

# A Greener And More Pleasant Land?



Three years after her first talk at a GCA AGM on the subject of the environment, and how the greeting card industry could 'green up its act', Sue Morrish, co-founder of Glebe Cottage, was invited to take up the 'green baton' once again at the trade association's most recent annual gathering.

There is no denying that Sue was the woman for the job. The environmental credentials of Glebe Cottage (the greeting card publishing company that she and her husband Scott founded) are 'squeaky green'. Last summer for example, it was presented with the top award in the prestigious Business Commitment to the Environment (BCE) Environmental Leadership Awards for its 'inspirational' commitment to eco-friendly publishing. "Last year's winner was Sainsbury's, so bearing in mind that at Glebe Cottage there are only six of us, two of whom are part time, we really felt this was a bit of a David and Goliath achievement," Sue said.

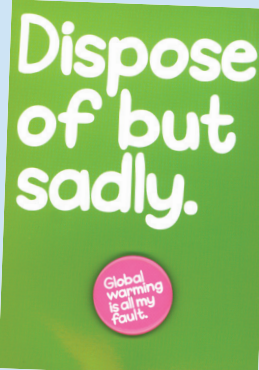
But looking at another 'David and Goliath' situation – the greeting card industry being the 'David' and the environment being the 'Goliath', Sue feels strongly that the greeting card industry could and should be doing more on the environmental front.

Looking back at how the environmental landscape has changed since her appearance

When Sue Morrish, co-founder of Glebe Cottage, spoke at the GCA AGM in 2007 about her hopes and dreams of growing a greener greeting card industry, she was looking out at a different landscape to the vista today. Some of the hills have been climbed (a greater availability of FSC accredited board for one), while other dark valleys have come into view. A worsening economic climate has pushed the eco-credentials further down the agenda for some, while brokerage and SOR agreements have caused wastage to soar.

PG finds out more about the environmental lay of the land with the industry's 'green goddess'.

at the GCA AGM in 2007, Sue said: "A lot has happened. In some areas, change has certainly been for the good, and the transition to Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified printers and boards seems to have gathered a healthy sense of momentum. Specialist paper supplier GF Smith, for example, reports that over 70% of its range is now either FSC certified or recycled, which is clearly good news. Back in 2007, FSC-certified printers were few and far between. Compostable bags were new to the market, and new ways of thinking about our 'environmental footprints' were only just creeping into the mainstream."



Top left: The increased availability (and use) of FSC board, compostable bags plus improvements on the environmental front in the production process has made the industry a more 'green and pleasant land' as depicted in this Glebe Cottage design.

Left: A Waldo Pancake badge from Really Good. Below: Glebe Cottage director Sue Morrish accepting the award from Sir Anthony Cleaver, president of the BCE Environmental Leadership Awards last year.

However, looking at a wider contest, she went on, "unfortunately, and perhaps inevitably, the economic slow-down has slowed-down environmental progress in many areas. Both paper supply and pricing have become significant problems for publishers. The economic downturn has led to an 11% reduction in paper consumption in Europe and the closure of many European Mills, not to mention strikes at Scandinavian mills." This has had a knock-on effect on rising paper prices as well as availability, most notably on board which has a recycled content.

"While there is a wider choice of FSC board, sadly the choice of board and envelopes, which are made from recycled, or have a high recycled content, is less than it was since two brands



of 50% recycled coated board, Gemini and Robert Horne's 50-50, have been dropped from the market," explains Sue.

But building on the positives, Sue feels that publishers who have made conscious environmental decisions (such as moving to FSC board) could do more to tell the consumer and the retailer.

In the last few years especially, many publishers have made the transition from not knowing or asking where their board comes from, to a specific expectation that their board comes from a certified source. Yet, as Sue points out, "in many cases, there is no reference to the environmental credentials on the card at all, or worse, it is a vague claim about 'sustainability' of forests."

With the help and guidance from Defra on its revised online document, Guidance on Environmental Claims on Greeting Cards, Sue feels that much could be done by publishers to improve this situation and leave the industry less open to criticism and the consumer is better informed.

"Environmentally meaningful and verifiable green claims are important in this industry. When they are done well, they enable the consumer to make positive environmental choices about how they shape the world," she adds.

Sue feels that there is a real opportunity that is not being realised on the FSC front. "I undertook a straw poll of different card publishers recently. Two thirds said they are now using FSC-certified board, yet only a quarter printed the FSC logo on their cards, a decision that generally boiled down to either 'cost' or 'design,'" she highlights.

As the FSC logo was originally conceived to deal with the labeling of timber, the logo and the current required accompanying wording does not sit aesthetically well on the back of a delicately designed card. "Perhaps this is something the GCA could champion on the greeting card industry's behalf?" suggests Sue.

Another area that she feels should be 'championed' by card publishers is a wider use of recycled materials, including envelopes.

"Over half the publishers I spoke to recently had no idea what type of paper their



*Below right: A Here Come the Girls design from Glebe Cottage's, its first range to be printed on 100% board.  
Below left: A real 'love the environment' from Glebe's Immorato range.  
Left: A Glebe design that highlights how the environmental landscape still has some 'dark patches'.*

envelopes were made of. An envelope supplier reckons that only 5% of the envelopes used by card publishers are made of recycled paper. To my mind, this percentage should be higher."

While sourcing decisions about choice of board, envelopes, compostable bags, as well as a commitment to more green measures in the general



running of their businesses, will all contribute to a 'greening' of the greeting card industry, Sue feels that that the trade should really be taking steps to confront what she describes as, 'the environmental elephant in the room' - the unnecessary waste that is generated through SOR agreements and brokerage schemes.

"I am well aware that this is a thorny issue, but from talking to publishers, there is a real heartfelt sense of frustration over the waste that is generated through sale-or-return, brokerage or over supply. This waste is costly, both environmentally as well as financially."

Accepting that she has more questions than answers on this front, Sue provokingly asks: "If neither the broker nor the retailer will bear the cost of cards that are thrown away, how is it possible to create a 'no waste' mindset? What systems are there to ensure that we don't deliver 12 cards of one design one week, only to dump 11 of them the next?"

Answers on a postcard please!

## A Well-Balanced Argument

Facing up to environmental concerns at Spring Fair, Cath Tate Cards launched Face It, a range that debuted its use of carbon-balanced board that is endorsed by the World Land Trust.

**Cath Tate, founder of the company, shares her views:**

"I think everyone, not just card publishers, should be placing environmental issues higher up the agenda. In our daily lives most of us use far more resources than the earth can sustain just by the way we live.

All our cards (both new designs as well as reprints) are now being printed on carbon balanced paper. This means that any carbon footprint that is produced when the paper is manufactured, eg the energy needed to run machines and petrol to transport products around, is being offset by the World Land Trust, which pays to replant and reforest areas of rainforest that is threatened with redevelopment.

We have had a good response to the Face It range that we launched at Spring Fair, debuting the new board. I suspect that they are selling well because people like the cards rather than because they are carbon balanced, but as we include the World Land Trust logo on the backs of them, it will help to raise awareness and give the consumers reassurance about their purchase.



While Oxfam has a very stringent environment policy (all the new products stocked in its shops have to be ethically and environmentally sound), surprisingly few other shops ask anything about the environmental impact of our paper. They seem more interested in the price that I am charging them!"

*Above: One of the designs from Cath Tate's new Face It range.  
Left: Cath Tate, checks the first sheet of Face It cards as they come off the press at printers Sherwood Press with representatives of paper company Rothera Breerton.*