

NEWSLETTER NUMBER 6 – December 2020 Edited by Anne Taylor

A Christmas edition of the newsletter, based on illustrations. There has been a bonus for the Society arising from lockdown – members are sorting and clearing their houses. I have received several items for our archives and have used one of these here. Thank you to the de-clutterers.

Thank you also to member Roger Smalley for alerting me to his book on *Political Dissent in Westmorland* and its section on Theodora Wilson Wilson – Theodora deserves to be better known.

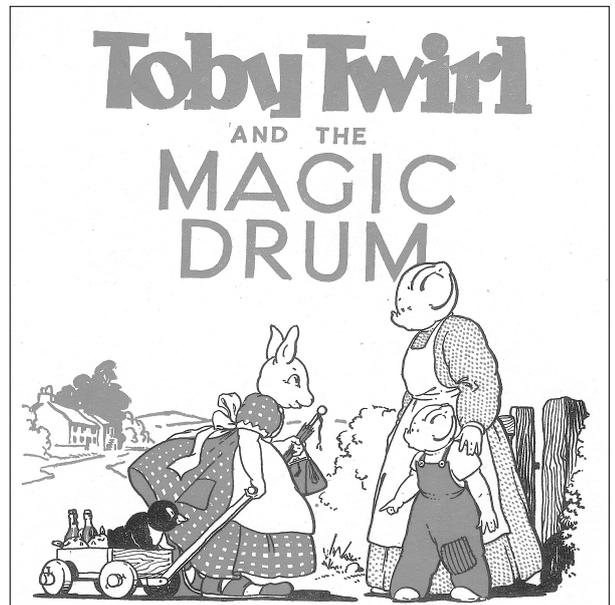
Committee members are meeting on Zoom and exchanging emails, planning next year’s schedule. We hope to send this out with the January newsletter.

The **Zoom meeting** for all members on **Monday 14 December 2020 at 7pm** is confirmed: one of Keith Jagger’s wonderful film-quiz series set in the Eden valley. As with the Bench Walk Zoom meeting, members of Nateby & Wharton WI have been invited too. Make a brew or pour out some mulled wine, heat up a mince pie and sit back to enjoy the movie. **Please email me if you wish to sign up.**

Anne Taylor at241@cam.ac.uk



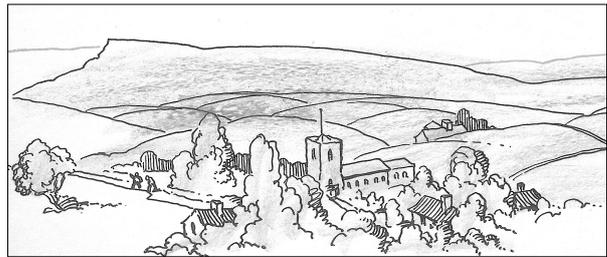
TOBY TWIRL ADVENTURE BOOKS
many thanks to Tim Cradock
for this donation to our archives



How many members of a certain age were given

these books as a Christmas or birthday present? They were produced between 1946 and 1958, giving Rupert Bear a serious rival.

Why might we be interested? The stories were written by Sheila Hodgetts and illustrated by Edward Jeffrey. Jeffrey was an excellent landscape painter, exhibiting widely in London and the provinces, and took commissions for paintings and pub signs. He was also an illustrator, working for the publishing company Sampson Low. Sheila’s father was Managing Director of Sampson Low, so Jeffrey was the obvious choice as illustrator for Toby Twirl. Born in 1898, he studied art at Newcastle upon Tyne and in 1946 he and his family moved to ‘Chantry Studios’ in Ravenstonedale.



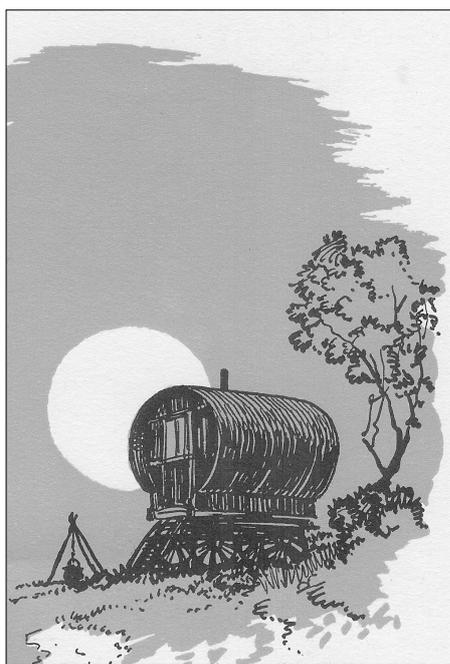
Tim Cradock presented his copy (published in 1948, the 3rd in the Adventure Series) to UEHS archives with a note – go to pages 47 and 97, the hill in the background is obviously Wild Boar Fell.

Jeffrey’s drawings of Toby, dressed in T-shirt and dungarees, were based on a toy piglet his wife was making at the time. Toby’s friends are also toy animals; the title page (page 5, opposite) for the first story shows Mrs Twirl, Winnie Wallaby and Pete Penguin.

Jackie Wedd, from Ravenstonedale Parish History Group, has carried out research on Edward Jeffrey and makes the following comments: ‘Many of the illustrations came from his sketch book, preparatory sketches for his commissioned work but also excellent source material for the Toby Twirl books. The house in the background of page 5 (opposite), and used again on page 42, is Townhead Cottage, at the south end of Ravenstonedale village. It is a very accurate depiction and used often by Jeffrey in his books’.

He was particularly fond of beech trees, and the few adults in the book – mostly farmers – were probably drawn from life too, from Ravenstonedale, Gaisgill, Orton or Kelleth.

And surely the bow top belonged to travellers on their way to Appleby Fair?



Some of the Toby Twirl books have become quite valuable as collectors' items, but Upper Eden History Society will not have to take out extra insurance as a result of this donation – the simple colour scheme of the original has been liberally 'enhanced' in crayon by its young owner.

Sources:

Tim Cradock, personal communication
Jackie Wedd, personal communication
Toby Twirl Adventure Books: A Collectors Guide, 2003, Martin Hockley



A NORTH-COUNTRY TOWN as portrayed by Theodora Wilson Wilson 1865 to 1941

Theodora was a Quaker, pacifist, suffragist and author, born and brought up in a large well-to-do Kendal family, studied music in Germany and returned to Kendal in 1901. Theodora moved to London when her mother died in 1909 and joined the Labour Party in 1914, wanting 'to solve the social and political problems of the day, and [...] prepared to flout the accepted conventions in order to do so' (quote from Smalley, see Sources).

She wrote 62 books: bible stories and adventure stories for children as well as *The Last Weapon* published in 1916. This was a hugely popular book, reprinted 3 times, showing the futility of war and warning about the possibility of more devastating weapons. It was banned by the government of the time for being too anti-war,

and 18,000 copies were seized and pulped in March 1918. A few have survived and a crowd-funding website was set up last year to try to republish it. Her first book *T' Bacca Queen* (1901) 'paints a grim picture of overcrowding, squalor and exploitation [in Kendal]' (quote from Smalley, see Sources).

Many of her children's stories are set in the Lake District and at least two are based at Brentholme, a small north-country town with a canal, river, railway line and ruined castle. In *Jim's Children* (1912) Jim Renton is manager of Castle Mills, 'the great Renton woollen mill' where 'dirty, oily fleeces [are turned] into beautiful travelling rugs, and tweeds, and clothing for horses.' This could be any one of a number of northern towns but, even without studying the small sketch at the start of the book (see page 3 of this newsletter), it soon becomes obvious that this town is Kendal. Where else is mint cake made? 'A kind of solid sugar, very strongly saturated with peppermint' (page 64).

The author explains that Castle Mills was so called 'because ages ago it had been a flour mill for the lords of Brentholme when they lived at the Castle.' Compare this with the description by Andrew White in his 2013 book about Kendal: 'this site is a very ancient one, originating as the lord's manorial cornmill operating in the late twelfth century.' Theodora knew her history.

The illustrator was Gordon F Browne (1858 to 1932), a well-known illustrator who undertook a great deal of research for his drawings. It is thought that he produced over 3000 illustrations for a wide range of magazines, and for books by authors as varied as Walter Scott, E Nesbit and Daniel Defoe. Browne lived in Richmond, Surrey and was the son of 'Phiz' who illustrated the books by Charles Dickens. Did George Browne come to Kendal to draw the sketch map, and the surrounding countryside as a source for his illustrations?

Sources:

- About *The Last Weapon*, article by Rae Street: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/oct/10/a-book-banned-for-promoting-peace>
- *Agitate! Educate! Organise! Political Dissent in Westmorland from 1880 to 1930*, 2013, Roger Smalley, CWAAS
- *A History of Kendal*, 2013, Andrew White
- *Jim's Children*, 1912, Theodora Wilson Wilson
- *Cousins in Camp*, 1933, Theodora Wilson Wilson – with the same family as *Jim's Children*

Wikipedia:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gordon_Browne

