particular favorites.

But the book that affected me the most was Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia*. I read it at age twelve and was absolutely devastated by it. "Enjoy" probably isn't the right word, because I was inconsolable for days after I finished it. But it really got its hooks into me.

2. What are your influences?

There are almost too many to count. As a teenager in the 1980's, Garry Trudeau—who writes a politically-themed comic strip in America called *Doonesbury*—was a huge influence. I learned a lot about the history of the US in the 1960's and 1970's by reading old *Doonesbury* anthologies. Bloom County was another comic strip that had an outsized influence on me. Rock bands, especially British ones—most prominently Motorhead, Black Sabbath, Led Zeppelin, and the Rolling Stones—loom pretty large in my head. When I was a sophomore in college, *The Simpsons* first appeared on TV, and I didn't miss an episode for at least the first five years. As far as writers go, F. Scott Fitzgerald was a big influence, not just *The Great Gatsby* but a lot of his short stories. And my three favorite films are *The Princess Bride*, *Apocalypse Now*, and *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, all of which I've seen at least a dozen times.

3. Where did the idea for Egg and his story come from?

I honestly can't remember where Egg came from. The book series as a whole started with an idea I had for a character who was a pirate. His name was Crooked Pete, and all the other pirates thought he was

cursed, so they wouldn't let him on their ships, and the only job he could get was as a waiter in a pirate-themed restaurant. I thought that was funny, and I started thinking about what kind of world a pirate like that would live in.

Then a kid popped into my head, who'd been orphaned and left in charge of some kind of plantation, and the kid had gotten a little grandiose and power-mad as a result, and he hired Crooked Pete as muscle, because he wanted to intimidate people...but then it slowly became apparent that somebody was trying to kill the kid, and whoever it was had also killed the kid's family, and the kid was in way over his head...

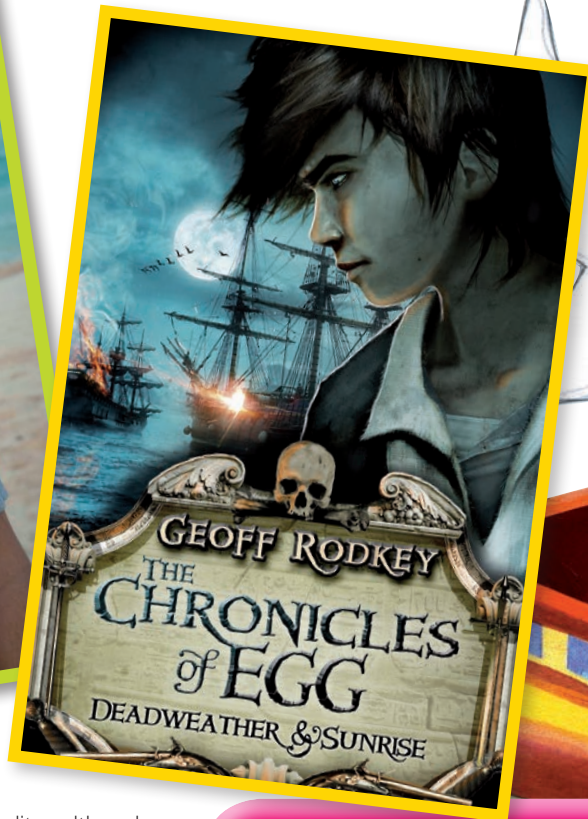
After about two years of thinking about the story off and on, I sat down to write it, and by then Crooked Pete and the pirate-themed restaurant were gone completely, and while the orphaned kid from the plantation was still there, he had a completely different personality. And I can't for the life of me remember how I got from that original kid, who was horribly obnoxious and full of himself; to Egg, who's neither.

But I think the best stories are like that—they start out as one thing, and you play with them for a while, and they become something else.

4. How different was the process of writing a novel, to that of writing a film?

Very different, for a lot of reasons. Film screenplays are very structurally rigorous—you've got to have three acts, act one has to end around page 30, act two ends around page 90, there's an inciting incident by page ten, there's a plot point roughly every ten pages... and so on. I guess you don't HAVE to do it that way, but it's the common language of everyone in the film business, so you're not going to get too far with movie studios if you're not thinking in those terms.

And the film business is collaborative to a fault—not only are dozens, even hundreds, of people involved in the making of a movie (most of whom have more of a say in the process than you do), but if you're writing a studio movie, at some point you're going to get fired and replaced by a different writer. Don't ask me why. That's just how they do it.



When you write a novel, it's just you...and ideally an editor, although when the editor makes suggestions, it's up to you whether or not to follow them (in contrast to film, where if you don't follow the suggestions, you get fired).

And novels are much more open-ended structurally. You still need a beginning, a middle, and an end—there still has to be a strong underlying story—but you can get there at whatever speed and in whatever manner works best for the story.

Partially as a result of that, it's possible to write a novel by the seat of your pants—you can start it without necessarily knowing how you're going to finish it. I was halfway through *Deadweather and Sunrise* before I figured out what the treasure was that everyone was trying to find. I would never, ever do that with a screenplay.

The advantage of writing without being certain where you're headed is that your subconscious tends to be more in control of the writing process. The disadvantage is that sometimes you head down a blind alley and don't realize it until you've wasted a couple weeks of your life.

Novels also take much, much longer to write. A screenplay is about 18,000 words, many of which are slug lines and character names, and it's possible to write a first draft in a few weeks. A novel is more like 75,000 words, and even a quick first draft can take six months or more.

5. Are you working on anything at the moment - and can you give us a hint as to Egg and Millicent's further adventures?

I'm just starting to rewrite my first draft of Book 2. Egg's on dry land for most of the book, running around the cities and wilderness of the New Lands as he tries to solve the problem he finds himself with at the end of *Deadweather and Sunrise*. He'll cross paths with Millicent again, along with a lot of other people he didn't expect to encounter. And he'll get in a great deal of trouble.

Right now, it's a little darker and heavier than Book 1, but I'm working on brightening the corners.

The Chronicles of Egg: Deadweather and Sunrise, published by Puffin and priced at £6.99, is out now.

Rebecca Knight

Like some adventure and looking for something else to read this summer?

Puffin have offered us ten copies of Rick Riordan's *The Kane Chronicles: The Serpent's Shadow* to give away! This is the third and final installment in Rick Riordan's thrilling, action-packed trilogy about Carter and Sadie Kane, descendants of the magical

House of Life, and finds them in pretty big trouble. Despite their bravest efforts, Apophis, the giantsnake of Chaos, is still threatening to plunge the world into eternal darkness. Their only hope is an ancient spell – but the magic has been lost for a millennia. Can they find the *Serpent's Shadow*, or will they be led to their deaths in the depths of the Underworld?

To claim a copy send an email to rebeccajaneknight@googlemail.com details will also be posted on our website: www.fcbg.org.uk.



NEWS from the groups



Thank you to all the groups who send in details about their events. The web site is regularly updated with group activities.

Yeo Valley

Hosted a thrilling 999! Emergency! themed story-telling event in April, with lots of tales about accidents and emergencies of all kinds, as well as activities and an opportunity to meet working members of the emergency services.

July will see the Yeo Valley Reading Gang celebrate the Jubilee, discussing books about the Queen, and possibly even finding out about *The Queen's Knickers!*

Aldbourne CBG

Hosted a painting and prop-making session at the end of June for their Carnival float, so far their theme remains a mystery to us!

They are also looking forward to a Sunday with Eileen Browne author of *Boo, Boo Baby and the Giraffe*, amongst other favourites, in early July. This promises to be a lot of fun, with garden activities for children up to 6.

Wolverhampton

The last few months have seen a few authors in Wolverhampton, with Sarwat Chadda visiting them in May as part of the HarperCollins *Spill the Ink* tour, and Kate O'Hearn visiting a couple of their local schools in June. Elen Caldecott, whose latest book is reviewed on page 3, will visit them in July.



Don't forget that you can keep up with events on the website www.fcbg.org.uk and many of the groups now have their own website where you can find even more ideas!

They are also very happy that Chris Bradford, author of the *Young Samurai* series, will be visiting them in July. Chris' events are very exciting and promise the opportunity to witness an authentic samurai sword display, listen and watch a dynamic all-kicking, all-punching book reading and visit Japan with a video tour from the author's research trips! It sounds like it will be a lot of fun!

Oxford CBG

As well as holding their annual BookSwap, Oxford has been busily celebrating their 20th anniversary, with lots of events.

John Foster has been visiting schools and World Book Day was celebrated with popular author Cressida Cowell. The event was great fun; an important day for dragon lovers of all descriptions who were able to pick up some excellent tips on training their own.

They were also visited by Harriet Castor, the author of *VIII*, an exciting book about the Tudor king, Henry VIII. After visiting three separate secondary schools, Harriet wrote about the visit on her blog (where you will also find an account of her visit to Ipswich CBG!) You can find it at <http://www.hmcaster.com/blog/>

Lewes CBG

Hosted a highly interesting talk from Laura Atkins, from the National Centre for Research in Children's Literature. She outlined her personal journey from the liberal west coast of the USA, where she was made aware of the importance of reflecting the many strands of society and cultures in books for the young, to New York where she worked in mainstream publishing and continued to press for diversity and inclusion before coming to the UK. Through research, teaching and personal contact she encourages readers, writers, illustrators, publishers and students to share a rich variety of values and stories.

They have also been holding regular book swaps – as always an opportunity to find something new to read!

South Bucks

Have had an incredibly busy few months, continuing their regular programme of book swaps and bedtime story sessions. They've also been up to some exciting, nature-themed, non-fiction summer half-term activities and celebrated the Diamond Jubilee, back in April, with a 'Kings and Queens' themed event.

At the end of June they have held a 'Members Only' event, an after-hours visit to the Beacon Bookshop in Beaconsfield, where the owner was on hand to recommend and review the latest releases, followed by refreshments at a nearby secret garden location!

St Albans CBG

Have joined up with a local museum to run a series of story-telling and activity sessions on the last Sunday of each month. So far they have covered the colourful stories of Brian Wildsmith, stories from different countries, and *The Queen's Knickers!* The theme for the last Sunday in July is sports inspired stories, as long as everyone's recovered from watching the Olympic opening ceremony!

Don't forget to send all your Group News to

rebeccajaneknight@googlemail.com and keep up with all events on the website: www.fcbg.org.uk



www.fcbg.org.uk

An Exciting New Venture for North West London Children's Book Group: Win Two Free Tickets to Meet Anthony Horowitz!

One of the pleasures of living in London is that there's always something to do. Finding a way to make books a part of our busy children's lives is even more challenging here than it is elsewhere. But the North West London Children's Book Group has now found a way to make this happen and has initiated an exciting new relationship with a flagship event centre in central London at the same time.

On October 29th Anthony Horowitz will be launching the new Words on Monday for Children series at King's Place in London and promoting his new book *Oblivion*. London's newest concert halls and exhibition space opened in King's Cross in 2008; the award-winning building with concert halls lined in oak from a single tree, provides a wonderfully creative environment for our events.

To add to the atmosphere, the Camden Somerstown Children's Jazz Band will be playing in the foyer beforehand. The Top 10 shortlist for the Red House Book Awards 2013 will also be announced here. A selection of books will be available for sale afterwards and Anthony will be signing copies of his new book.

Further events will take place on the first Monday of every half term; tickets will be on sale on-line at www.kingsplace.co.uk at £9.50 for adults and £6.50 for children. But if your Federation group would like a pair of free tickets to offer as a competition prize, contact Daniella on daniella.gluck@talktalk.net.

Next year's schedule is equally exciting with Jacqueline Wilson coming on February 18th and Malorie Blackman on May 27th. We hope Words on Monday for Children will become a focus event for the London Book Group and for the Federation as a whole. We look forward to seeing you there.

Daniella Gluck

Rebecca Knight, the new editor.



www.fcbg.org.uk

Your New Newsletter Editor: Rebecca Knight

Hi! Officially I took over last issue, but we had so much to go into it, that there just wasn't space to introduce myself properly.

I first learned of the Federation when I was ten, when my family joined the York Children's Book Group (now folded). I have very fond memories of face-painting in our local supermarket, and storytelling sessions at school fetes, as well as eagerly anticipating the arrival of bags full of books for testing. This early involvement clearly had a very strong effect on me, as I've never found anything I loved more than curling up with a good book, particularly a children's book – and has affected the choices I made for University (English) and afterwards (initial ambitions of becoming a librarian soon translated into a Primary PGCE.)

I joined the Executive committee a couple of years ago to support the continuation of a charity that I know did me a lot of good, and have been working on the newsletter since. I have also just taken over responsibility for the FCBG website, which feels like quite a daunting task, but one that I'm looking forward to getting to grips with as we are all agreed that it needs some updating. Julia has done such a fantastic job with the newsletter and the website for the past few years, so I'm hoping I can keep up her standards!

Favourite books:

I find this too difficult, but I grew up with *Harry Potter* (I was a tester when the first book came out, and was at the Children's Book Award ceremony in 1999, when *Chamber of Secrets* won) as well as Phillip Pullman, Roald Dahl, Brian Jacques, Robin Jarvis and Robert Swindells.

Things I have enjoyed recently:

Black Heart Blue – Louisa Reid, full review, page 3.

Peaches for M. le Curé – Joanne Harris, the sequel to *Chocolat*, taking Vianne Rocher and her children back to Lansquenet-sous-Tannes, and just as much of a sensuous treat!

The Other Worlds exhibition at The Story Museum, Oxford – this was a real delight, lots of rooms full of wonder and whimsy, and so many different stories sparked. It is sadly now finished, but I do recommend keeping an eye on www.thestorymuseum.org.uk!



In the news...

Kevin Crossley-Holland takes up role as SLA President

The School Library Association (SLA) is delighted to announce that from June 10th 2012 the distinguished and award winning author Kevin Crossley-Holland will take up his role as President of the SLA.

Kevin Crossley-Holland is a prize-winning writer of many books for children, a well-known poet and author of a memoir of childhood, *The Hidden Roads*.

Crossley-Holland has translated *Beowulf* from the Anglo-Saxon, and his retellings of traditional tale include *The Penguin Book of Norse Myths* and *British Folk Tales* (reissued as *The Magic Lands*). We offer our congratulations to him on this new role.

The Children's Bookshow turns 10!

This year *The Children's Bookshow* has a lot to celebrate as they turn 10! They now reach over 6000 children every year, giving them access to the very best writers and illustrators from all over the world. 2012 sees a thrilling line up of artists - 11 authors and illustrators performing in 12 venues across the country and a programme of free workshops in schools through the Autumn.

From internationally acclaimed artists such as Ulf Stark (Sweden) and Carll Cneut (Belgium), to household favourites Michael Rosen and Alexis Deacon, *The Children's Bookshow* is set to inspire and delight children with great poems, beautiful illustrations and fabulous stories. For details see <http://www.thechildrensbookshow.com>

Highly successful first event for Luton Hoo's Children's Book Festival!

Organised with the help of ex-Federation Chair Jayne Truran, the first Luton Hoo Children's Book Festival took place in May. Over 1740 visitors braved the overcast weather to enjoy a feast of activities that took place throughout the day. Audiences were enthralled by talks from Cressida Cowell, Kes Gray, James Mayhew, Justin Somper and Jonathan Stroud and, as well as taking the opportunity to ask questions and get their books signed, listened to folk singers and a travelling poet, and even had the opportunity to 'sow a word'!

Take a look at:

<http://www.lhwg.org.uk/ChildrensFestival.html> to learn more about the event, and keep a look out for information about next year!!

Copy deadline for the next issue is October 27th 2012.

Please send all group news, ideas and photos to Rebecca Knight

Follow us on Twitter @FCBGNews, and on Facebook and don't forget our website: www.fcbg.org.uk

Editorial Team - Rebecca Knight, Daniella Gluck, Ellie John, Jessica Knight and Louise Stothard

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The next Executive meeting is
20th October 2012.

All meetings are held at
80, Strand, London.

Please tell Julia two weeks
beforehand if you wish to
attend as an observer.

