



## Questions for: Orna O'Brien

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*The London Book Fair conference manager contributes to our Q&A series*



***Describe your current job in one sentence***

Just the one sentence?! Creating conferences, seminars, content and awards and finding people - not in a "missing persons" way you understand! But a lot of my time is spent looking for the right person to do something for LBF: speak, judge, moderate, MC, become a partner, join a committee...

***What was your first job in the book industry?***

Executive assistant: training at the Booksellers Association, having left secondary school teaching after two years. Bizarrely, just as I began answering these questions, an invite appeared in my inbox to a retirement party: for Tim Godfray, long-time head of the BA!

***Who has been the most influential person in your career?***

Tricky to name just one: but if I must, my first boss at the Publishing Training Centre, an ex OUP journals editor, Jean Hindmarch. I learnt a lot about problem solving, thinking laterally, the publishing industry, and much more, from her.

***How has the industry changed since your first job?***

How long have you got?! Ebooks, audio, podcasts, self-publishing, Open Access, and Amazon were not even seeds of ideas back then. We couldn't have made it up! "Alexa - play my favourite audiobook"!

***What's the biggest challenge in your job?***

Creating content and events that capture the attention of increasingly sophisticated, informed and demanding audiences: this is probably the greatest challenge.

***What's the best piece of book-related advice you've ever been given?***

They say everyone has a book in them: but not all should be unleashed! I'll certainly keep mine firmly under lock and key!



***What are the most interesting things you're seeing at the moment in the industry?***

Change is the only constant in the book world, from self-publishing, the rise of audiobooks, to the steps being taken to create a more inclusive industry, with more diverse authors and books. The blurring of the discrete creative industries is fascinating to witness, as is the happy fact that book IP continues to form the basis of most of the best entertainment on offer.

***What do you think might be the next big thing?***

Impossible question: I don't profess to be a futurist! But I shall certainly be on the lookout!

***What do you most like doing when you're not working?***

Gardening, cycling, reading and socialising.

***What is the best book you've read in the last year?***

*Milkman*, Anna Burns. I chose it for book group, which happened to be on the same night as the Man Booker dinner. We discovered during our animated discussions that evening on our previous book that *Milkman* had won, so maybe I can anticipate the future after all.

***What are you reading now?***

*The Wall*, John Lanchester: not exactly uplifting, but really compelling and thought provoking.

***How do you like to read: on screen, on paper, or do you listen to audio books?***

I'm firmly a physical book bod: I spend too much time on screens for work. I do however listen to the odd audiobook. It feels like a real treat to have someone read to you, and reminiscent of my childhood.

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