

A Lost Legacy:
**A Critical Assessment and Catalogue
of the Illustrated Work of Ernest Aris**

**Alfred Ernest Walter George Aris
(22 April, 1882 -1963)**

Children's Author, Illustrator and Commercial Artist

Volume I : Critical Assessment

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Errata

Volume I

Page 48, line 2 footnote added: See also Dudley Chignall, 'Ernest Aris (1882-1963): The Man Who Drew for Potter and Blyton', *Book and Magazine Collector*, No. 278, February 2007, 44-62. (p. 46).

Page 102, line 13 footnote added: See also Dudley Chignall, *The Man Who Drew for Beatrix Potter – Ernest Aris*, (Witham: private publication, 2010

Page 108, line 11 emended to: Chignall has suggested in conversation, it may have been the "Grammar School or The Old College, which were prep schools for Eton, Harrow and other public schools."

Page 120, line 14 emended to "south of the valley".

Page 120, line 16 emended to "preliminary sketch ... of the Langdale Pikes"

Page 120, line 16 footnote added: Chignall, *ibid.*

Page 195, line 13 emended to Chignall's private collection.

Volume II

Page 7 line 3: emended to: unique illustrated list.

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Abbreviations

COPAC	is a registered trademark of the University of Manchester, no longer standing for CURL Online Public Access Catalogue.
Cos'	Conscientious Objectors.
ed.	Editor.
HBH	Beatrix Heelis (nee Potter).
HFHS	Henry Frowde Hodder & Stoughton.
IS	International School.
ICS	International Correspondence School.
LMS	London, Midland and Scottish Railway.
LSTC	London and Suburban Traction Company.
LUT	London United Tramways.
NCC	Non-Combatant Corps.
MET	Metropolitan Electric Tramways.
PULHEEM	Acronym used during WW1. Known today as PULHHEEMS, which is a system of grading physical and mental fitness used by Britain's armed forces. It is an abbreviation for the factors it is intended to test. These include: Physique Upper limbs Lower limbs (or 'Locomotion', as this includes the back) Hearing (left) Hearing (right) Eyesight left (corrected / uncorrected) Eyesight right (corrected / uncorrected) Mental function Stability (emotional)
RA	Royal Academy RA.
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corp.
RCA	Royal College of Art.
RI	Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolour.
RBA	Royal Society of British Artists.
RWS	Royal Watercolour Society.
UERL	Underground Electric Railway Companies of London Ltd., or Underground Group.
WW1	World War I.
V& A	Victoria and Albert Museum.

Abstract

Ernest Alfred Walter George Aris FZS, SGA, (1882–1963) was born in Islington and moved to Bradford where he spent his formative years and attained a diploma at the Bradford Technical College of Fine Art in 1900. Aris was a professionally trained commercial artist, author, and prolific illustrator of 170 children's and natural history books. He also illustrated over 250 books for other authors, including Enid Blyton, Beatrix Potter, and May Byron, as well as contributing to a number of leading periodicals, magazines and newspapers. Aris was not a member of any of the active artists' clubs or societies and was possibly shunned by his contemporaries and peers, who considered him unoriginal and an unscrupulous opportunist. Volume I of this thesis seeks to examine these suggestions and assesses why Aris's name, despite his significant output, has remained relatively anonymous and why much of his legacy appears to have been unidentified, overlooked or forgotten.

Chapter 1 discusses the historical influences of anthropomorphism on Aris's style and those of his immediate predecessors. I have categorised Aris's books into three periods for this appraisal and examined his technical attributes and qualities, together with his trademark features and characteristics, with the purpose of identifying what makes Aris's creative design instantly recognisable and his output of illustration so distinctive.

Chapter 2 discusses Aris's relationship with the children's author and illustrator, Beatrix Potter. Aris holds a unique place in history in that he was commissioned by Beatrix Potter to provide illustrations for her book and was the only artist with whom she seriously contemplated a professional working partnership (1916). However, Frederick Warne and Beatrix Potter later accused Aris of plagiarism and of exploiting any opportunity to achieve a commercial advantage. There is an argument to suggest that Aris's affiliation with Potter and the allegations

of plagiarism had a significant impact on his long term reputation and was possibly the reason for adopting the pseudonym Robin A. Hood.

Chapter 3 examines the creative scope and features of Aris's prestigious commercial partnerships. These start from the beginning of his professional career at the turn of the twentieth century, which coincided with the technical development and advancement of the colour picture postcard. Aris was at the forefront of this revolution, designing several series of comic and humorous postcards for leading printers that are now associated with and representative of a bygone era. In 1915 Aris was commissioned to design six tram posters, which were selected by Frank Pick at London Transport, as part of the National Collection of Posters. Pick single handedly revolutionised poster art in Britain and was responsible for establishing the national collection, where these posters now reside and have remained forgotten and out of sight for the last century. In the 1920s the trend for collecting novelty cigarette cards enabled Aris to produce a number of outstanding natural history designs as well as the infamous *Frisky* series, where his mischievous sense of humour is much evident in his trademark characters. Perhaps Aris's final and greatest legacy, however, lies in the legendary Cococubs campaign for Bournville Children's Cocoa, which was described as 'one of the cleverest publicity schemes of the year.'¹ The success of the advertising campaign meant demand outstripped supply of the product, as youngsters eagerly sought the 'free toy in every tin' promotional figurines that Aris designed (1934-1936).

Volume II of this thesis comprises of a unique catalogue of Aris's creative output over fifty years and spans a range of commercial fields of art. The catalogue is divided into four parts. Part one consists of Aris's literary publications, with a detailed bibliographic record and image of the cover of each book that he wrote and illustrated under his own name and pseudonyms, as

¹ *The Grocery and the Provision Merchant Journal*, November 1934, p. 276.

well as prominent books Aris illustrated for other eminent authors and a compendium list of books Aris illustrated for authors and other publications. Part two is a record of Aris's commercial work, including the early series of pictorial postcards that he completed for leading quality publishers at the start of his career (1904-1909) and the six pictorial natural history posters, which Aris was commissioned to undertake for the London Transport tram system (1915). Part three comprises of Aris's collectables and contains the four unique series of cigarette cards that Aris designed for leading tobacco manufacturers (issued 1929-1935). Part four includes a comprehensive description of each of the limited editions and subtle colour variants of the Cococub lead figurines inserted into Bournville Children's Cocoa (1934-1936).

The aim of the thesis is to justify why I believe Aris deserves further merit for his contribution within the field of illustration and commercial artwork. I have sought to highlight the factors that make his contribution and the success of his creative designs within these different fields so significant.

Introduction

In 1997, after a career in the City of London, I became immensely interested in the work of children's illustrators in the early decades of the twentieth century, an era considered by leading authorities and experts in this field to be the 'golden period' of children's book illustration.² My attention was drawn to the exceptional creative innovation and artistic talent of these illustrators, whose designs provided innocent humour and excitement. However, today many of these illustrated tales are broadly classified as having a conventional moral tone with traditional language and prose, and the texts have a certain nostalgia associated with an epoch now lost. Another aspect which drew my curiosity was the fact that so little is known about many of these eminent artists' lives, and, furthermore, only a minority have had their complete works accurately recorded and catalogued.

Perusing the old book shops of Bath, I was beguiled by the window display of George Bayntun, one of the world's most famous bookshops and home to the Bayntun-Riviere bindery, which dates back to 1829. The bookshop specialises in fine bindings, first and illustrated editions, with an emphasis on English literature, and familiar and unusual books. Displayed in the window was a small compact book with a striking cover which caught my attention,

² Books dealing with the 'golden period' of children's book illustration include John Barr, *Illustrated Children's Books* (London: British Library, 1986), David Bland, *A History of Book Illustration* (Cleveland and New York: World Publishing Company, 1958), Marcus Crouch, *Treasure Seekers and Borrowers, Children's Books in Britain 1900-1960* (London: Library Association, 1962), Richard Dalby, *The Golden Age of Children's Book Illustration* (London: O'Mara, 1991), Debora Denenholz Morse and Martin A. Danahay, *Victorian Animal Dreams: Representations of Animals in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), Brian Doyle, *The Who's Who of Children's Literature* (London: Hugh Evelyn, 1968), Peter Hunt, *Children's Literature: An Illustrated History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), Diana L. Johnson, *Fantastic Illustration and Design in Britain 1850-1930, Bulletin of Rhode Island School of Design* (Rhode Island: Museum of Art, 1979), Susan E. Meyer, *A Treasury of the Great Children's Book Illustrators* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997), Margaret R. Slythe, *The Art of Illustration 1750-1900* (London: Library Association, 1970), Joyce Irene Whalley and Tessa Rose Chester, *A History of Children's Book Illustration* (London: John Murray with the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1988).

Bunnikin Brighteyes The Indian (1916) by Ernest Aris. The interior had a detailed illustrated frontispiece, with technically competent colourful illustrations of anthropomorphic creatures accompanying the narrative prose, and an array of vignettes printed in sepia. As a botanical illustrator with an attraction to themes of nature, I was instantly captivated by the subject matter and the creative technical skill of the artist. I purchased two other books by Aris in Bayntun's collection and wondered why I had not seen or recognised this particular artist's work before. I spent many days researching Aris and it became evident that he had actively been involved in a number of other commercial fields of creative art. Nevertheless, with the exception of booksellers and collectors of associated ephemera, Aris was relatively unknown. I discovered there are few references recorded in terms of biographical details other than in *Who's Who 1947*, or written by critics regarding his creative activities and the work he contributed to children's book illustration. It became apparent that Aris was one of many historical figures whose illustrated legacy had been forgotten; only a solitary portrait is now known to exist that was taken from his book *Fishing: A Comprehensive Guide to Freshwater Angling* (1947) (fig 1.1).

The main reason for embarking on this thesis about Aris was that I wished to make a contribution to a field which was of personal interest (stemming from my own interest in natural history and illustration), and in which I could discuss the work of the artist and undertake a critical assessment based on my previous experience and knowledge. The material in this thesis draws on completely new and original research, including the location of documentation in national archives connected with Aris that has remained hidden until now. This thesis will seek to assert that Aris deserves further attention by means of a discussion of all his illustrated work and a complete catalogue of his written and illustrated books, creative designs for posters, cigarette cards, postcards and commercial products. Aris's name is only remembered in biographical notes for his extraordinary and humorous illustrated tales. However, the scope of this analysis will extend beyond his authored publications to include the wide range of creative

Plate 1

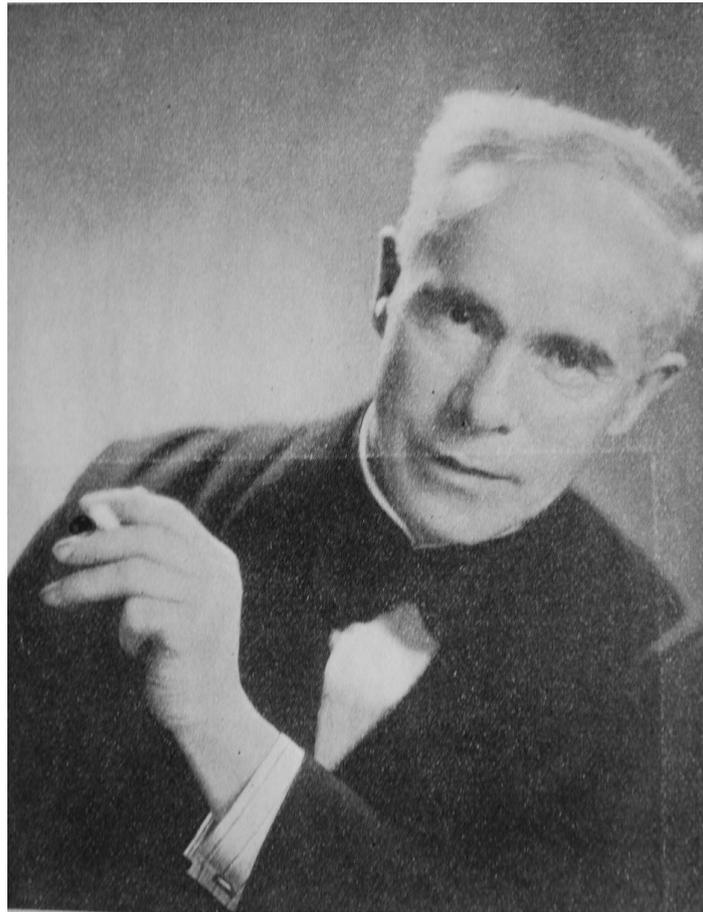


Fig 1.1. Author and illustrator Alfred Ernest Walter Aris (*Fishing* circa 1947)

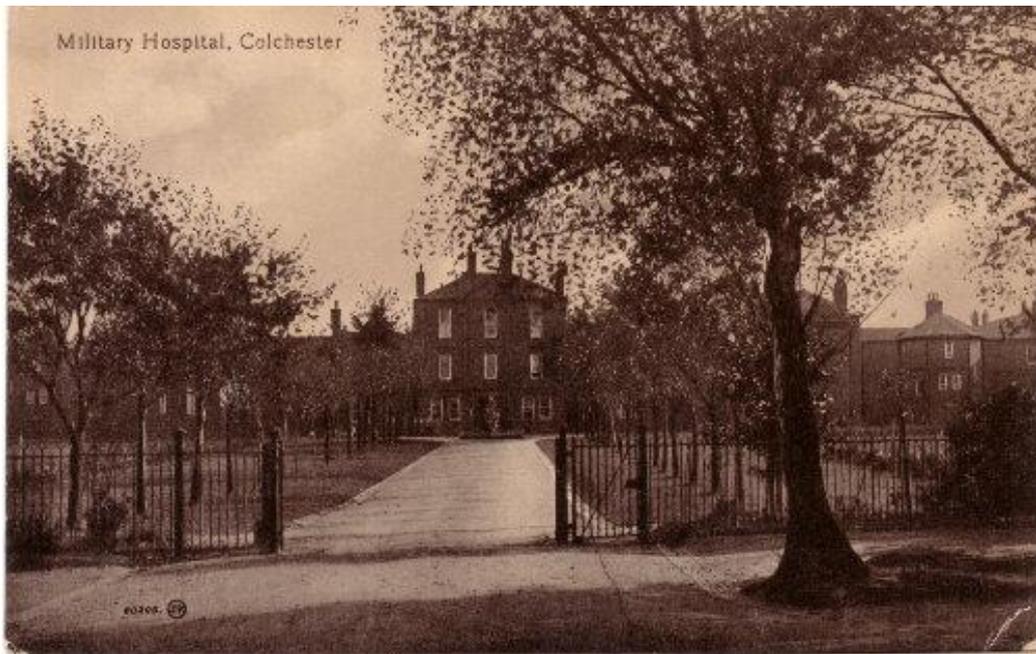


Fig 1.2. The Military Hospital, Colchester
Aris was a Laboratory Attendant during World War One (1918-1919)

activities across different commercial media that he participated in during a professional career spanning between 1904 and 1947. My intention is to rediscover the buried archive of Aris's lost legacy.

Aris's Status and Reputation

Alfred Ernest Walter George Aris, the author and illustrator of numerous children's tales and educational books, as well as a successful and accomplished commercial artist, worked during the golden era of children's book illustration at the turn of the twentieth century. Today, Aris's name remains relatively unknown in comparison to his contemporaries. The reason for this is a complete mystery when one considers the immense quality and prolific amount of original illustrated work that Aris created during a working career that covered nearly half a century and the designs and promotional material that he devised for key brand names. It is also surprising when one takes into account the immense contribution that Aris made beyond his area of expertise in children's literature, including a marketing and advertising concept for Cadbury. Nonetheless, Aris has remained obscure. His creative designs are scarcely mentioned or recognised in modern critical works on children's illustrated literature, other than by the historian, Leslie Linder, who discusses Beatrix Potter's affiliation with Aris, 'with whom she had been in touch on several previous occasions to try out the quality and scope of his work,' and his commission to prepare finished drawings for *The Oakmen*.³ Judy Taylor has edited Potter's correspondence with Aris during and after this commission, and Margaret Blount, a celebrated children's literary critic and leading authority on anthropomorphism, makes the observation in her analysis of the genre that Aris's work was 'impeccable and beautiful and the

³ Leslie Linder, *A History of the Writings of Beatrix Potter* (London: Frederick Warne, 1971), p. 240.

stories have a slightly romantic element quite lacking in Beatrix Potter'.⁴ These experts, however, all mention Aris in relation to his association with Potter rather than in his own right and according to his own merits.

There is an argument to suggest that very few artists, with the exception of Aris, managed to establish working partnerships with other eminent authors from the same field during this era, as well as achieving success in the commercial arena with numerous household brand names. Aris's achievements were not only in the field of literature, but in other broader forms of art such as posters, postcards, cigarette cards, cartoon strips, magazine articles and advertising campaigns, such as the Cococubs, the legendary promotional scheme which he designed for Cadbury's Children's Bournville Cocoa. I shall seek to explore and explain why Aris remains unrecognised today. Was it simply because much of Aris's original commercial artwork was unsigned and may not have been attributed to him? Was his technical competence in question, or was he regarded as a plagiarist by his peers? Another possible reason for his anonymity could be that because he often worked under a pseudonym, a lot of his work was not accredited to him. In addition, much of Aris's genuine design work has been lost or destroyed over time. The small quantity of his original artwork that survives today is very limited, and this, allied with the associated costs for galleries of promoting an artist with a restricted supply of artwork, may have resulted in less interest or demand. It is noticeable that many children's illustrators of the same period that are prominent today, such as Mabel Lucie Attwell (1879-1964), Honor Appeltan (1879-1951), Lawson Wood (1878-1957) and Beatrix Potter (1866-1943), appear to have an abundant stock of original artwork that has been marketed over the years and has helped to maintain their status and reputation, as well as keeping their legacy in

⁴ Margaret Blount, *Animal Land: The Creatures of Children's Fiction* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1975), pp. 156-158. Major critical books on the subject of children's book illustration and literature that do not mention Aris include Doyle, *The Who's Who*, Virginia Haviland, *Children and Literature Views and Reviews* (London: Bodley Head, 1974), Hunt, *Children's Literature*, Meyer, *A Treasury*, Whalley and Chester, *A History of Children's Book Illustration*.

this field alive. Conversely however, there are other artists including Ellen Jessie Andrews (1857-1907), Cicely Mary Barker (1895-1973), Racey Helps (1913-1970) and Charles Folkard (1878-1963) who are still regarded as eminent, although like Aris, their original artwork is in short supply.

I believe that Aris deserves recognition as an inspirational figure who made an impact on and was a major contributor to the British scene of design and illustration during his era. Aris's technical skill and competence allowed him to demonstrate his proficiency across a broad range of artistic subjects. In addition, his commercial artwork was popular with a wide audience and few artists can claim to replicate Aris's success across such an assortment of creative specializations. Notable illustrators such as the legendary poster designer John Hassall (1868-1948) and the caricaturist Phil May (1864-1903) focused and concentrated on a single area of design and are renowned for their expertise in a specific field. Aris achieved success in a number of commercial art disciplines, which were at the forefront of this period of great artistic creativity.

Biography

There is no biography available or any surviving people who could give an insight into Aris's personal background. All that exists is Aris's personal entry in *Who's Who* (1947) and *Who's Who in Art* (1948).⁵ I have undertaken extensive research through national archives, census records, military archives, private correspondence, national, private and public collections and various articles that Aris contributed to, and this has enabled me to assemble biographical material to build a picture of the individual and discover the person and his passion.

⁵ 'Aris, Ernest Alfred', *Who's Who*, 1947 (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1947), p. 73, 'Aris, Ernest Alfred', *Who's Who in Art: Fourth Edition* (London: Art Trade Press, 1948), p. 9.

Aris was born in the district of Islington, County of Middlesex, London on 22 April 1882, to parents Alfred Henry Aris, a lithographic artist, and Emily Juliet Aris née Wright. Ernest's brother, Albert Sydney, was born a year later on the 12 March 1883 in Rowley Green, High Barnet, Hertfordshire.⁶ In the census of 1901, the family resided in Bradford, where Aris attended the local school, and went on to study art as a student at the Bradford Technical College (Bradford School of Art), earning his diploma in 1900 under the tutorship of Charles Stephenson.⁷ He later attended the Royal College of Art in London, studying under Graham Moira, although there is no official record that Aris studied there as a full-time student and he probably participated on a part-time or evening course where students are not recorded long term.⁸ Aris completed his formal education at the turn of the century and began his career as a portrait painter working in charcoal, wash and watercolour, offering his work at numerous galleries, exhibitions and in the provinces, hoping to build a reputation as an artist whose work would be collected by connoisseurs and collectors. Aris's entry in *Who Was Who* (1961-1970)

⁶ In the census of 1891, the Aris family resided at number 276, Arkwright Street, Bridge, Nottingham in the Parish Ward of St Mary. At the aged of 18 Albert was working as a Drysalter Clerk (a dealer in chemical products, such as dyestuffs and gums, dried, tinned, or salted foods and edible oils) and became a commercial traveller living in Wivenhoe, Essex. In 1917, aged 28 (as noted on his marriage certificate, although he was actually 33), he married a bank manager's daughter Ethel Winifred Weston, who fifteen months earlier had bore him an illegitimate son, Frank Norman, on 25 October 1915 in Victoria, London. His date and place of death is recorded as Nottingham 1953.

⁷ Charles Stephenson was the author with F. Suddards of *A Text Book Dealing with Ornamental Design for Woven Fabrics* (London: Methuen & Co., 1897).

⁸ The following information on Gerald Moira can be found in David Buckman *Dictionary of Artists in Britain since 1945* (Bristol: Art Dictionaries, 1998). Gerald Moira (1867-1959) Painter, mural decorator and teacher studied at the Royal Academy School, 1887-1889, winning several prizes, having been earlier tutored and encouraged by his father, a miniature painter. Exhibited at RA from 1891 and IS from 1899. Moira went on to become Professor of Mural and Decorative Painting at the Royal College of Art, 1900-22, then principal of Edinburgh College of Art, 1924-32. In addition to teaching, he carried out a formidable number of large commissions, including decorations for the Trocadero Restaurant, in Shaftesbury Avenue, the ceiling for the boardroom of Lloyd's Register, a frieze for the Passmore Edwards Free Library, in Shoreditch; work at the central Criminal Court as well as work in private houses. Deceased 2 August 1959.

and *Who's Who in Art* (1948) confirms that he taught art for a short time at IS (International School, 1909-12) and exhibited at the Royal Academy (RA), the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolour (RI), the Royal Watercolour Society (RWS) and the Royal Society of British Artists (RBA).⁹ Evidently, Aris became frustrated at the time it took in establishing himself as a serious artist and instead turned to commercial art and book illustration, specialising in natural history, story books and nature articles that were published throughout the world.

Aris's professional working career commenced as a freelance artist for periodicals and magazines, which was still the predominant route for artists entering publishing and commercial illustration up until the First World War (1914-1918). He received his first commission in 1904 for a series of postcards and produced a number of memorable humorous series for major publishers until 1909. The 1900s, with its romantic and sentimentalised representation of childhood, saw the emergence of many female authors and illustrators, notably Mable Lucie Attwell, Hilda Cowham (1876-1965), Madeleine Jessie Collier (1897-1965) and Mabel Mackintosh, who offered Aris his first opportunity to illustrate her book *Dilly Duckling*, which was to have a great influence on the course of his career.¹⁰

In 1913 at the age of 30 Aris purchased his first and only home, 9 Oak Avenue, Hornsey, North London, where he resided for fifty years until his death in 1963. In the same year, Aris married Winifred Archer Ould, who bore Aris's only child, Kenneth Ernest, born 18 January 1917, in Hornsey. Winifred was the cousin of the author Hermon Ould for whom Aris later illustrated *The Pirates* (1919) and *The Ballad of Captain Timber Toe* (1919). These tales were

⁹ 'Ernest Aris 1882-1963', Buckman, *Dictionary of Artists*, p. 76, 'Aris, Ernest Alfred', *Who's Who in Art, Fourth Edition*, p. 9, 'Aris, Ernest Alfred', *Who's Who 2010 & Who Was Who*, A & C Black, 1920-2008; online edn., Oxford University Press, December 2007. Available at: <<http://www.ukwhoswho.com/view/article/oupww/whowaswho/U56192>> [accessed 5 July 2010]. 'Ernest Aris', *Wikipedia* available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernest_Aris> [accessed 24 September, 2010].

¹⁰ Madeleine Jessie Collier (later Holloway following her marriage). Full dates for Mabel Mackintosh are unclarified, but she authored books between 1891-1924.

based on a wooden Dutch doll similar to those in Florence Upton's *Adventures of Two Dutch Dolls* (1895). The huge success of these charming and mischievous adventures of the wooden peg dolls and golly were exploited by many authors because the Uptons had not retained copyright of the image. Aris illustrated the peg dolls in a similar style to Florence Upton's under his pseudonym Dan Crow, possibly as a disguise to avoid any accusations of plagiarism, a habit that, as I go on to suggest, Aris repeatedly adopted.

Aris's style of design combined with his trademark personalities are easily identifiable and can be seen throughout all his commercial work and series of books between 1912 and 1947. The most significant technical improvement in his design developed during the years he was conscripted into the army (1916-1919). In 1914, after 20,000 casualties had been recorded in the first two weeks of the war, compulsory call-up for British men was introduced under the Military Service Act 1916, the first statute of full conscription in British military history. The Act was introduced by Prime Minister H. H. Asquith in January 1916 and came into force on 2 March 1916. Previously, the British Government had relied heavily on voluntary enlistment, and latterly a kind of moral conscription called the Derby Scheme. The new Act specified that men from 18 to 41 years old were liable to be called up for service in the army unless they were married, widowed with children, or served in one of a number of reserved professions.

In October 1915 Local Military Service Tribunals had been appointed by local authorities under the instructions of the Local Government Board and the Scottish Office to consider the postponement of the calling up for military service of voluntarily attested men. They were part of the administrative provisions, which co-ordinated military service requirements with those of civil departments and vital industries. In general, Local Tribunals were held to hear the cases of conscientious objectors (COs) and those who had a case for postponing conscription into the military service. Ernest Aris's military records indicate he was originally meant to have commenced his military service in July 1916, although he was deferred until September 1916.

Over 16,000 men applied to have their claim assessed by people chosen by the Local Council, which was made up of businessmen, shopkeepers, landowners, retired military officers and civil servants. The CO Project Archive and Educational Resource suggests that:

Most were also strongly patriotic and therefore prejudiced against anyone whom they thought was not. Often they were people 'of not very great depth of vision or understanding', genuinely confused about their task and its complicated guidelines. A few tribunal members were women, who seemed particularly incensed by the conscientious objectors' (COs') point of view.¹¹

There were other hazards for COs' and men like Aris who sought a deferment because each tribunal panel contained one army-selected member who attended every hearing and had the right to cross-examine each applicant. These 'military representatives' had a common aim: to enlist as many men into the army to fill the gaps left by the dead. 3,400 COs' accepted call-up into the Non-Combatant Corps (NCC) or the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) as non-combatants. The NCC (the 'No-Courage Corps' as it was nicknamed by the Press) was set up in March 1916 as part of the army and run by its regular officers; those assigned were army privates, wore army uniforms and were subject to army discipline, but did not carry weapons or take part in battle. The duties were mainly to provide physical labour, building, cleaning, loading and unloading anything except munitions to support the military, or perhaps, as in Aris's case, the role of a Laboratory Attendant.

On Monday 18 September 1916, Aris wrote to Beatrix Potter:

In another fortnight I shall be in the army: This is not at all to my taste: I am asking the local Tribunal for another month's extension, but I am afraid it is

¹¹ 'Conscription', available at: <<http://www.ppu.org.uk/coproject/coww1a.html>> [accessed 10 September, 2010].

hopeless. It is regrettable, at least from a business point of view as I shall have to relinquish at least a half dozen books that I have in hand.¹²

Aris was not an advocate of war and contributed only as a minor participant in the efforts, as he reveals in this correspondence with Potter. War did not appeal to him and impeded his artistic endeavours. Intriguingly, one might speculate that Aris may have been a conscientious objector (CO). However, this is only conjecture as the question was specifically addressed to Aris in his enrolment papers and was left blank in his Record of Service Paper. The reason for leaving this question blank may have been because he failed to give an answer, or he did not wish to declare his position through fear of being classified a moral coward, or it might simply be that he may have had genuine reasons for seeking a postponement of the calling up for military service, which was originally scheduled for July, due to concerns for his pregnant wife. Alternatively, he may have had a legitimate cause for undertaking a non-fighting participating role due to his poor physical health in certain conditions.

Aris's health and fitness for service report was classified under the PULHEEM system, which was used as a means of assessing the fighting man's physical and mental capacity. An aural specialist in Aris's discharge documents noted that his medical classification of fitness for service on joining was graded B one, which implies he was relatively suitable for posting to military zones, although probably owing to his hearing impairment and rheumatism, these ailments prevented him from serving overseas.¹³ These ailments combined with his height, which was the minimum for enlistment, may have been contributory factors to him serving as a

¹² Ernest Aris to Mrs Heelis, 18 September 1916 (The Linder Bequest LB, V&A, 1469).

¹³ The PULHEEMS was a system which is dated prior to WW1 for grading physical and mental fitness used by Britain's armed forces. Its purpose was to determine the suitability for purpose rather than fitness of servicemen for posting into military zones. During WW1 soldiers were graded from the highest to the lowest level for deployment from A1-D3 in four bands of three ratings.

non-combatant. At five foot six inches and weighing 8 stone 11lbs, Aris was short, slightly built and there is no evidence of him being interested in any form of physical sport other than swimming. His recreational interests listed in *Who's Who 1947*, included entomology, collecting old furniture, gardening and travel.

By July 1916 at the time of the Somme offensive 420,000 British were dead, which was more than twice the number of the entire army in 1914 (most of the old British army had been killed). This meant any man who was physically fit and able was duty-bound to serve their country. Aged 34 (although his notes state he was 35), Aris eventually enlisted on Thursday 23 November 1916, which was approved by A. R. Riddell on 27 November 1916 at Ripon, and he was appointed to the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC), whilst Alfred, his younger brother joined the Royal Engineers in 1917 (aged 31years). 98794 Private Aris was posted to the RAMC's A Company in Ripon. Archive papers indicate that he moved to camp at Broxbourne, a convenient fifteen miles from his home in Hornsey, and finally transferred to Unit 9 Company on 17 March 1918, based at Colchester, Essex (fig 1.2).

At the outbreak of war in 1914, a man's chances of survival depended on how quickly his wound was treated; modern warfare had resulted in vast numbers of casualties requiring treatment at the same time and survival was reliant on the RAMC's chain of evacuation. Casualties were evacuated via a chain of military personnel from the front and were moved backwards through a series of posts: firstly the regimental aid post, the collecting post, the advanced and main dressing station, the casualty clearing station and finally a general military hospital either in France or England via hospital ship. Aris had been assigned as a Laboratory Attendant in the Bacteriological Laboratory at the Colchester Military Hospital, although he was

dealing with medical technical issues rather than the physical problems of the patients.¹⁴ In a letter to Mrs Heelis (Beatrix Potter), Aris wrote:

Well I am still a soldier to all outward appearances. I am now in the Bacteriological Laboratory, Colchester.

The work is interesting & at the same time very useful.

It is quite a new experience for me. I must say that the acts of war, do not appeal to me like the acts of peace, although it seems there is war even in the acts peace [sic].¹⁵

From Aris's correspondence, it would appear he found his work interesting, and archive papers show that he attained 63% in his examination paper as a Laboratory Attendant. He may have superficially looked the part of a soldier; however, privately his inner conscience probably struggled with the reality of his situation. In addition, his comment 'there is war even in the acts [of] peace' perhaps hints at his own dispute with Potter and her publishers over the accusations of plagiarism made against him in the months prior to his conscription (see Chapter 2).

Following Aris's discharge from the army in March 1919, he endeavoured to use his 'negligible' health problems to his advantage and made an application for a disability pension due to his partial deafness, which, he claimed, had been aggravated by exposure, even though his military record does not indicate he participated in any active service. It was noted in Aris's discharge documents, 'Never served overseas; was slightly deaf on enlistment; this and rheumatism prevented him from serving overseas. Both membranes intact, rather opaque....

¹⁴ Ernest Alfred Aris, *Examination Paper for Laboratory Attendant*. British Army WWI Pension Records 1914-1920. Record for Ernest Alfred Aris. The National Archives at Kew, London.

¹⁵ Ernest Aris to Mrs Heelis, 21 November 1917 (Victoria & Albert Museum, London: The Linder Bequest LB 1470).

Disability utterly negligible'.¹⁶ The report from the aural specialist noted on 9 February 1920, 'Not the faintest evidence of either any attributable nor aggravation of a trivial disability'.¹⁷ On 23 March 1920, Aris's 'Disability has passed away no ground for further award' and 21 June 1920, the document noted that there was 'No ground for any award on appeal'.¹⁸ Aris's discharge documents imply he had little interest in actively participating in the war efforts and it would appear that he was quite relieved not to have been sent to the front and passed his time concentrating on illustration and developing his unique style of humour and design, which is very evident after this period. As he wrote, 'I have managed to get a fair amount of work done during my period of army life. I am longing for the time when the act of peace will be the order of the day'.¹⁹ Obviously, from Aris's correspondence with Potter, he was quietly preparing illustrations for publication and following his discharge Aris entered his most prolific period of book publishing.

Aris returned from the war to his family home in Hornsey, North London and continued to work in the commercial art world, remaining there for fifty years until he died aged 80 on 14 April 1963. Following Aris's death, his family moved to Winchcombe Hill in 1967 where his wife died in 1978 aged 90.

Aris's Influences

Aris's specialism in the field of illustration was in natural history and anthropomorphic animals, subjects about which he was extremely knowledgeable. He produced a number of tales around these themes, as well as informative educational books on flora and fauna. Throughout Aris's

¹⁶ Ernest Aris, *Cover for Discharge Documents*, Royal Army Medical Corp Record of Service Paper, 27 November 1916. British Army WWI Pension Records 1914-1920. Record for Ernest Alfred Aris. The National Archives at Kew, London.

¹⁷ Ernest Aris, *Cover for Discharge Documents*, 9 February 1920.

¹⁸ Ernest Aris, *Cover for Discharge Documents*, 23 March 1920, 21 June 1920.

¹⁹ Aris to Mrs Heelis, 21 November 1917 (Victoria and Albert Museum, London: The Linder Bequest LB 1470).

work, he portrayed his creatures as animals with human qualities and personalities, and to appreciate his style and technical skill, we should place them in the context of a long tradition of anthropomorphism in art. In addition, it is essential to understand from an historical perspective the evolution and development of this genre of children's book illustration, particularly Aris's position in relation to his predecessors and those who may have influenced him during his childhood. These influences, combined with Aris's personal interest in natural history and the environment, may have been the stimulus that inspired him to create the many series of humorous tales, which focused on his anthropomorphic creatures' adventures in the natural world.

The definition of the Greek word 'anthropos morphos' means the attribution of uniquely human characteristics and qualities to non-human creatures and beings, inanimate objects, natural or supernatural beings or phenomena.²⁰ Anthropomorphic creatures can be classified into two categories. First, there are those that are out of the ordinary or fantastic, depicted as part human part animal and illustrated with unusual body features or proportions, or as composites of various combinations of animal parts like those of J. J. Grandville's executions in *Les Métamorphoses du Jour* (1828-1829) (fig 1.9).²¹ The second category of anthropomorphic creatures, to which Aris's animals belong, are those whose physical appearance remains animalistic but are shown engaging in human activities. Aris's creatures are dressed or housed in human-made material and surroundings with human traits and are able to reason and converse, conducting themselves as fully cultural beings rather than wild animals. The most

²⁰ Anthropos means human and morphos means shape.

²¹ J. J. Grandville, *Les Métamorphoses du Jour* (1828-1829) is a series of seventy scenes in which individuals with the bodies of men and faces of animals are made to play a human comedy.

renowned historical illustrations of this type are Gustave Doré's *Puss in Boots* in *Les Fables de La Fontaine* (1867) and Beatrix Potter's *Peter Rabbit* (1902).²²

Historically, there is a long tradition of literary anthropomorphism that is evident in many cultures throughout the world from old Europe and early ancient Australia and Africa to Asia and the Americas. The earliest written or recorded example in literature is by the Ancient Greek citizen, Aesop, whose characters have transcended the generations in the form of fables involving anthropomorphic animals. One common theme throughout these fables is the moral dimension of the tale, which is conveyed by means of visual imagery or narrative text. Within these stories, particular animal creatures have become associated with or recognised to have certain types of behavioural pattern or traits. By tradition and in modern stories, for example, the lion is generally regarded as the king, while typically the wolf and the fox are the tricksters, and Aris follows this historical tradition. The leading critic on the subject of anthropomorphism in children's literature, Margaret Blount, remarks of Aesop's fables:

They are interesting because they are the very beginning of that typecasting which animals have found so difficult to shake off since; but there is a flatness about the stories, a cynical assessment of human nature at its lowest, an acknowledgement that often the good and innocent are duped and that good works often pay, not because they are good, but because nature is sometimes arranged that way.²³

Despite 'typecasting' the physical aspect of his animals like Aesop, Aris approached this genre from a very different viewpoint to Aesop in the emotional investment and the manner in which his characters conducted themselves. Aris's characters are lively and adventurous and have

²² Gustave Doré, *Les Fables de La Fontaine* (Paris: Hachette & Co., 1867), Beatrix Potter, *The Tales of Peter Rabbit* (London: Frederick Warne & Co., 1902).

²³ Blount, *Animal Land*, p. 36.

minor consideration of the consequences of their actions. Little serious attention is paid by Aris to the moral tone and traditional values set by Aesop.

In folklore, talking animals often co-habit with people and provide guidance and security. Aris, like Aesop, does not have any people in his designs and those that do appear are minor incidentals to the story or non-figures without any form of social or intellectual interaction. Perhaps Aris, in the tradition of Aesop, believed any real complex human attributes might spoil the scene. Many authors have sought to replicate Aesop's popular fables in one form or another, including Aris in his final achievement on the literary front, *Famous Animal Tales* (1935). This was a compilation of short tales that revolved around anthropomorphic creatures' adventures and contained numerous anecdotal tales based on historical characters, with Aris's trademark features, characteristics and humour standing as a testament to all that inspired and influenced him throughout his distinguished professional career.²⁴

By contrast to Aesop, the classic anthropomorphic fairy tales written in the seventeenth century brought a different connotation, being fantastical tales with no moral or educational purpose, but serving to provide a feel-good factor and satisfaction at the conclusion of the tale. An eminent name at this time was Jean de la Fontaine (1621-1695), a famous French fabulist and one of the most widely read French poets of the seventeenth century, whose work was

²⁴ Many eminent authors and illustrators published different versions of *Aesop's Fables* in this period. Notable versions published before or during Aris's adolescence included Aesop, *Aesop's Fables* (London: Bliss, Sands & Co., 1897), Aesop, *Aesop's Fables* (London, Review of Reviews Office, 1896), Aesop, *Aesop's Fables* translated by Thomas James and J. Tenniel (London, 1854), Thomas Bewick and Robert Dodsley, Oliver Goldsmith, Edwin Pearson, *Bewick's Select Fables of Aesop and Others* (London: Longmans Green, 1878), Randolph and Alfred Caldecott, James Davies Cooper, *Some of Aesop's Fables* (London and New York: Macmillan and Co., 1887), Walter Crane, *The baby's own Aesop* (London and New York: George Routledge & Sons, 1887), Elizabeth Eyears, *Aesop's Fables in Verse* (London: Elliot Stock, 1901), Charles Robinson, *Aesop's Fables* (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1895), J. B. Rundell, (ed.), *Aesop's Fables* illustrated by Ernest Griset and text chiefly based on Croxall, La Fontaine, L'Estrange (London: Cassell, Petter & Galpin, 1869), J.B. Rundell (ed.), *Fables English 1875* illustrated by Ernest Griset with text chiefly based on Croxall, La Fontaine, L'Estrange, (London, 1875).

distributed in England and almost certainly known to Aris. At the end of the seventeenth century, he produced his adaptation of *Fables Choisies* (1668), taking inspiration from the Aesop tradition, Horace, and the original Sanskrit version by Vishnu Sarma. The use of anthropomorphism as depicted in La Fontaine's *Shepherd and the Wolf* in *Fables Choisies*, creates a sense of wisdom and well being, whilst seeking to recognise and highlight the faults of man and beast, as well as the importance of political matters during that era in France. Although La Fontaine had many predecessors in the beast fable, his collection was outstanding for the verse, which was complemented in the nineteenth century by the exceptional talent of Gustave Doré, the French wood and steel engraver, who reproduced *Les Fables de la Fontaine* (1867) in two volumes.

This collection was a triumph in terms of prose, verse and visual imagery and would have been familiar to Aris, as it was widely circulated and certainly a source from which he would have drawn inspiration. Doré's expertise and skill lent themselves to this technical method; his magnificent illustrations of La Fontaine's work complement the verse with outstanding recreations of animal creatures depicted in human pose. Doré was a master at illustrating anthropomorphic animals and this is demonstrated in the unique artistry shown in the manner he depicts *Le Loup Devenu Berger* in *Les Fables de la Fontaine* (fig 1.3). These plates capture the true essence of the satirical tone of the fables, whilst the engraving medium serves to enrich the images and narrative (fig 1.4). Doré's detailed engravings are truly remarkable for their accuracy, skill and animated composition and this is considered to be one of the greatest fable partnerships, even though author and artist are separated by two centuries.²⁵ Doré's engravings, particularly those of animals, have provided a unique place in history and a foundation that fabulists and artists like Aris, who were more than likely exposed to Dore's

²⁵ *Le Loup Devenu Berger* translates as The Wolf who became a Shepherd.

Plate 2



Fig 1.3. The Wolf who became a Shepherd illustrated by Gustave Doré (1867)



Fig 1.4. *Puss in Boots* illustrated by Gustave Doré (1867)



Fig 1.5. *Puss in Boots* illustrated by Gustave Doré (1867)

Les Fables de La Fontaine (1867), Two volumes in folio. 8 large and 250 small plates

works as a child, became interested in the genre of anthropomorphism and possibly used it as a basis to construct their own tales.

There are other historical artists that Aris may have drawn upon as a stimulus for his own creative design and narrative ideas. Another important author of this era was Charles Perrault (1628-1703), who laid the foundations for a new literary genre, the fairy tale. Doré's interpretations of Perrault's fairytales and *Les Fables de la Fontaine*, particularly his images of the anthropomorphic creatures, have set his work in a class of its own. His imagination and understanding, as well as originality of composition, influenced artists like Aris, who were able to use these historical works to develop their own ideas. Aris, like Perrault, produced fictional stories that involved talking animals, usually in an unbelievable sequence of events. In 1697 Perrault published *Histoires ou Contes du Temps passé*.²⁶ In these classic imaginary tales, he introduced personalities from around him, as in *Puss-in-Boots*, based on the Marquis of the Chateau d'Oiron, contrasting his folktale subject matter with details, asides and subtext drawn from the world of fashion. Doré captured the satirical tone of this story in iconic images that have become synonymous with *Puss in Boots* (fig 1.5). These tales are literary and visual icons; it is almost certain that Aris would have acknowledged his predecessors' proficiency and been influenced by their narrative tales and expertise in representing this genre as he worked on the same theme.

There were further changes from the eighteenth century onwards in the genre of anthropomorphism as themes and technology developed, alongside people's social mobility.

²⁶ Charles Perrault was the renowned author of *Le Petit Chaperon rouge* (*Little Red Riding Hood*), *La Belle au bois dormant* (*Sleeping Beauty*), *Le Maître chat ou le Chat botté* (*Puss in Boots*), *Cendrillon ou la petite pantoufle de verre* (*Cinderella*), *La Barbe bleue* (*Bluebeard*), *Le Petit Poucet* (*Hop o' My Thumb*), *Les Fées* (*Diamonds and Toads*), *La Marquise de Salusses ou la Patience de Griselidis* (*Patient Griselda*), *Les Souhais ridicules* (*The Ridiculous Wishes*), *Peau d'Âne* (*Donkeyskin*) and *Riquet à la houppe* (*Ricky of the Tuft*). Perrault's most famous stories are still in print today and have been made into operas, ballets (including Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty*), plays, musicals, films, both live-action and animation.

Children were particularly privileged with a profusion of quality literature that was illustrated and published in one form or another. There was an abundant and wide range of books that became available on both sides of the Atlantic that steadily increased with improvements in and efficiency of production, financial investment, and an ever-increasing competitive market. Aris would have been aware and possibly exposed to many of these books and the changes that had taken place in literature, especially the developments in his early childhood, which probably influenced his own creativity later on. In the nineteenth century, Paris, like London and Berlin, experienced an influx of people who spoke different dialects and languages, which made communication difficult. In addition, only half of the Parisian population could read and, therefore, the genre of caricature became hugely popular, as it bridged the language and illiteracy gap. In Britain there were magazines and illustrated newspapers such as *The Graphic* and *The Illustrated News* that used images in a more vivid and striking way and employed some of the most important artists and of the day including the caricaturist Phil May. Caricature took many forms as political satire or a commentary on the current social scene.²⁷ It was able to mock one particular person, a social class, a public event, or an idea, and this element of caricature is certainly evident in the early satirical and humorous postcards Aris designed, such as the Star Series (Havelock Lonsdale, 1904) and the series known as Bill Bailey (Liversidge Ross, 1904) at the beginning of his career, which gently mocked the working class.

J. J. Grandville ((1803-1847) is considered to be the true master of satire, as demonstrated in his illustrations for *Les Métamorphoses de Jour* (1828-1829), where he placed animal heads on human bodies to exhibit people's animalistic characteristics and ridiculed human airs and posturing. Grandville was an artist whose work would definitely have been familiar to Aris as this book was so widely known and circulated within the period. There is even the possibility that Aris played as a child the Victorian vintage card game of Heads and

²⁷ The *Graphic* was a weekly British illustrated newspaper, published from 4 December 1869 to 23 April 1932, by Illustrated Newspapers, Ltd.

Tails, which had etched illustrations of caricatures of animals in the style of Grandville on the face of each card. Whilst I was undertaking research at Beatrix Potter's Hill Top Farm in the Lake District and perusing through some of Potter's private artefacts that were not on public display, the Curator revealed a child's wooden box labelled '*Les Metamorphosis de Jour*' (fig 1.6). Evidently, the mix and match of head, body and lower limbs was a source of inspiration for Potter and her designs. There is no doubting that Grandville's images on these cards, which Potter played with as a young girl, closely resemble her Jemima Puddleduck (fig 1.7). It is also quite possible that Aris was also exposed to games such as these as a child, even though he came from a working-class background and it is unlikely that he would have had such an expensive version.

Grandville's caricatures are packed with hidden meaning that is directed specifically at a knowledgeable audience of that period and are perhaps difficult to construe today, by contrast to Aris's uncomplicated images which, when presented to a contemporary viewer, are effortlessly interpreted by the eye and convey the meaning simply. Aris's illustrations are drawn in a style that is easily accessible, colourful, less intellectually challenging and the illustrations are timeless in design and appeal. By comparison, Grandville's *image No. 14* (fig 1.8) portrays a mouse on his deathbed representing misery as the cat wipes his eyes pretending to grieve. This is a symbol of hypocrisy (characteristically cats are likely to expedite the death of mice rather than mourn their loss!). Three crows standing to the right represent desire and by nature are scavengers who eat everything from bugs, berries and small animals. The three crows are in distinct dress, from left to right, signifying the church, nobility, and the state, appear to be waiting for the mouse to die to claim the possessions and property of the helpless victim. Although the superficial implication might be obvious, the subtle message, whether political or

Plate 3



Fig 1.6. Beatrix Potter's childhood game 'Hheads and Tails' taken from J. J. Grandville's 'Les Metamorphosis de Jour' (private collection at Hill Top, Sawrey, (not on public display))

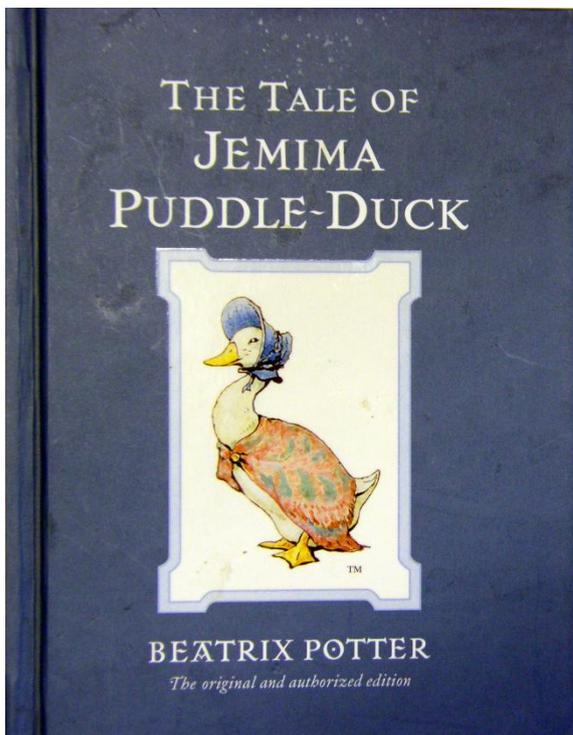


Fig 1.7. J.J. Grandville's *Hheads and Tail* card designs were a primary inspiration for Beatrix Potter's *Jemima Puddle-Duck*

Plate 4

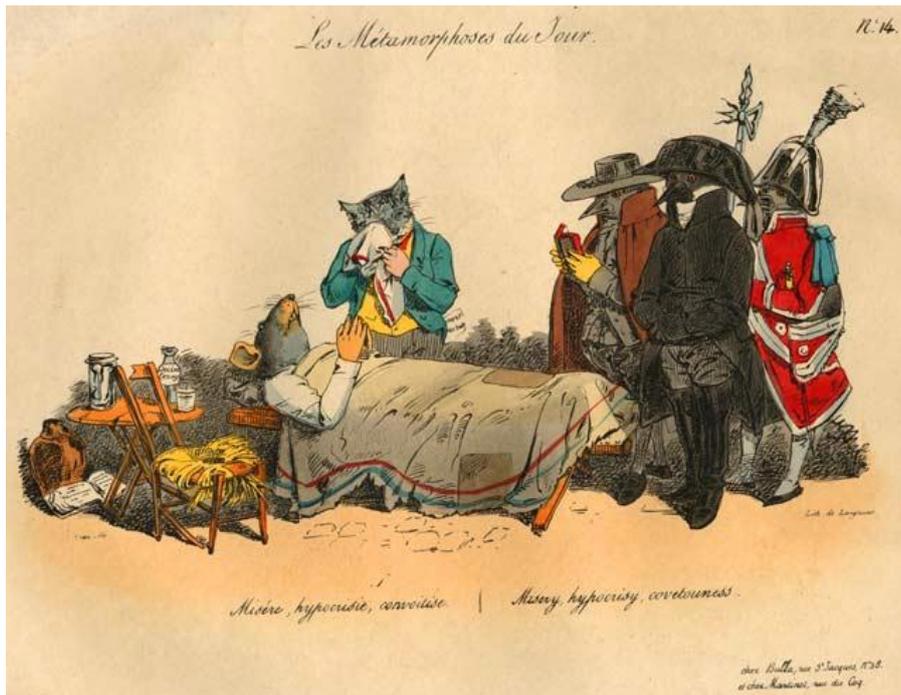


Fig .1.8. *Image No. 14* illustrated by J.J. Grandville (Misery, hypocrisy, covetousness)

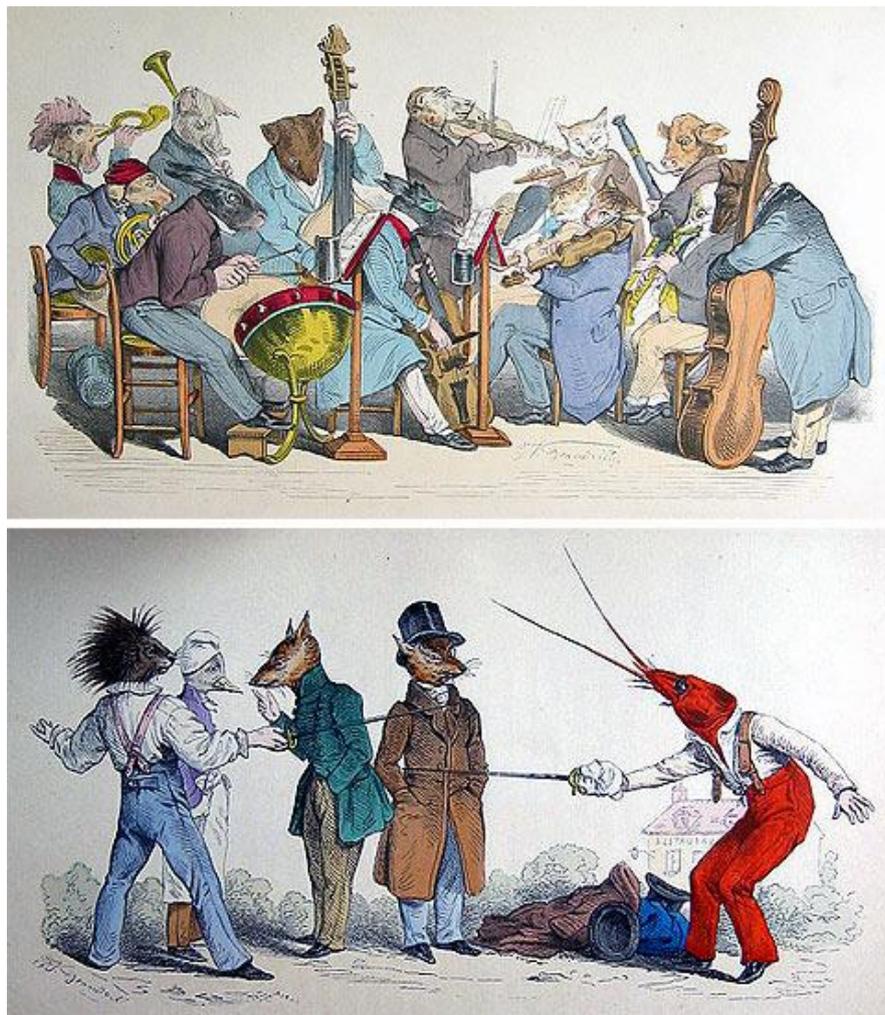


Fig 1.9. *Les Métamorphoses du Jour* illustrated by J.J. Grandville (1828-1829)

social, and true reasons the artist drew the image can be lost on a modern viewer, unlike those of Aris, which are not complex and straightforward to construe.²⁸

Historically, animals representing human qualities had been illustrated in fables and literature and the moral tone and value was considered more significant than the creatures of the story. Aris, like many other illustrators, based his anthropomorphic creatures on the historical characters portrayed by Aesop. Aris's most famous trickster character, Brer Rabbit, has traditionally held a specific place in folklore and literature. As the popularity of the genre changed, so did the artists' interpretation of anthropomorphism in popular mainstream and mass culture. The creatures underwent a transformation like those represented by Aris, which were 'cleaned up' and left without many of the historical attributes or satirical intent associated with the animal tales of Aesop and Grandville. Aris's modern representations of the characters were endowed with human characteristics and traits; they dressed and behaved like human beings and played the central part in the tale. His simple trickster tales had no consistent thread or moral twist and revolved around plots of mischievous schemes. He portrays his characters with no official power or status; they are of ambiguous virtue, by no means heroic, and do not fit into pre-conceived ideals. Aris's trickster characters make fools of everyone, including themselves, play tricks, deceive, and change their identity and morals at a whim. It was these traits that endeared them to their young audience.

Throughout the 1800s there are many examples of anthropomorphism stories that were famous when Aris was a child. These include the animal-related fairytales of Hans Christian Anderson (1836), the poem *The Owl and the Pussycat* by Edward Lear (1871), Rudyard Kipling's collection of talking animal stories, *The Jungle Book* (1894) and H. G. Wells' novel, *The Island Of Doctor Moreau* (1896). One of the first illustrators in the nineteenth century to provide an example of a popular image of an anthropomorphised animal was John Tenniel

²⁸ J. J. Grandville, Misère, hypocrisie, convoitise. No. 14, *Les Métamorphoses du Jour* (Paris: 1828-1829).

(1820-1914) with his immortal White Rabbit for Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in 1866 (fig 1.10).²⁹ Aris went on to illustrate a reproduction of Tenniel's popular image, the Mad Hatter's tea-party, in his book *Famous Animal Tales* (1935) (fig 1.11), in addition to producing *The Tale of March Hare* (1916) (fig 1.12), which is clearly taken from Tenniel's interpretation of Lewis Carroll's character March Hare (fig 1.13). Other early examples of this specific type of anthropomorphism can be seen in drawings by Randolph Caldecott (1846-1886), Arthur Burdett Frost (1851-1928) and Charles Henry Bennett (1829-1867), though it was initially Walter Crane who explored the metamorphosis of people into animals and illustrated them wearing human clothes as in *The Fairy Ship* (1870), and undoubtedly Aris based his character in the tale *Sir Francis Duck Adventurer* (1915) on Crane's book. Aris's title *The House that Jack Built* (1920) must have been taken from Caldecott's *The House that Jack Built* (1878). In addition, the main characters and technical method of Aris's design closely resemble many of those illustrated in books by Harry Rountree (1878-1950) and Arthur Frost's illustrations of Brer Rabbit in *Uncle Remus* (fig 1.14).³⁰ Although Aris came from a modest background, it is apparent that these early printed classics by his predecessors, which as a child he would have been familiar with, were an inspiration and consequently influenced the style of and ideas for his tales. Evidently, Aris drew on a number of his historical predecessors' interpretations for inspiration and the design of his celebrated characters.

²⁹ Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, under the pseudonym Lewis Carroll, with illustrations by John Tenniel, *Alice's Adventures on Wonderland* (New York: Macmillan, 1865). The first print run of 2,000 was held back because Tenniel objected to the print quality. A new edition released in December of the same year had an 1866 date. The original edition was sold with Dodgson's permission to the New York publishing house of Appleton. The binding for the Appleton *Alice* was virtually identical to the 1866 Macmillan *Alice*, except for the publisher's name at the foot of the spine. The title page of the Appleton *Alice* was an insert cancelling the original Macmillan title page of 1865, and bearing the New York publisher's imprint and the date 1866.

³⁰ Aris's characters and style closely resemble Harry Rountree's illustrations from *Uncle Remus* (1906) and Arthur Frost's illustrations of Brer Rabbit in *Uncle Remus* (1904).

Plate 5



Fig 1.10. Mad Hatter's Tea Party, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) illustrated by John Tenniel



Fig 1.11. Mad Hatter's tea-party, *Famous Animal Tales* (1935), illustrated by Ernest Aris

Plate 6

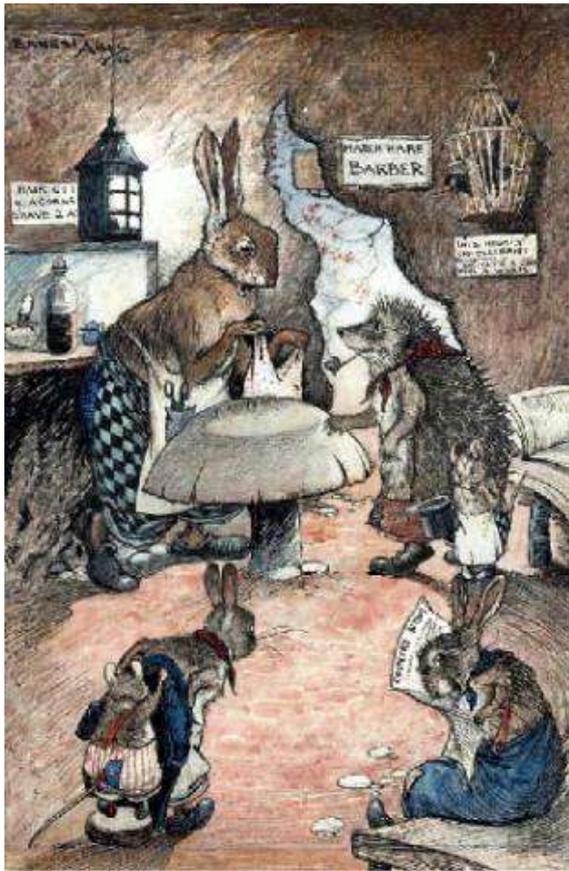


Fig 1.12. *A Tough customer: A Hedgehog at the March Hare Barber (1916)* illustrated by Ernest Aris



Fig 1.13. John Tenniel's interpretation of Lewis Carroll's character March Hare from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1866)*



Fig 1.14. Brer Rabbit from *Uncle Remus* by Joel Chandler Harris, Illustrated by Arthur Burdett Frost (1851-1928)

The turn of the twentieth century was the pinnacle of children's book illustration in Britain. This came about because of a prosperous period of opportunity and creativity, along with developments in the methods of reproduction within the printing and manufacturing industry. These factors combined with a significant growth of an educated middle-class audience for books, comics and magazines, encouraged illustrators and provided the perfect opportunity for Aris to express his talent.

In 1851 half the country lived in a city; early 1900s Britain, however, was predominantly an urban society and by 1915 urban dwellers constituted three quarters of the population. This meant that the majority of children had little or no direct knowledge of animals in their natural habitat, other than through images by artists like Aris, who specialised in this field and were immensely sought after. With limited contact or understanding of the natural environment, society had become a receptive audience for Aris's romanticized and imaginary vision of the relationship between humanity and the animal kingdom. Depictions of anthropomorphic animals were firmly established by the start of the twentieth century, with Beatrix Potter considered the principal author and illustrator in this genre at the time Aris was working, along with Louis Wain who also brought anthropomorphism to the public's attention.³¹ The fantasy anthropomorphic characters were an object of fascination to children and adults, appearing in almost every conceivable type of entertainment and establishing themselves as a major commercial marketing tool. Aris's images, for example, were used in different forms including the successful Cadbury's advertising campaign promoting the Children's Bournville Cocoa in 1934.

³¹ Louis Wain (5 August 1860 – 4 July 1939) was an English artist best known for his drawings, which consistently featured anthropomorphised large-eyed cats and kittens.

Aris in the Archives

Following extensive research, I was surprised by the quantity of primary material relating to Aris, considering the scarcity of secondary sources. The majority of primary source material was obtained from the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) and Dudley Chignall, who is considered the world's leading authority on the subject of Cadbury's Cococubs and associated ephemera and who has built a unique and incomparable collection. The Cadbury Archive in Birmingham was fascinating from a broad perspective and gave a detailed overview of the historical background of the business, advertising and marketing strategy for Aris's Cococubs. It also provided supporting information and an insight into the Cadbury Board Members' decision-making processes, as well as indicating specific areas of Aris's success and his personal contribution to the Cococub campaign.

In the early 1990s Alan P. Dilley, a friend and work colleague of Aris's son Kenneth, had the job of organising Kenneth's private possessions after his death in Eastbourne, Sussex in 1988.³² After Dilley's death (he was a man who had a habit of hoarding), his widow approached a dealer in respect of Aris's personal collection, whilst his son, Nick Dilley, carried out a search on Aris over the internet and discovered Chignall, who purchased the collection privately. Chignall recovered the lost archive of Ernest Aris's private mementoes and documentation that had been stored in the garage of the widow in Gosport. The collection comprised of his personal diary, an album with over 300 artist's proofs for his books, the only known copy of his book *Poster Art*, original illustrations and designs, a private notebook filled with Phil May's cuttings, as well as Aris's personal album of his postcards of *Fishes*, and a number of papers with

³² An email from Nick Dilley to Dudley Chignall in 2002 notes that 'The figures were originally given to my father by Ken Aris (Ernest Aris's son) who was a friend and work colleague We also have quite a few books by Ernest Aris; at least two of these are by 'Dan Crow' which I am sure you know was one of the names that Ernest Aris used.... I found a copy of *Who's Who In Art* (fourth edition 1948) which belonged to Ernest. I'm not sure if there is anything new to you here but this is his entry: (copied as shown in book)'.

scribbled personal notes that clarified uncertainties surrounding his work and were almost certainly made in later years following a stroke (circa 1953).³³ In addition, there were personal copies of Aris's original signed books, as well as publications he illustrated for authors with original pasted letters of thanks. Fortuitously, the private archive is now preserved for posterity. I recently acquired the archive, with the exception of Aris's private diary of notes and have added to it by purchasing the books that were not found or included in Aris's collection. Over a period of time, I have established a comprehensive archive collection of tales that Aris wrote and illustrated, in addition to the archival material relating to Aris's commercial work. This unique collection has been drawn upon for this thesis and used as the basis for the catalogue of complete works and collectables produced by Aris over a period of fifty years.

The primary material used to research Aris's affiliation with Beatrix Potter originates from the Linder Bequest at the V&A. Leslie Linder (1904-1973) was an engineer who was a collector of Potter's drawings and bequeathed his major collection of Potter material to the V&A after his death in 1973. Included within the Linder Bequest is correspondence between Aris and Potter, which relates to her commissioning Aris to provide illustrations for *The Oakmen* (1916), the provisional sketches she sent him, Aris's original watercolours, along with Potter's final illustrated letter for *The Oakmen* (Nancy Nicholson's Gift). Primary material relating to the commercial aspect of Aris's work, postcards and cigarette cards was more accessible and readily available to purchase from other sellers and collectors, although none of Aris's original art work in these areas is known to have survived. This is possibly because much of the artwork for

³³ Email from Adam Hunt to Dudley Chignall dated 16th May, 2010. Adam Hunt has recovered personal documentation belonging to Aris's close friend and fishing partner, B.G. Kettle, 5A Crouch Hall Road, N.8. Kettle made a poignant note in a scrapbook of memories, photographs, press cuttings and private notes, that his own life would be less rich because of the loss of his life-long pal Aris and indicated that he had had a stroke c. 1953. Hunt advised that in the collection there are many photos of Aris with Mr B. G. Kettle, a charcoal sketch of a woman that was found in the back of the frame by Aris and was possibly Mrs Kettle, newspaper cuttings of Kettle and Aris, and personal letters relating to fishing along with a water colour painting called *Angler's Dream-the one that got away* of a fisherman that is in all probability illustrated by Aris.

cigarette cards was destroyed in the Second World War: Imperial Tobacco Group printers, Mardon Son & Hall, lost ten of its thirteen factories in Bristol.³⁴ Furthermore, various takeovers of the traditional postcard manufacturers meant that archival material, considered worthless at the time, was lost or thrown away. It is only in modern times that the real value of original artwork by Aris and many well-known artists in these fields is truly appreciated, and has become more widely available as work circulating within families and historical archives is discovered. The three original posters Aris designed for the London United Tramways reside at the V&A, although the three Metropolitan Electric Tramway posters only exist as monochrome photos in historical albums archived by the London Transport Museum. Fortunately, all the historical correspondence and documentation related to Frank Pick (1878-1941) of London Underground that was associated with the offer of Aris's posters to the National Archive Collection of Posters, was noted and documented by the Curator during the submission process and retained in archives at the V&A.

The most unique account of Aris's work comes from the forewords he wrote in a number of his books and the six articles that he wrote for the magazine *The Artist* (1938-1939), which give concise detail about his technical approach to illustration and composition of children's literature. In general, little is written about Aris in classic works on children's illustration, although he is mentioned by Norman Joplin in the context of William Britain's toy figures. John Bradley, author of *Cadbury's Purple Reign*, an authoritative guide to marketing and advertising at Cadbury, refers to Aris as 'one of the country's leading comic book illustrators', although Aris was not, strictly speaking, a 'comic book illustrator' and Bradley does not even acknowledge Aris by name.³⁵ Oliver Green, a leading authority on London Transport posters and Curator of

³⁴ 'Pride of Bristol - Mardons'. Available online at: < <http://www.thisisbristol.co.uk/packaging-firm-folded/story-11256002-detail/story.html>> [website accessed on 3 November, 2008].

³⁵ John Bradley, *Cadbury's Purple Reign: The Story Behind Chocolate's Best-Loved Brand* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), p. 92. Other critical books on the subject of children's

the London Transport Museum, has written a series of books on the subject, but has failed to recognise Aris's input, even though Aris's work resides in the national archive collection.³⁶ I believe the reason for this is simply because there has previously been very limited knowledge and factual information that is publicly known or available about Aris, and this has resulted in a diminished interest or general lack of awareness of his legacy.

Format

Chapter 1 of this thesis focuses on stylistic features of the books Aris wrote and illustrated over an extensive period of five decades, making an incomparable contribution to the world of children's illustrated literature. Aris was author and illustrator of 150 books, a number which is virtually without precedent and a remarkable achievement for a single author. He also illustrated numerous books for other authors and publishers.

The First World War brought changes in the literary market, with the decline of the engraved quality annuals with colour images in favour of cheap inferior colour frontispieces and black-and-white work. With the steady decline in subscriptions during the War, gift books and periodicals were considered a luxury and slowly diminished because of the lack of resources. The war therefore brought to an end an era of distinguished children's book illustration that had developed over the preceding forty years. It was a superb period in which the true array of British talent in book illustration had flourished, bequeathing the most outstanding historical period of illustration and technical developments in children's literature. The final period of

illustration that mention Aris in relation to other artists include Blount, *Animal Land*, Dawn and Peter Cope, *Postcards from the Nursery* (London: New Cavendish Books, 2000), Linda Lear, *Beatrix Potter: A Life in Nature* (London: Penguin., 2007), Linder, *A History of the Writings on Beatrix Potter*, Judy Taylor, (ed.) *Beatrix Potter's Letters* (London: Frederick Warne, 2001).

³⁶ Oliver Green's books include *Underground Art: London Transport to the Present* (London: Studio Vista, 1908), Oliver Green and David Bownes, *London Transport Posters: A Century of Art and Design* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2008), Oliver Green in association with the London Transport Museum, *The Moving Metropolis: A History of London's Transport since 1800* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2001).

Aris's literary career reflects this changing market. The social and economic effects of the war had a major impact on all book production, with publishers looking for different types of literature. Although the 1920s was a period of unadventurous writing, the girls' school story-book was fashionable as were the *Billy Bunter* stories and *Little Folks*, which Aris regularly contributed to. However, developments in technology brought about the popular press and radio which had a profound effect on children's book illustration and saw the introduction of *Teddy Tail* in the Daily Mail (1915) and *Rupert Bear* in the Daily Express on 8 November 1920, which continued in comic strip and Annuals for fifty years, selling a million and a half copies. The post-war years also witnessed a growing popularity for adventure and mystery tales, such as Arthur Ransome's *Swallows and Amazons* (1930) and Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* series of twenty one books written between 1942 and 1963. Aris had previously illustrated many books for Blyton and via her publishers George Newnes.³⁷ The advent of the radio and 'Children's Hour' in December 1922, which dramatised children's books, helped to arouse children's interest in literature as well as resulting in increasing book sales.³⁸ Aris was part of the older tradition, which now started to decline, and he turned to other commercial ventures as an alternative to secure his financial income. Aris's final works emphasised his areas of personal interest, including natural history and educational books for Oxford University Press, who were reducing output by selecting books for originality and excellence rather than for their commercial value and emerged as publishers of the best children's books of this period.

In the section on Aris's technical expertise, I concentrate on the most exceptional features of Aris's book cover designs: the continued development of style, innovative ideas,

³⁷ Aris illustrated for Enid Blyton, *The Book of Brownies* (George Newnes, 1926), *The Further Adventures of Brer Rabbit* (George Newnes, 1943), *Boys and Girls Story Book No. 3, 4, & 5* (News Chronicle, 1935-1937), *Birds of our Gardens* (George Newnes, 1940) and *The News Chronicle Boys' and Girls' Annual*, (News Chronicle, 1940).

³⁸ Whalley and Chester, *A History of Children's Book Illustration*, p. 183.

consistency of practical expertise and technical quality. It also focuses on the trademark styles, features and characteristics that are evident throughout Aris's creative designs and that make his work so individual. Chapter 1 concludes with an analysis Aris's *Playtime Stories of the Woodfolk* (1916), a book which I believe encompasses all elements of Aris's flair in design and fully represents his creative talents and his technical expertise. This is not necessarily his foremost publication, but it is a book that combines all the trademark features of Aris's style of design combined with many of his general characteristics and is typically representative of his work. The fine publications of the Edwardian era required a large amount of investment for production fees, fine illustrations, superior cloths for binding the block designs in gold on the covers and surrounding colour-plate illustrations, an investment which eventually proved to be no longer commercially viable. Many of the attributes from that era influenced Aris and are evident in *Playtime Stories of the Woodfolk*, where Aris has replicated some of these typical features, such as the extravagant detail of the internal contents and the interiors, which are delightfully executed, along with the wonderfully produced frontispiece and end papers. The visual images throughout have decorative borders resembling engravings and relate to the enchanting little vignette scenes from the story. Aris was clearly influenced by the artistic developments around him and created similar ideas economically and used more advanced technical processes, which allowed an expedient and improved quality to be printed by publishers, as well as being cheaper for the purchaser.

Chapter 2 of the thesis examines Aris's professional affiliation with Beatrix Potter and the consequences of the plagiarism allegations against him. One of the highlights of Aris's working career and possibly the greatest mystery is how he initially became acquainted with and commissioned to illustrate *The Oakmen* by the author and illustrator Beatrix Potter. I put forward the argument that she may have had an influence over Aris's career and an impact on his reputation and long term standing amongst his peers.

Over many years Potter had holidayed in the Lake District with her parents and the proceeds from the sale of books enabled her to purchase Hill Top Farm (1903) and Castle Farm (1909) in Sawrey, Cumbria. I believe that it was during this period when Aris was based in Windermere that the two initially became acquainted, possibly through their mutual interest in natural history or angling. Potter's correspondence with her publishers, Warne's, and letters to Aris evidently suggests they had met prior to Aris's commission by Potter (1916). It was noted in *Who Was Who* (1961-70) that Aris was Art Director at Windermere, (although this is not noted by Aris in his original entry in *Who's Who*, 1947), and Potter refers to Aris in correspondence as a photographer's assistant in Windermere.³⁹ It is conceivable that the later amendment may have been referring to the advice and directives that Aris had given Potter whilst she was living in Windermere. Aris wrote giving clear instructions on how he had improved her initial ideas and instructions for the commission and incorporated these changes into his final designs, which he returned to Potter for *The Oakmen* letter. Aris was known for his mischievous sense of humour and exaggeration.

As Potter became immersed in breeding and exhibiting Herdwick sheep, she lost the creative instinct and impetus to continue illustrating. Mr Warne had sent Potter a package containing books recently illustrated by Aris, which the publisher believed had plagiarised titles and characters from her books.⁴⁰ Rather than condemning Aris, however, Potter saw this as an opportunity to collaborate with an artist whom she believed had considerable artistic merit and an understanding of natural history and the ability to undertake the complex process of

³⁹ Art Director at Windermere and Art Master at the International Correspondence School were both added to Aris's entry of *Who's Who* (1958). They advised they were probably added by Aris on his annual proof. This cannot be confirmed as original archive documentation is not retained. From discussions with Chignall, he had a theory Aris gave Potter advice and hence called himself a Director. See Chignall's theory Dudley Chignall, *The Man Who Drew for Beatrix Potter – Ernest Aris*, (Witham: private publication, 2010), p. 6.

⁴⁰ Beatrix Potter to Mr Warne, 12 August 1916, Judy Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter's Letters* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 227.

illustrating her tales. In August 1916 Potter wrote directly to Aris and commissioned him to produce six sketches for *The Oakmen*. Aris produced the preliminary sketches, which evidently influenced Potter's final illustrated letter of the tale and was presented to Nancy Nicholson in a loose-leaved book for Christmas that year as a reminder of their meeting. Potter's final illustrated letter of *The Oakmen* was never published and donated as part of the Nancy Nicholson Gift archived at the V&A.⁴¹ The fact that *The Oakmen* was not published may have been due to the fact Aris lacked technical competence, though evidently this was not in dispute by Potter. Copyright infringement subsequently emerged as a possible reason, as the story was not original and the possible damage its publication may have caused to Potter's reputation may have been a primary concern. These issues, combined with Warne's and Potter's allegations of plagiarism by Aris, evidently led to a dispute between the parties and resulted in the illustrated manuscript being set aside. Close examination of the facts would suggest the Potter affiliation did have a detrimental effect on Aris's career as will be discussed later.

Chapter 3 concentrates on Aris's commercial partnerships and highlights the diverse range of artistic disciplines that he was involved with throughout his career. These prestigious projects included postcards for Raphael Tuck & Sons Ltd. (1904-1909), posters for the Underground Group (1915), cigarette cards for John Player & Sons (1925), as well as the advertising and promotional material executed by Aris for Cadbury (1934-1936). Aris's first venture into the world of commercial art was in a weekly satirical and arts magazine called *The Jackdaw*, published in Bradford for a year from April 1904, which included cartoons and portraits of music hall and theatre artists.⁴² It is highly likely Aris obtained his first local

⁴¹ A full transcript of *The Oakmen* (1918) letter is transcribed in Linder, *A History of the Writings of Beatrix Potter*, p. 240.

⁴² The Bradford Central Library hold copies of *The Jackdaw*, a satirical magazine published in Bradford from the 14th of August 1904 to the 14th of August 1905. Most of the articles relate in a humorous manner to the Bradford Industrial Exhibition of 1904.

commission, a series of postcard designs for the Bradford Exhibition (1904), probably through the *Bradford News*, or through his having submitted images for and won a local competition, a regular means for artists to obtain recognition. Aris designed a series of ten humorous postcards of the pleasures and amenities at the exhibitions for the Pictorial Post Card and provided many series for the leading manufacturer of quality publishing, Raphael Tuck and Sons.

At the turn of the century, Aris was fortunate to have played a role at the forefront of the new postcard phenomenon, which became the modern medium for communication as it was economical and a speedy means of exchange or contact, with the collecting of postcards providing a social and cultural pursuit. The form of the postcard gave Aris the opportunity to expose his artistic potential to a wide audience, at a time when mass production and distribution of postcards was required to meet the huge demand. The inclusion of a caption in the design made cards popular and meant even those who were unable to write, could recognise short captions or phrases and still correspond by selecting a card that encapsulated their message.⁴³

A factor that makes Aris's postcards more fascinating is that he used the pseudonym 'Earis' as the signature on his earlier cards. I have speculated that this could have been because he was unsure about his own talent or was possibly using it as a disguise to hide his true identity in case the venture proved unsuccessful. Alternatively, Aris may have been employed full time by a publisher and did not wish to be seen working for a competitor or moonlighting on another job. Aris provided an assortment of cards; however, it was the *Bill Bailey* series that proved to be the most popular, many publishers distributed this series. Taking into account that they are

⁴³ For further information on the history of postcards, see Frederick Alderson, *The Comic Postcard in English Life* (Newton Abbott: David & Charles, 1970), David Bowers, *The Postcards of Alphonse Mucha in the Art Nouveau Style* (New York: Vestal Press, 1980), C.W. Hill, *Discovering Picture Postcards* (Tring: Shire Publications, 2001), Tom Phillips, *Postcard Century: 2000 cards and their messages* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000).

the earliest record of Aris's work as an artist, the talent that he displays in this field is definitely comparable with other leading artists of that time.⁴⁴

From a collector's perspective, Aris's postcard designs are interesting because they give a portrayal of and an insight into a bygone age of fashion and comic humour, epitomising the social and cultural period of the Edwardian era. Aris's postcards also demonstrate his technical versatility, the subject matter in the range of series that he designed varying from the early humorous seaside to landscapes and proving that he was able to adapt his style to new techniques and media. Aris's postcard series are a wonderful collection of memorabilia, which, I believe, contribute to his legacy. As I discovered, Aris was often at the beginning of new initiatives or promotions in the field of commercial art that appealed to a broad audience and this made his work popular whilst at the same time enabling him to build partnerships with leading brands in many commercial areas.

Aris also played a part in the pioneering era of poster development in Britain and was at the cutting edge of an unparalleled period of creative inspiration in this field. One of the more surprising and remarkable aspects of Aris's career is the posters that he designed for the Underground Group (1915). This discovery has transpired to be one of the most significant aspects of his career. However, due to the nature of this type of advertising, in which posters were displayed on trams, the pictorial images were temporary. This has resulted in only three of the six posters that Aris designed surviving in the National Collection of Posters at the V&A. The other three images reside as photographic proofs in record books at Covent Garden's London Transport Museum. At the outbreak of war, Aris was forced to enlist, which restricted

⁴⁴ Tom Browne (1870-1920), an English strip cartoonist, painter and illustrator of the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. Phil May (1864-1903) was an English caricaturist and Donald McGill (1875-1962), an English graphic artist whose name has become synonymous with a whole genre of saucy seaside postcards that were sold mostly in small shops in British coastal towns.

any further commercial work for the Underground Group. However, there is evidence contained within Aris's diaries of further sketches and references that he had noted for other ideas. Clearly, he wished to continue this prestigious partnership and would have undoubtedly achieved further success in this field of commercial art given the opportunity.

Cigarette cards were an area which Aris actively became involved in from 1925, and he designed a number of pictorial series for major tobacco manufacturers. Over a period of two years Aris produced several series published by John Player & Sons and Lambert & Butler among others. These series are quite diverse in the range of subject and themes, varying from the comical caricatures of the *Frisky* series, to the fine art views of the *Motor Index* series, to the astonishingly accurate and superb series of natural illustrations for *Fishes* and *Curious Beaks*. These series of cards are evidence of Aris's commercial awareness, aptitude to adapt his technical skill to an assortment of diverse subjects, and sheer hard work since these cards were very labour intensive to produce because of the research that was required. These cigarette cards are now highly sought after for their rarity and originality and because many of the images represent a bygone era. The sights in the *Motor Index* series possibly no longer exist and the birds and fish have become rare as a result of climatic changes. It is highly likely that Aris produced several other series, as there is a handwritten reference by Aris noted in private papers, 'I've done 6 series for Players'.⁴⁵ However, these series remain unknown because the pictorial images on the cigarette cards were unsigned and there is no written or documented evidence in the Player Notebooks of them ever having been produced.

Aris's final and most significant commercially successful partnership was with Cadbury, and proved to be a winning formula in terms of recognition and financial success for both product and brand, although unfortunately, Aris did not receive the public recognition that he

⁴⁵ A private note handwritten by Aris on paper, which is now in the archive collection retained by Siân Dawson.

deserved for creating the Cococubs advertising campaign. Aris submitted a set of drawings of anthropomorphic creatures which were named the Cococubs. The range consisted of a collection of thirty three brightly coloured miniature lead figurines cast by William Britain Ltd. Each tin of Children's Bournville Cocoa contained a free toy as part of the promotion, and was initially announced as a comic strip supported by advertisements that were inserted into women's magazines under the slogan 'A Toy in Every Tin.' Neither of the parties had predicted the extraordinary success of Aris's advertisements and the sustained promotion, which created a huge demand for the lead figurines at a time when children's toys were expensive and a luxury.

Ultimately, this chapter will seek to examine why Aris's final commercial partnership with Cadbury was such an important part of his legacy and the role he played in one of the most successful advertising campaigns in history. The commercial influence of Aris's promotion is suggested in the consequences of its success, both financially and commercially, to Cadbury and William Britain Ltd., when they were forced to a standstill until they could increase production to meet demand and continue selling the product. There is also substantial evidence to suggest that Aris's concept and ideas have influenced other corporate businesses who have also tried to replicate his characters but without the same commercial success.

The second volume of this thesis comprises of a catalogue, which supports this critical analysis and reinforces its argument that Aris's work deserves further recognition. The catalogue comprises of four parts. Part one consists of a detailed full record of Aris's literary publications, alongside an image of the cover of each book that he wrote and illustrated under his own name and pseudonyms. In addition, there is a compendious list of books that Aris illustrated for other authors and various publications that he contributed to during the early and latter part of his professional career. Part two of the catalogue takes account of Aris's commercial advertising, which includes the early series of pictorial postcards that he completed for leading quality publishers at the beginning of his career from 1904-1909, though many have

later used stamp dates. In addition, I have included the six pictorial natural history posters, which Aris was commissioned to undertake for the London Transport tram system in 1915. Part three comprises of Aris's collectables and contains the four unique series of cigarette cards that he designed for leading tobacco manufacturers issued between 1929 and 1935. A comprehensive description of each of the limited editions and subtle colour variants of the Cococub lead figurines that Aris designed, Britain's manufactured and Cadbury distributed from 1934 and 1939. Part four includes the various miscellaneous commercial products, such as jigsaws, board games, bridge cards and prints.

Chapter 1

Aris's Books:

Literary Publications 1910-1948

Background

A critical analysis of the books that Ernest Aris wrote and illustrated, including those that he illustrated for other authors such as Madeleine Jessie Collier, Jane Thornicroft, May Byron, Enid Blyton and Beatrix Potter, would not be complete without examining Aris's technical style and merits. It is important to review all aspects of the book cover design, the form, format, size, frontispiece and endpaper layout, the internal title and contents page, in addition to the recognisable characteristics and trademark features in Aris's designs. Another consideration are the themes and styles for each series Aris produced and whether he had any direct influence over the publisher as regards the creative input and technical design of the format, cover and internal display of the book.

From the 1890s, the publishing of children's literature and book design had become very competitive. Art presses such as William Morris's Kelmscott Press and J.M. Dent's Everyman Library were producing books for young children. In 1895 Helen Bannerman began the series of twelve 'golliwog' books. These large formatted books with their colour illustrations in bright poster style paints on white backgrounds were considered quite unorthodox for the time. In 1897 the '*Dumpy Books for Children*' published by Grant Richards also proved popular and profitable. In 1899 Richards published *The Story of Little Black Sambo*, a small picture book for young children, featuring a few words of text opposite brightly coloured pictures and with a fashionable coloured cover that became an instant best seller. Preceding Beatrix Potter by two years, the Dictionary of Literary Biography notes Bannerman created a publishing phenomenon

with her little book, of the same size as the ones Potter would make famous.⁴⁶ The appeal of this little book may have influenced artists such as Aris, who authored and illustrated the majority of his tales in a small size, as well as Beatrix Potter, who produced her *Peter Rabbit*, a finely illustrated tale of a mischievous anthropomorphic rabbit in human clothing, in 1903. Potter was the first to adopt the small compact size format rather than the larger popular styles; she believed children would prefer her books if the size was easy to handle. Potter's two or three little books costing one shilling each, as opposed to a large formatted book costing six shillings, were cheaper to produce and could be sold at a lower retail price, making them instant bestsellers and setting a precedent in the publishing world.

Likewise, by 1900 most publishers were replacing engraved prints and lithographs with hand-coloured screen printed illustrations, which were proving popular with the consumer and affordable for the publishers because of new faster and modern printing processes. The size and format of books had reduced considerably as children's literature became more widely available to the masses.

Aris's Literary Series

Aris had trained and worked as a commercial artist for a decade. During this period, he had worked in collaboration with many renowned artists, most notably John Hassall, E. H. Shepard (1879-1976) and Harry Rountree. His first illustrated books were produced and illustrated from 1910 onwards, a period considered to be the golden age of children's book illustration and technical production. To compete in this expanding market, Aris knew from his commercial background that the most captivating element of the book was the cover design: it had to be clearly visible and have an instant, eye catching design that would attract the young reader. In 1912 Aris illustrated Mabel Mackintosh's *Dilly Duckling* and a companion, *Mrs Bunny on Tour*

⁴⁶ Helen Bannerman, *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (England: Gacl, 2011).

and it was then that he had the motivation to proceed in trying to make a name for himself writing and illustrating his own tales.

From a personal perspective, I believe that the most interesting aspects of Aris's books are the great variation and originality of his book covers and the composition of the illustrated interior. The format of a book was generally dictated by the publisher and usually dependent on the audience, budget and whether the book was part of a series or an edition. However, Aris's trademark characteristics are evident in his designs across different publishers. His commentary and advice in articles he wrote for magazines and academic books on illustration suggest that he clearly had influence over the book cover design and format. Many of these common characteristics and features are recognisable on covers Aris produced for different publishing houses.

Aris was undoubtedly a prolific author and illustrator, producing nearly 150 books during his working career, in addition to illustrating a further 250 for other authors. The range of books he produced varies quite considerably, and his legacy has provided a wonderful assortment of educational works and literary tales. For this critical analysis, I have divided and categorised Aris's output into three periods, highlighting those that are significant for technical design.

The first books Aris illustrated were prior to the Great War (1914-1918) and constituted the earliest part of his literary career. These include the Stick books, the miniature book enclosed within a cardboard sleeve (both published by Henry Frowde Hodder & Stoughton, London, circa 1910), the Log Books (*Tales in the Wood* published by J. F. Shaw & Co., 1912), and the early *Playtime Picture Book Series* (published by Lawrence & Jellicoe, 1912). Without doubt, this was a period of real innovation and originality in the development of new formats for books, and authors like Aris took advantage of the improvements in printing and book publishing. Aris's earliest books, and probably the first he was commissioned to illustrate, were the Stick books: *Hollow Tree House*, *The Wood Brownies* and *The Wooden Soldier*, a set of long

narrow books, bound with string (fig 2.1). The Stick books are a very rare and a scarce format.⁴⁷ It is unknown whether Aris was the author of the text, which consists of simple olive green coloured narrative, accompanied by minimal line drawings in the same colour. The miniature book *Billy Quack* is highly unusual for its diminutive size, which would have made it economical to publish and inexpensive for the purchaser. The simple illustrations are supported by green text and enclosed within a pictorial cardboard sleeve case for protection. Though the format and size of these miniature books are innovative and captivating to view, from a technical perspective, Aris's coloured illustration is exceptionally naïve and simple with no notable merit. It is most probable that Aris provided quick sketches to accompany an anonymous author's text. These little books were mass-produced and few survive (fig 2.2). *The Tale of Dilly Duckling* is another early book that Aris probably illustrated for another author, possibly a reward book, which were little books given away at Sunday School as a reward (fig 2.3). The *Log Books* or *Tales of the Wood* are the most original of all Aris's books for their unique format and size. Whether the publisher or Aris selected the choice of this unique format is unknown. The highly unusual physical format would suggest it was most likely Aris's idea, as there are no other comparable examples of publishers using a similar concept for other author's books, or perhaps it proved too costly for the publisher, who did not wish to replicate the concept. The three log books are made to look like logs, measuring 4" x 1.25", with a wood texture on the exterior which opens lengthways to reveal three little books, each containing thirty two coloured and black and white illustrations. The fact that only one has survived from this period is a testimony to the delicacy and intricacy of this set of three log books bound together with string (fig 2.4).⁴⁸

⁴⁷ *The Wooden Soldier* and *Hollow Tree House* are in Siân Dawson's private collection. Neither of these books have been lodged at the British Library nor can be located via COPAC.

⁴⁸ The only known copy of the Log books is in the British Library's collection of rare books and manuscripts.

Plate 7



Fig 2.1. Stick Books (1910)
published by
Humphrey Milford, London

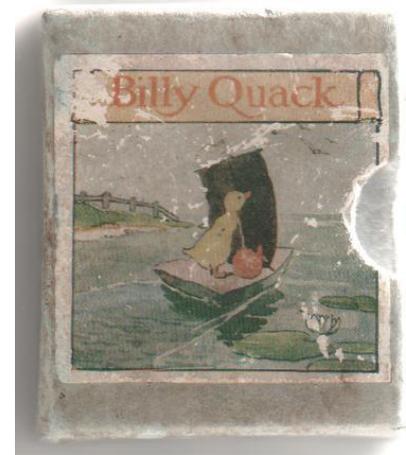


Fig 2.2. Miniature (1910) in cardboard
sleeve, published by
Humphrey Milford, London

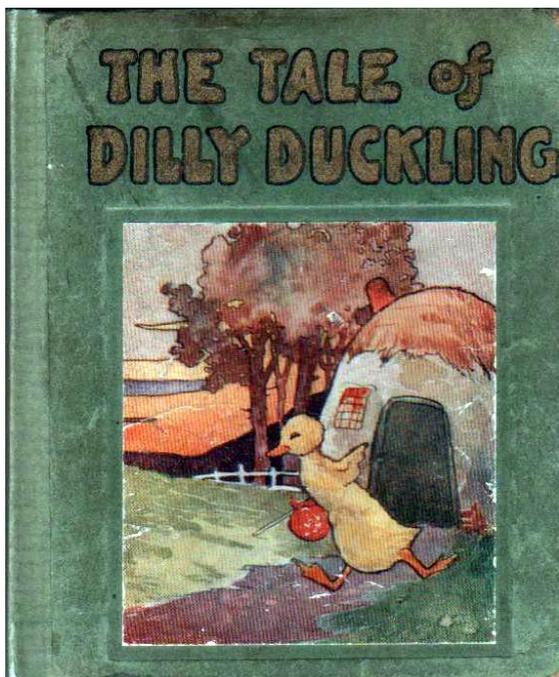


Fig 2.3. Reward Book
Humphrey Milford (circa 1920) and
Henry Frowde and Hodder & Stoughton (1910)



Fig 2.4. *Tales in the Wood* (1912)
The Log Books by J. F. Shaw & Co.

At this time, photographic reproduction for newspapers, magazines and periodicals all required skilled artists, which resulted in a dramatic rise in their social position as the demand increased for visual stimulation via advertising, comics, poster art and postcards. This raised the public's awareness of illustration in books and allowed artists like Aris to develop their own exclusive style. Aris's background and training in the commercial field of graphics for magazines and newspapers gave him an understanding of what was required in illustrating books, most notably the book cover, which drew the instant attention of the viewer. Aris realised the cover of a book was probably the most important and problematic aspect. Put simply, without visual appeal to the eye, the book would not sell. Aris believed the inherent impact of the cover design had to appeal both to the child and to the adult who would purchase the book. He also recognised from a commercial perspective that it was important that the book design reflected and captured the flavour and character of the publishing house in the same way as a magazine would to a firm's advertising.

Up to the end of the Edwardian era, illustrated book jacket covers were not required; covers tended to be decorative rather than portraying the contents of the book. After this period, authors and illustrators like Aris, whose books were directed at the younger reader, intentionally designed the early jacket covers and frontispiece depicting a simple scene or character from the story. The title and the author's name were inserted on to the book by the publishers using gelatine which was placed over the drawing when reproduced. However, Aris ensured that all his designs were equally good with or without lettering and that the spine was complete in itself and not necessarily a continuation of the front design, Aris paid meticulous attention to all aspects of the overall technical design. The style of lettering for the type font was probably chosen by the publishers as it is similar to that used by many authors at that time. The title of his tales was generally in display type, a heavier face which provides additional emphasis on the title. A similar type face is used for the author's name in body type; this gives less prominence

yet is distinct for its clarity, size and colour which varied according to the dimension of the book.

During the ten year period between 1915 and 1925, Aris concentrated solely on his books and produced the very best illustrated publications of his literary career, in what transpired to be his most prolific period. Aris completed 111 books, including 71 for Humphrey Milford and those under his pseudonym Robin A. Hood and those he also illustrated for others, including two for Mrs. Strang's Pop-up Playbooks, six he illustrated for May Byron and four, which were translated by Yvonne Ostroga and published by Librairie Hachette (1922). The intermediary period of Aris's literary career is more distinct for the development of his creative style and trademark characteristics that featured on his book cover designs, along with his popular anthropomorphic creatures and high quality illustrations. Two of the more unusual series that Aris wrote and illustrated from this period are the ribbon books (published by Henry Frowde, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1916) and the silhouette series (published by Humphrey Milford, London, 1921) (fig 2.5-2.6).⁴⁹ The six ribbon books are a small landscape format with a delicate ribbon threaded through the cover, which adds further visual charm. The illustrations are accompanied by handwritten narrative (fig 2.7). Each book has a different coloured ribbon evocative of the title, *That Little Red Hen*, *That Little Green Frog*, *That Little White Puppy*. It should be noted, however, that Aris's idea was not original and is identical in design and format to Mabel Prendergast's *The Little Yellow Duckling* (published by Alf Cooke Ltd. of Leeds and London, (1907) (fig 2.8-2.9). Similar in size and format are Aris's silhouette series, *The Story of Tinkaboo Mouse*, *The Story of Duckling Duck* and *The Story of Jack Sparrow*. These are very rare and collectable for their unique black and white silhouette illustrations, a design method

⁴⁹ The ribbon series and silhouette series are used in this thesis as a means of simplifying identification of this particular set of books. It is not a term of reference used by the publishers for these series.

Plate 8

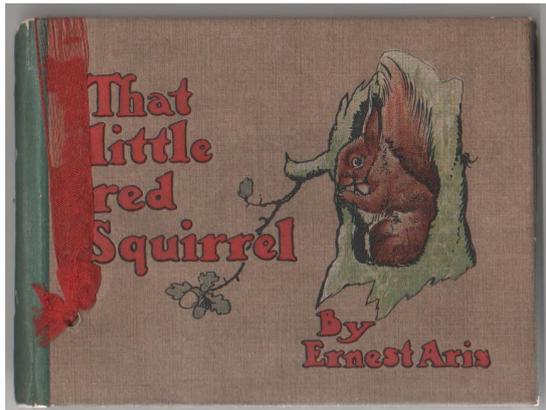


Fig 2.5. A ribbon book (1916)

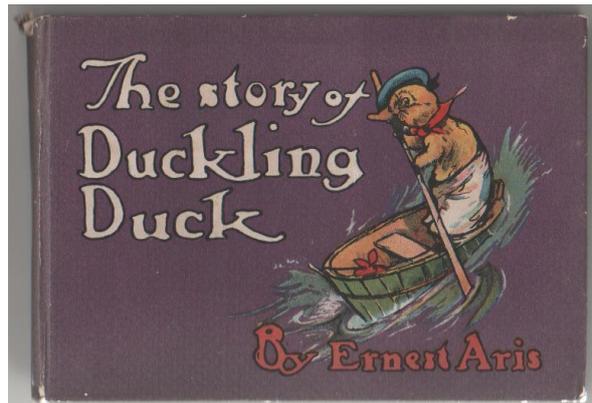


Fig. 2.6. The silhouette series (1921)



Fig. 2.7. Interior of the ribbon book accompanied with handwritten calligraphy

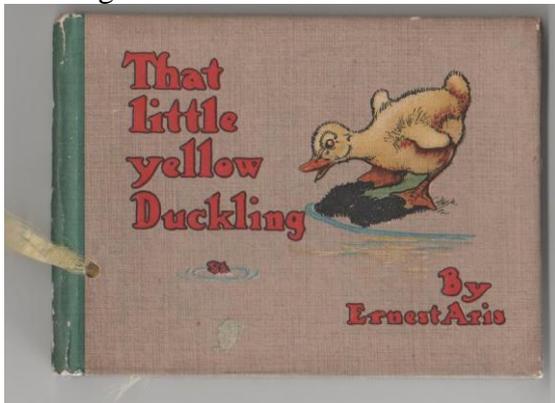


Fig 2.8. Ernest Aris (1916)

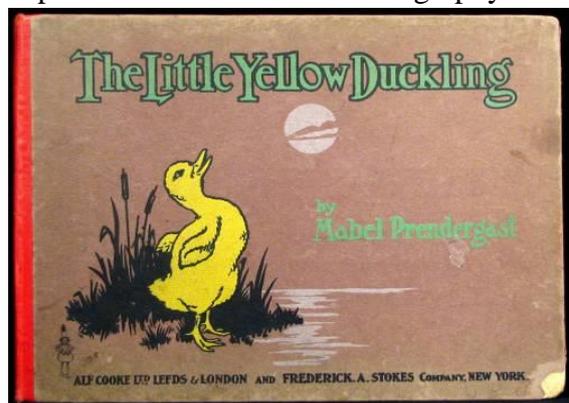


Fig. 2.9. Mabel Prendergast (1907)

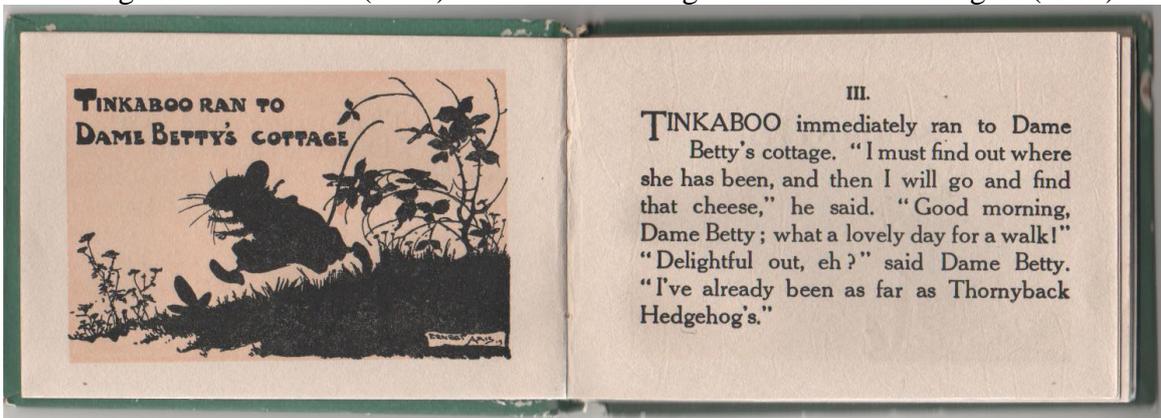


Fig 2.10. Interior of the silhouette series illustrated by Ernest Aris

Aris had previously used for a poster for London Transport (circa 1915).⁵⁰ This is a good example of Aris demonstrating his versatility by extending his expertise into broader forms of art design. He emphasises the image by creating a silhouette and, although constricted by certain limitations of colour and the simple outline, the illustrations are remarkably clear. The precise short verse within the image makes the picture complete and is fully representative of the narrative text (fig 2.10).

The *Toy book Series* (Gale and Polden, 1912-1916), the *Bold Bad Mouse Series* (Partridge, 1916) and the *Tufty Series* (Partridge, 1912-1920) are enchanting for their coloured illustrations and compact size, even smaller than Potter's format. This stage of Aris's career appears to be his most prolific period of production and many of his illustrated tales from these years are his most collectable and remain a landmark for their enduring simple stories and wonderful illustrations.

Evidently, many of Aris's illustrated books are dated post his conscription into the RAMC from November 1916 to March 1919. It would appear he made very good use of his extra time, producing some of the finest illustrative tales of his literary career. After the allegations of plagiarism by Warne's and Potter in their correspondence with Aris and his publisher Gale & Polden (1916; see Chapter 2), Aris changed publisher to Humphrey Milford, probably to avoid any conflict and wrote and illustrated his unsurpassed and only series written under the pseudonym, Robin A. Hood (1918-1921) as a consequence of the events. This was followed using his own name for the *Dainty Series* (1919-1922), the *Uncle Toby Tales* (1921) and the *Duck a Dandy Series* (1923).

Aris's most visually captivating and original set of covers from this period was from the *Dainty Series* (fig 2.11). The book cover design for the initial book *Little Jill O'The Hill* (1919) was submitted without visuals or narrative content to Humphrey Milford. The design was

⁵⁰ Silhouette was a popular decorative technique during the nineteenth century.

Plate 9



Little White Tail

Little Toddler Tail

Fig 2.11. (The Dainty Series 1919)



The Story of Ginger Hare

The Story of Ebenezer Bristles

Fig 2.12. Uncle Toby Tales (Ward, Lock & Co., Limited 1947)



Busy-body Bob

Duck-a-Dandy

Fig 2.13. Duck a Dandy Series (1923)

Illustrated by Ernest Aris

something new in children's books, its merit being the striking and distinct black and white stripes, which were bold and visibly conspicuous to the young eye. The printers nicknamed the series the 'jazz series,' which was appropriate as it certainly signified the modern jazz era of the 1920s. The *Dainty Series* was accepted by Humphrey Milford and Aris produced four additional books from the initial cover design submitted: *Little Hop O'The Green*, *Little Tiny Tot*, *Little Toddler Tail* (1921) and *Little Mousey Muffet* (1923). These were all consistent with the original volume in terms of format, size, and layout. Aris believed the success of the books was dependent on the merit of the cover design, which had to be visually captivating. In an article that he wrote for *The Artist* (1938), Aris suggests that it was he rather than the publisher who had control over this cover design.⁵¹ I would also suggest that because of the similarities of this eye-catching design, it is highly probable that it was Aris, who having realised the commercial success of the *Dainty Series*, provided the idea for the *Uncle Toby Tales* (published by Humphrey Milford in 1921 and reprinted by Ward, Lock & Co., 1947) (fig 2.12). Aris reproduced another similar design, the *Duck a Dandy Series* (1923) (fig 2.13), with a checkered black and white cover, a variation along a similar theme. All three series are immediately visually appealing and are strikingly different from other books published at that time. It is evident Aris had influence over the publisher on the creative cover design as they are all similar in style. Following this period, Aris's output was probably exhausted and, out of necessity, he reverted to the commercial sector to earn a living.

In the final period of Aris's career his work concentrates predominantly on correspondence and educational books in areas of personal interest, including natural history and tuition books such as *Poster Work* (circa 1942) and *The Art of the Pen* (1948), which he produced for instructive purposes. In the 1930s there was little experimentation with illustrative ideas other than the revival of the nineteenth century techniques of white-line wood-engraving

⁵¹ Ernest Aris, 'Illustrating Children's Books', *The Artist*, February 1939, 184-185, (p. 184).

and an interest in nature and education. Post war and the Depression brought about a recession in the 1930s and meant families had limited funds for social interests, which tended to revolve around practical pursuits within the natural environment.⁵² This trend was reflected and can be seen in literature, such as the popularity of the precise and superb work of the author and artist, Eric Fitch Daghish (1892-1966), a professional naturalist and fine engraver of animals and birds, who produced a nature series, '*How to see Flowers* and *How to See Beasts* (1933). Raymond Sheppard, an engraver, also illustrated Maribel Edwin's *Round the Year Stories* (1938-39) in four volumes, one for each season, which proved highly popular during this period.

Aris, ahead of the trend, had already collaborated with Charles Bayne, a partnership that resulted in the exceptionally illustrated and educational Charlecote Series (1927); which can be traced back to Aris's initial contact with Bayne in 1910. Charles S. Bayne was the editor of *Little Folks* (1908-1915) and produced a variety of children's annuals for Cassell & Co. Both Aris and Bayne had a lifelong passion for natural history and had become professional partners in an artists' publishing agency based in Fleet Street, London. In July 1927 Aris and Bayne collaborated together and published the *Charlecote Series: Life in the Cabbage Patch, Peeps into the Hedgerow, All Around a Stinging Nettle* and *The Nest in the Ivy* (fig 2.14). These wonderful little natural history books are very rare and highly collectable today. The *Charlecote Series* has beautifully illustrated hardboard covers, detailing the life cycle of the flora and fauna surrounding the habitat featured in the title. Aris's personal diary refers to a fifth book called the *Secrets of the Stream*, but although the illustration for the cover exists in a private collection, there is no other reference to or evidence of it ever having been published.⁵³ The wonderful collection of coloured illustrated plates in this series by Aris was reproduced by the Charlecote

⁵² N. H. Dimsdale, S. J. Nickell and N. Horsewood, 'Real Wages and Unemployment in Britain in the 1930s', *The Economic Journal*, June 1989, pp. 271-292.

⁵³ A book cover design for *Secrets of the Stream* was illustrated by Ernest Aris and is currently in the private collection of Dudley Chignall.

Plate 10



Fig 2.14. Charlecote Series illustrated by Ernest Aris and Charles Bayne (1927)

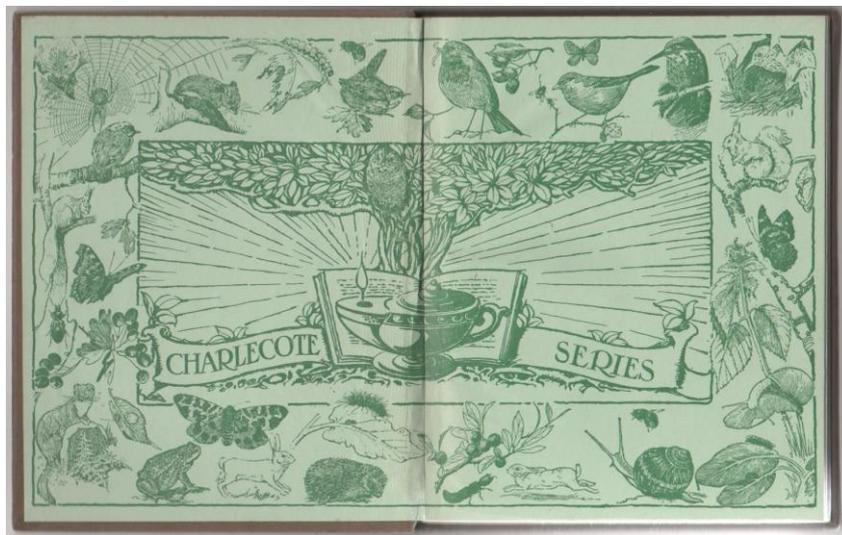


Fig 2.15. Frontispiece and Endpapers of Charlecote Series

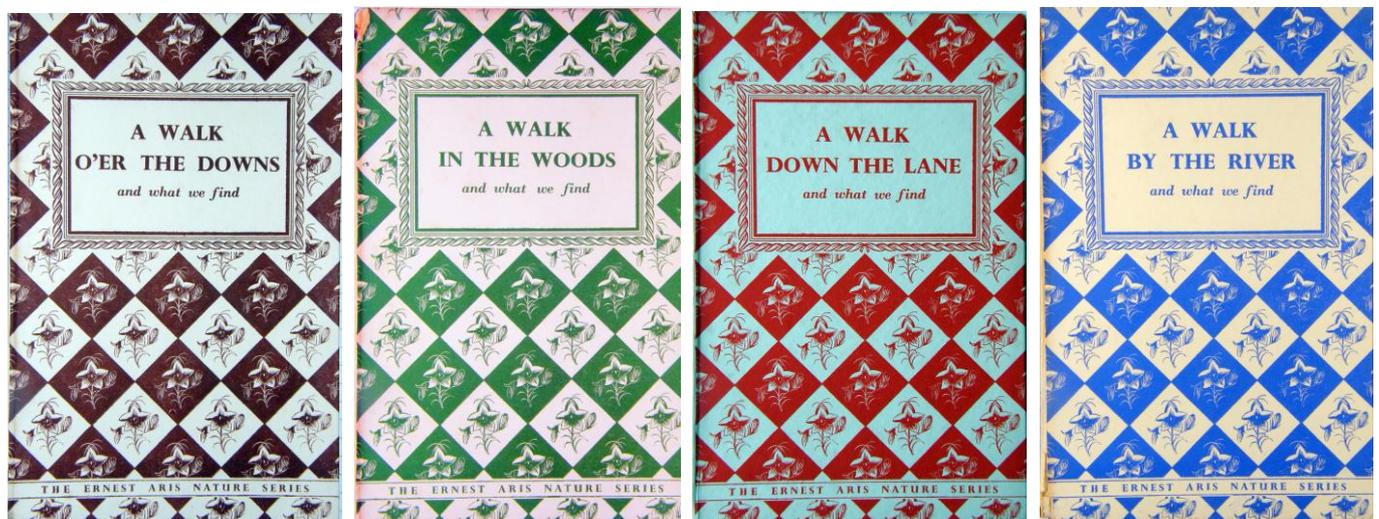


Fig 2.16. The Nature Series published by The Fountain Press, 1948

Press in four volumes, dating from 1917 to 1927. Bayne and Aris spent a decade preparing the narrative text and illustrations and this is a clear indication of Aris's dedication in his pursuit of excellence. Aris left no part of this unique set of books untouched by his creativity and they are an important aspect of his legacy. Great attention is paid to illustrating the frontispiece and endpapers, which he considered an important component of the design for a book. In an article Aris wrote for *The Artist* about illustrating children's books, he commented that:

The bold, strong effect of a book jacket would not be suitable for a frontispiece, which is really a coloured illustration. Therefore the general treatment must embrace the qualities of an illustration not too delicate in colour or too rude in technique.⁵⁴

Aris's design for the frontispiece and endpaper of the *Charlecote Series* is a simple but imaginative line drawing in green on light coloured paper which gives the reader an overview of the contents of the book. Within the creative design, the focal eye is drawn to the centre, helped by the horizontal lines. The owl is peeping from the tree, surrounded by glorious decorative illustrations of nature (fig 2.15). Aris creates a well-conceived and balanced composition and a technical comparison can be drawn with the designs of Walter Crane, who pioneered an awareness of book design and considered the double page spread a visual unity. Aris, like Crane, has embellished the ornamental with scrolls and surrendered the whole image by surrounding it with a decorative border and incorporating a title.⁵⁵

Aris's later nature series; *A Walk by the River*, *A Walk Down the Lane*, *A Walk O'er the Downs* and *A Walk in the Woods* (The Fountain Press, 1948), is evidence of his obvious love of nature and his remarkable knowledge of and ability to move from children's to educational books. The purpose of Aris's series was not to give a learned dissertation on nature, but to

⁵⁴ Ernest Aris, 'Illustrating Children's Books', *The Artist*, February 1939, 184-185, (p. 184).

⁵⁵ Walter Crane, *The Decorative Illustration of Books* (London and New York: George Bell & Sons, 1896).

impart a rudimentary knowledge of creatures, seen and supported with dialogue effortlessly conveyed to the reader by word and picture. Aris takes the reader on a ramble down the lanes, over the Downs and through the woods, enabling us to absorb his full knowledge and perception of the environment (fig 2.16). These books were described by Aris as, ‘A delightful series of four-nature books written in an easy, conversational manner for all lovers of the countryside. The fine quality line drawings which profusely illustrate the text are a unique feature of each volume’.⁵⁶

Aris is generally more considered in his approach to the importance of combining and integrating the word and visual images in these educational books: there is a special awareness of composition and less of the Edwardian and Victorian opulent decorative borders. Aris’s approach to the composition of the image and technical design, I regard as quite traditional in style for this period of illustration, although not for this type of book. The line drawing is minimal and uncomplicated, which was necessary at this time for the current market and made it economical to produce. As Aris remarked:

many educational books have limp covers, and the cover designs are as a rule not very ambitious. They generally consist of a small drawing, taken from one of the illustrations and printed in colour. Two to three flat colours at most are used, the paper, if coloured, counting as one.⁵⁷

This later nature series is typical of educational books after the Second World War with simple, plain, inexpensive covers, accompanied internally by monotone illustrated plates and the creative design limited by the cost of production. Though simple in presentation, each volume is pleasing to observe; the wood block cover design is eye-catching and can stand alone, and the cover design ensures the books are recognisable as a series. The same cover is presented in a

⁵⁶ Ernest Aris, *A Walk o’er the Downs* (London: The Fountain Press, 1948), p. 46.

⁵⁷ Ernest Aris, ‘Illustrating Children’s Books’, *The Artist*, January 1939, 157-158, (p. 158).

variety of colours and complimented by Aris's fine quality internal line drawings, which are profusely represented throughout the text. According to Aris:

The same scrupulous care for accuracy and authenticity which governs the text must govern the illustrations. In depicting facts, nothing must be conjectural or fanciful, but must be based on the most modern available material—photographs, films.⁵⁸

While many authors merely dismissed or considered the attention to creative detail far too time consuming and costly, Aris recognised the important aspects of the overall book design and accuracy in representing the exactness of nature.

Aris was always conscious about the cover design and gave considered attention as to which part of the story should be depicted on the frontispiece and endpapers. Both must encompass the overall impression of the storyline, characters and nature of the book's contents and were imperative for the book's success. I believe these features are the most endearing and enchanting aspects of Aris's books. The frontispiece and endpapers in his earlier books generally consist of a sepia line drawing, printed on a light coloured tinted paper pasted down across the full width of the book. Aris intended that as soon as the reader opens the book, he or she would be immediately engrossed by the visual images that instantly greet the eye. Striking examples are the designs for the *Uncle Toby Tales*, where Aris depicts a synopsis of the story of Uncle Toby, with the book upside down and the characters leaving the pages (fig 2.17). The frontispiece and endpaper illustration provide a broad overview of the whole story, as well as introducing us to the characters and setting the scene for the reader. The majority of Aris's books, including the earlier tales, have illustrations on the frontispiece and endpapers printed with a light colour on tinted paper. By comparison to other authors of this period, who tended to simplify or marginalise this important aspect of the book, Aris portrays these images in far more

⁵⁸ Ernest Aris, *The Artist*, January 1939, p. 157.

Plate 11



Fig 2.17. *The Story of Ginger Hare*
(Uncle Toby Tales 1921 and 1947)

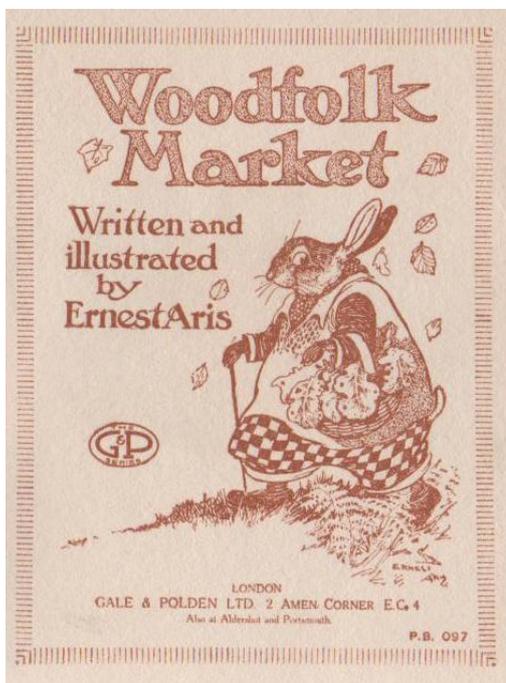


Fig 2.18. Title page of *Woodfolk Market*
(1916)

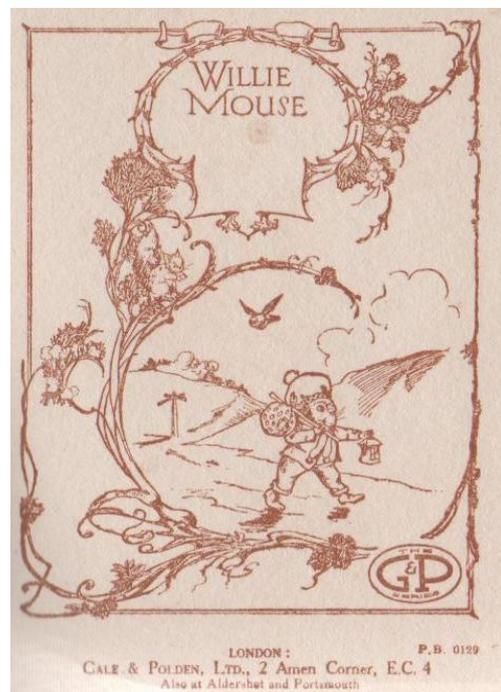


Fig 2.19. Title page of *Willie Mouse*
(1912)

detail as well as carefully considering every aspect of the internal book design, including the frontispiece as in *The Story of Ginger Hare* from the Uncle Toby Tales (fig 2.17).

The title page is another important aspect of the creative design. Aris observed that the title page was ‘most fascinating and gives much scope for the illustrator’s inventive faculties’.⁵⁹ This page is governed by the type of book and should always suggest the ambience of the interior and what the reader is about to discover within the cover. In *Woodfolk Market* (1916) and *Willie Mouse* (1912), the illustrated sepia imprints clearly indicate the humour of the book to the viewer and suggest that there is more to come (fig 2.18-2.19). A child would be intrigued by the small detail and drawn to turn the page and discover more about the contents.

Aris’s title pages generally have images designed to fill the whole space on the page and vary from the very simple in his earlier books, to the highly decorative in *Playtime Stories of the Woodfolk For the Wee Folk* (1916). The simple title pages were a result of economies within the industry and a profound change in fashion following the high extravagance of the Edwardian era. Publishers had to seek methods to reduce the costs and commercial artists like Aris were required to adapt their style and provide artwork that was suitable for the current market. The title page composition and creative design of the illustration on this page is most captivating and allows Aris to use his full artistic talent and creativity to the best of his expertise. Aris had to provide something special and rely upon his artistic merit rather than technical processes to recreate the desired effect. *Playtime Stories of the Woodfolk For the Wee Folk*, is, I believe, Aris’s finest title page (fig 2.20). The intricate detail surrounding the coloured image with a decorative effect is a masterpiece; Aris has illustrated an image that represents a pen-and-ink style lithograph. The lettering is simple and set on an ornamental plate with the publisher’s imprint beneath. The four colour illustrations at each corner depict the characters from the four tales, each surrounded by ornamental borders, scrolls and other characters subtly placed amongst

⁵⁹ Ernest Aris, ‘Illustrating Children’s Books’, *The Artist*, October 1938, 57-58, p. 58.



Fig 2.20. *Playtime Stories of the Woodfolk For the Wee Folk* (1916)
Illustrated by Ernest Aris

the detail. The technical design style of these imprints is similar to the results achieved from pen-and-ink style lithograph, which is a time-consuming process of using a pen drawing with greasy ink on stone.⁶⁰ Aris has used meticulous draughtsmanship and emulated this result using pen and ink, a skill he may have acquired from watching his father, Alfred, a professional lithographer. Aris would have been familiar with the technical processes at that time and able to imitate some of the techniques with precision by hand.

Aris's attention to the contents page and list of illustrations is another important aspect of the decorative design at the front of his books. Aris does not limit his design to the top of the page, but takes advantage of the space by using the sides of the page for decoration and introducing characters whilst ensuring space is left centrally for the purpose for which the page was intended. He takes great care to ensure that the visual image portrays a message to the reader. For example, a list of illustrations page would comprise of a scene from the tale rather than a decorative border or ornamental design. Similarly, the contents page depicts a representational scene or incident from the passage which creates a sense of anticipation or expresses information to come. Without doubt, Aris had an input on all aspects of the overall creative design of his books, which is evident from the trademark characteristics and features that are portrayed across the broad spectrum of his work he produced for different publishers. Aris considered no detail too small to be ignored and a better understanding of his complete technical expertise and his knowledge of design are what make his work so significant.

Technical Expertise

There are a number of factors that may have influenced Aris's technical expertise and creative development, although his natural skill was probably inherited from his artistic father, Alfred. As a child, the discussion of artistic subjects and methods must have greatly interested and influenced Aris's aesthetic style and the course of his life. It would also have meant Aris

⁶⁰ Bamber Gascoigne, *How to Identify Prints* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004).

possibly had a greater awareness of the trends in the art sphere, including exposure to the Arts and Crafts Movement, which impacted on artists and society in the 1880s. This was inspired by the teachings of John Ruskin and by the aims, ideas and practical achievements of William Morris, who founded the Kelmscott Press in 1891. This movement generated discussion around the subject of book production and design as well as the art of the typographer and the decorative illustrator, and resulted in stunning production and design of books. Morris's belief was that the book should be designed as a whole and not in individual parts. As a consequence, the craftsmanship became truly outstanding in all aspects of the creation of the book. Pages, according to Morris, should be designed by an artist rather than an engineer and must be clear and easy to read; for instance, each letter should sit properly on its base with small even white spaces between the words and the lettering. Morris applied careful attention to every technical aspect of detail down to the 'hinder edge', which he suggests 'must be the smallest member of the margins, the head margin must be larger than this, the fore larger still, and the tail largest of all'.⁶¹ Morris's work was considered remarkable for its harmony of type and illustration, but his high standards of perfection were largely unattainable as they were too time consuming and costly. Aris would have been unable to pay the same meticulous attention to this type of small detail, although he was more commercially aware and creative. For example, the lettering in the ribbon books would have been difficult for a child to decipher because the type font was handwritten calligraphy. Morris would have considered this undesirable, even though it had a commercial appeal. Aris's later books were of a lesser quality as they were mass produced, in contrast to the limited editions produced by the Kelmscott Press. Nonetheless, there is much evidence of Aris's attention to detail combined with his technical expertise, which is reflected in his eye-catching illustration and innovative covers.

⁶¹ William Morris, *The Ideal Book: Essays and Lectures on the Arts of the Book*, ed. William S. Peterson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), p. 71.

Aris produced numerous books during his career and towards the latter part of his creative life that concentrated predominantly on education, his own observations on natural history and advice on various techniques such as pen and ink, poster work and the processes used in creating and submitting quality images to publishers and magazines. Throughout Aris's career, he had worked in a variety of media and different sectors of the art market and it is from this body of commercial work and his literary books, that I have drawn an understanding and appreciation of his technical expertise.

Aris understood from observation that a child has no sense of the artist's lines and detail at a young age and certainly no appreciation of style or technique. Aris realised that it was necessary to place the simple facts of outline in as direct a manner as possible before the child, avoiding crude or static drawings but portraying the image not too simply, so that a child's imagination would have to play its part. As Aris claimed, 'everything has to be defined, and nothing of an impressionistic nature will serve.'⁶² It is evident from Aris's illustrations that he recognises that for children to understand the visual image, they need to see the complete picture in its entirety, as a child only sees what is placed before them; as in Aris's sketch A for *The Artist* (fig 2.21), nothing is hidden or left to the imagination. Aris is aware that a child has limited knowledge to supply the absent detail that an adult takes for granted as in sketch B, and that the type of block and paper required for reproduction of the fine lines in sketch C would have to be of high quality and considered too costly. However, these three sketches are a good example of Aris's explanatory thought process on the technical merits of developing a style suitable for different audiences.

⁶² Ernest Aris, 'Illustrating Children's Books', *The Artist*, September 1938, 22-24, (p. 22).

Plate 13

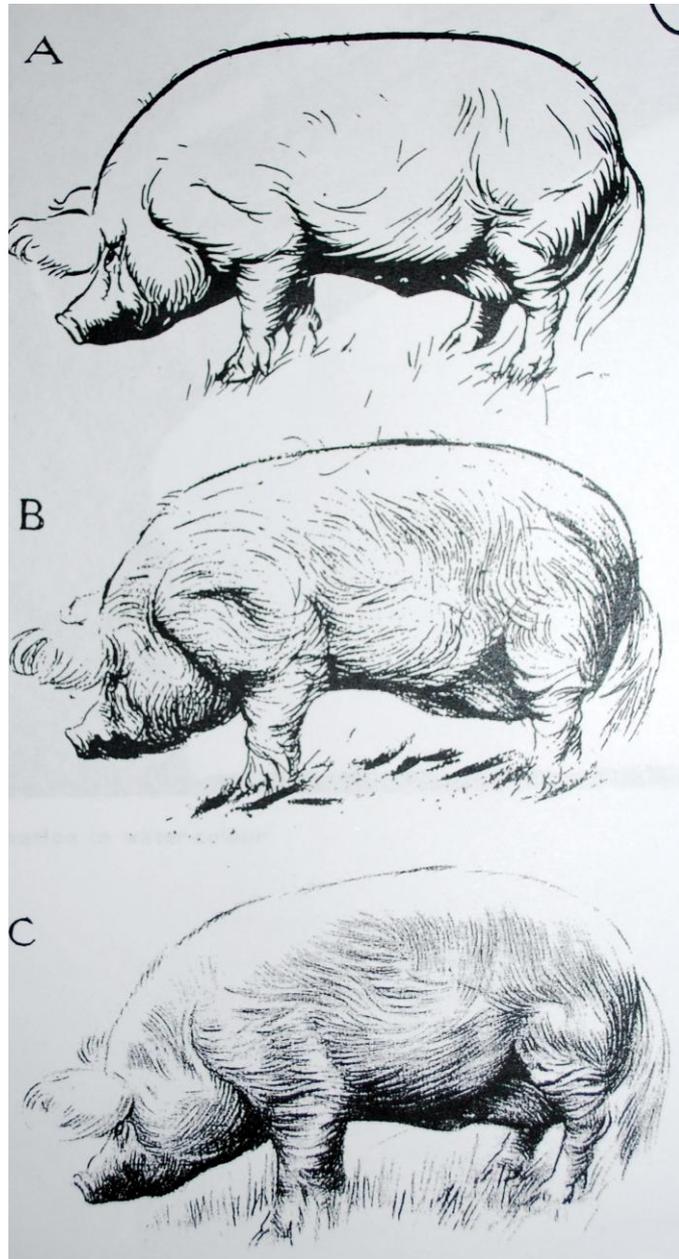


Fig 2.21. Illustrated by Ernest Aris.
'Illustrating Children's Books', *The Artist*, September 1938, 22-24, (p. 22)

Aris focused his tales on selected topics and subjects that he found personally interesting. This was imperative when submitting to publishers because it is easier to submit visuals on a subject that is familiar to the artist. As Aris observed:

one's work is governed by temperament, tastes and inclinations. The all absorbing love of nature has influenced my work to such an extent that nine-tenths of my commissions are of this order. When the artist is not familiar with his subject he must guard against his details looking 'placed' rather than just occurring.⁶³

From articles Aris wrote for magazines and educational books, it is apparent that he had an understanding from his commercial background of what publishers required throughout the submission process. For example, many publishers rejected artists' preparatory roughs and preliminary drawings for a variety of reasons: the choice of illustration might represent too minor an incident in the tale, or because an illustration could simply be too physically close to the next or previous illustration, thereby leaving a large proportion of the book without visuals. When preparing rough sketches, Aris took great care to ensure he produced an even spread throughout the book and endeavoured to prepare his rough drawings and provisional sketches as near as possible to how they would appear in the book and drawn to actual size with chapter and caption added. Aris wrote, 'Even in rough I am very particular to express with care the telling points, such as expression'.⁶⁴ Aris also observes other practical considerations to make life easy for the publisher which often artists ignore, such as submitting a sketch with title, chapter, verse or caption added. Additionally, although Aris was able hastily to produce preparatory roughs in as little as twenty minutes, he recognised the importance of ensuring efficiency at all stages and,

⁶³ Ernest Aris, 'Illustrating Children's Books', *The Artist*, December 1938, 122-124, p. 122.

⁶⁴ Ernest Aris, *The Artist*, December 1938, p. 122.

most importantly, made sure the image was able to stand alone and speak for itself. Aris's foremost occupation before undertaking any preliminary roughs would be thoroughly to read the script of the story so that he could create visuals in sequential order at specific points in the book. This makes the final sketches Aris provided for *The Oakmen* all the more remarkable (see Chapter 2). In this case, he was limited in that he had received neither narrative nor summary of the story, other than the preliminary sketches with a few notes in the margin supplied by Potter and was therefore unable to illustrate specific incidents or vignettes, which may have given additional action, interest or excitement.

Aris's illustrations for books had to depict the whole story. Occasionally, it was not straightforward providing artwork for precise points in the tale, where the text maybe of less interest from a visual perspective and difficult for the illustrator to represent. Aris understood drawings had to be striking and of strong contrast, yet with sufficient detail to make the reader muse over them. He observed that:

An illustration, in order to please the editor or reader, must possess something which will touch the heart as well as engage the mind. It must reach human experience as well as the human senses, creating a desire to possess and cherish the print.⁶⁵

Another important aspect of Aris's work was the creation of contrasting texture that gives the elusive 'quality' to a design. Aris was always careful to consider the detail in relation to his finished drawing and this consideration was particularly important at the transitional stage, when an image is submitted to publishers or for commercial use. If the image is reduced significantly and printed on rough paper, the resulting picture can generate clogged up lines producing a distorted mass. Aris was cautious to provide images at actual size or provide

⁶⁵ Ernest Aris, *The Art of the Pen* (Oxford: Pen-in-Hand Publishing Co. Ltd., 1948), p. 27.

images with open lines, which were more suited if reduction was required. In Aris's article for *The Artist*, he wrote that he

experimented largely in this respect by having blocks made of drawings in various styles and printed on various papers, so that I can interpret any technique I use. In the event of a verbal fight with editors, and block makers over the reproducing qualities of a drawing, my experiments justify themselves, for I can squash all arguments with proofs. It is by constantly thinking and experimenting that one keeps going.⁶⁶

From this comment, Aris confidently indicates he has a better understanding than the publishers and printers of the practical process and implications of technical reproduction of the image. Aris believed, to justify his argument and emphasize his opinion, that it was easier to show examples of the various techniques and his preferred approach on different papers to justify his reasons for using a particular method of design, rather than trying to give an explanation of the different processes required to reproduce a version of his image.

Aris's drawing technique and style for his commercial work tended to be simplistic and bold; nevertheless, it transmitted the message without appearing naïve or weak. Although there are many examples of more detailed work, this was also his preferred style for children's books and there were reasons for this. As he remarked, 'everything has to be defined and nothing of an impressionistic nature will serve.'⁶⁷ In other words, too much detail would be lost on a child. Moreover, such detail would require finer quality paper for reproduction and thus increased costs for the publisher. Aris therefore ensured that as a commercial publishing artist, he not only understood the needs of the young reader but he also combined this with the desires of the publishers.

⁶⁶ Ernest Aris, *The Artist*, January 1939, p. 158.

⁶⁷ Ernest Aris, *The Artist*, September 1938, p. 22.

A distinct feature of Aris's work in my opinion is his attention to minor detail on the horizon of the image combined with depth of field. Aris suggested that the illustrator should make 'figures large on the field, for he must remember that even in a picture book there is an educational interest. In making the figure large, it is more noticeable by its size and more readily impressed on the child's memory.'⁶⁸ For example, in *The Tale of Robbie Rabbit* (Fig 2.22) it is striking how Aris places the person in the distance of the focal eye and brings it into the design by creating perspective. This is achieved by emphasising the small detail and the placement, giving an impression of depth of field. Aris once said of his figures, 'I do not think [the artist] can err on the side of smallness as long as they are clear and distinct'.⁶⁹ Aris construes his work in this way and allows the young reader to pore over the minute detail, which gives the picture extra focus as well as further areas of interest for discussion.

Another notable strength of Aris's illustrations is the lack of boundaries and skilful planning and placement of characters and objects within the composition. Aris seldom puts a line around his illustrations, as this tends to limit the focal point of the picture to the edge of the borderline. If a boundary is included in his images, it is squared rather than ruled. Aris suggests 'To the child's mind the picture definitely ends with the ruled line, whereas in the vignettted picture there is no end'.⁷⁰ In the two images from *Little Toddler Tail* the top and one side is cropped; the eye does not travel any further (fig 2.23). The direction of the character's downhill movement in the illustration suggests a sense of speed and forward motion that will go on indefinitely. Aris's clever use of composition is evident here: it fixes the eye and allows the viewer to focus on the central figures at the same time conveying speed and movement (fig 2.24).

⁶⁸ Ernest Aris, *The Artist*, September 1938, pp. 22-24.

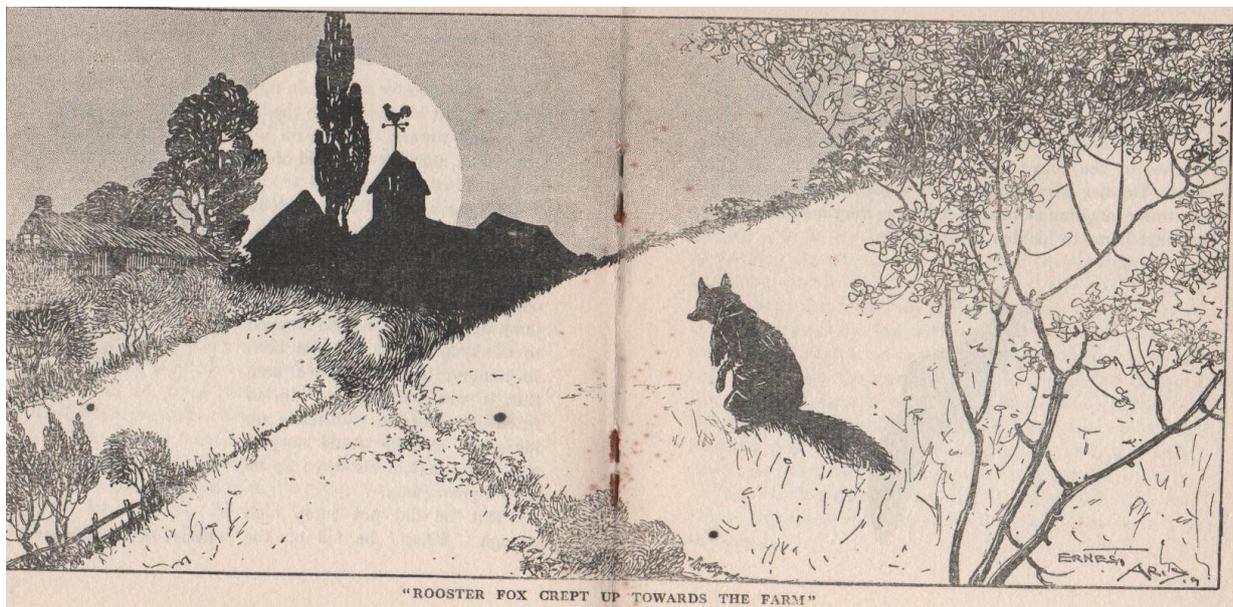
⁶⁹ Ernest Aris, *The Artist*, October 1938, p. 57.

⁷⁰ Ernest Aris, *The Artist*, October 1938, p. 57.

Plate 14



Centre pages of *The Tale of Robbie Rabbit* (1920)



Centre pages of *The Tale of Rooster Fox* (1920)
Fig 2.22

Plate 15

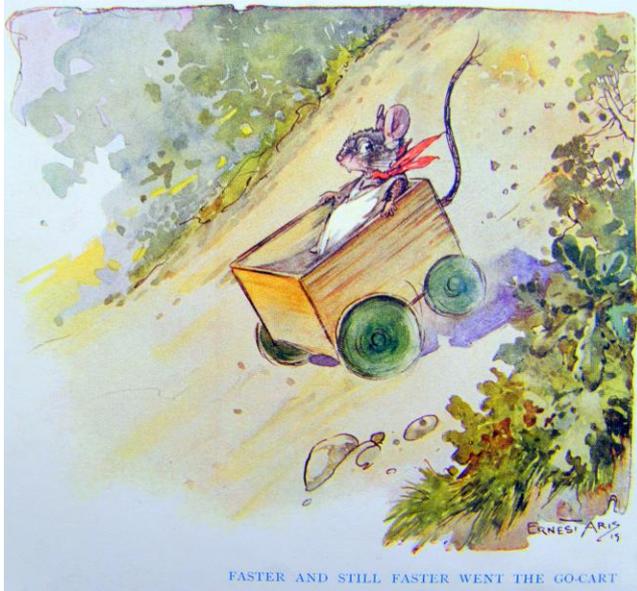


Fig 2.23. *Little Toddler Tail*
The Dainty Series 1921



Fig 2.24. *Little Toddler Tail*
The Dainty Series 1921

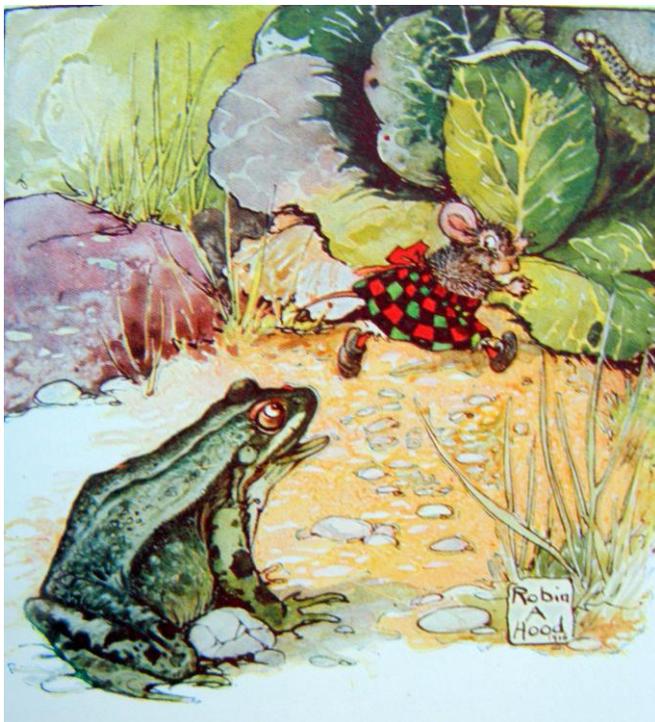


Fig 2.25. *Just a Tiny Mite* (1918)



Fig 2.26. *The Wee Babes in the Wood* (1918)

Also important to Aris's work is his emphasis on the use and intensity of vivid colour. This may have stemmed from his education under the tutorship of Charles Stephenson, who specialised in ornamental design at the Bradford Technical College, and under Gerald Moira, Professor of mural and decorative painting at the Royal College of Art. It may have also emanated and developed from his commercial work on newspapers and various associated products. Without doubt Aris had a natural gift for and wealth of experience with the use of bright clean colours. He states:

This does not necessarily mean primary colours as secondary and tertiary colour can be clean and bright ... For the purpose of illustrating for children it is always wise to let red be a prominent colour, consistent of course with the subject.⁷¹

The illustrations from *Just a Tiny Mite* and *Wee Babes in the Wood* are typical of the way Aris has depicted interesting colourful subjects and are fine examples of how he uses intense pure colour, with red strategically placed right at the centre of the optical field, seductively enticing the viewer into the image (fig 2.25-2.26).

Aris's best collection of coloured plates, I believe, was published under his pseudonym Robin A Hood, following the plagiarism debacle with Beatrix Potter. The series comprises of seven books with beautifully illustrated images, which are crisp and lively in the colouring. Aris achieved this by 'putting the colour on more or less in patches; a staccato touch'.⁷² By comparison to Beatrix Potter's watercolours, Aris's illustrations have much more vigour and spirit and the colours are not so pale, or 'sombre', as he refers to Potter's images in his correspondence.⁷³ A close scrutiny of the illustration for *The Wee Babes in the Wood* suggests

⁷¹ Ernest Aris, *The Artist*, September 1938, p. 24.

⁷² Ernest Aris, 'Illustrating Children's Books', *The Artist*, November 1938, 89-90, p. 89.

⁷³ Ernest Aris to Beatrix Potter, 18 September 1916 (The Linder Bequest LB, V&A, 1469).

that the detail of the cabbage is less significant and the colours paler by contrast to those in the foreground, which have more detail and sharpness. Aris's technical understanding about the application of colour, therefore, achieved significant results.

Aris was foremost a commercial artist and designer and many of his best works were the monochrome illustrations he produced in pen and ink. He probably inherited his line drawing techniques, eye for detail and elaborate craftsmanship from his father. Observing his father's painstaking work on metal plates, Aris realised that he could replicate this medium hastily and more economically using pen and ink. Aris once claimed with pride that he had produced a line-block proof, which had been mistaken on sight by a publisher for a half-tone proof, the range of tones being so wide. This could be a satisfactory proposition for a publisher, who would appreciate the full gamut of the half-tone, at line-block cost.⁷⁴ As Russell Reeve states in his introduction to Aris's *The Art of the Pen*:

drawing for the line block demands a special regard for the blackness and precision of lines and the whiteness of the spaces between them ... lines will often tangle together, resulting in spaces too narrow or scratchy to ensure facsimile reproduction.⁷⁵

Evidently, Aris had the skill and ability to use this expertise in his commercial career to great advantage.

Aris was continually seeking to find new techniques to suggest colour, light and shade, using the pen to apply different textures and tones or translating colour into tonal values. Tonal contrast is a vital component of Aris's design; similar tones can cause an image to be dull, flat

⁷⁴ Ernest Aris, *The Art of the Pen* (Oxford: Pen-in-Hand Publishing Co. Ltd., 1948), p. 10.

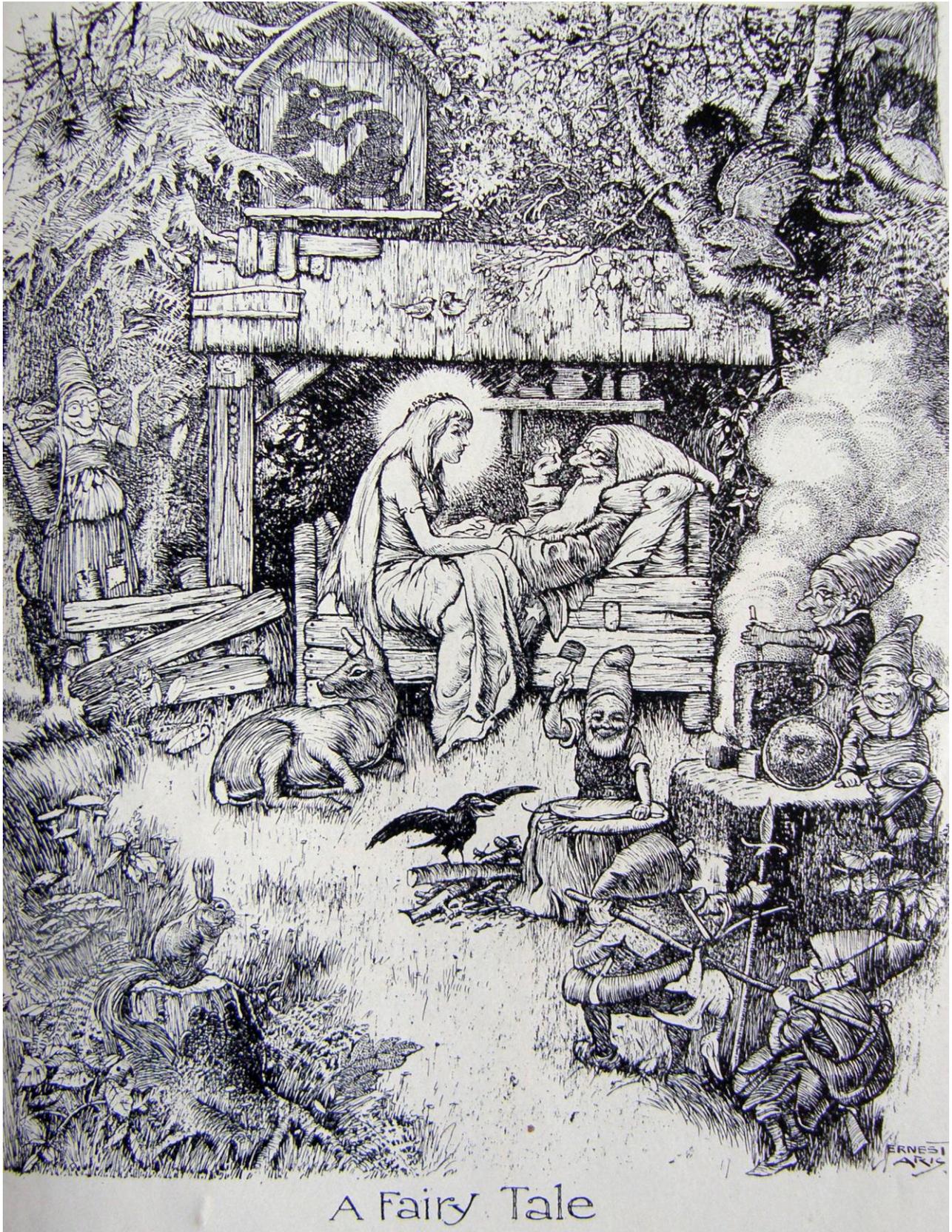
⁷⁵ Russell Reeve quoted in the introduction, Ernest Aris, *The Art of the Pen* (Oxford: Pen-in-Hand Publishing Co. Ltd., 1948), p. 9.

and lifeless. His prudent use of tone gives the indefinable substance to the object, a three-dimensional effect, and adds perspective. Aris's work in colour and monochrome has strong tonal contrasts that make his images seem animated; he advocates that strong contrasts give the effect of brilliancy to a drawing.

Aris's formal training and familiarity with reproduction methods allowed him to recognize that the image was not complete until it had passed through the final stages of printing. The technical complications involved meant that a line pen and ink drawing could easily be destroyed if too much ink was placed on the block. Alternatively, over reduction of an image on low quality or grade of paper could distort the lines and cause blurring. Aris's experience meant he overcame many of these difficulties. He ensured that he knew the quality of the paper prior to the execution of the illustration. If the paper was rough, broader strokes were required; if the paper had a smooth surface similar to Bristol board, finer lines and detail would be used.

Another technical problem Aris strove to avoid was the problem of over reduction of his illustrations, particularly when he was providing a variety of visuals and vignettes for a story.⁷⁶ Aris tended to work to the same scale, avoiding extra work for the block maker and cost to the publisher. He knew how different techniques reproduced and generally preferred only a third reduction, avoiding indistinct images. One of the best examples of Aris's draughtsmanship where he avoids the reduction problem is *A Fairy Tale* illustrated in *The Art of the Pen* (fig 2.27). The illustration is fully representative of the broad spectrum of different textures and applications using various techniques and conveys Aris's outstanding artistic merit in the discipline of pen and ink. The composition of the illustration has been carefully balanced and

⁷⁶ Aris refers to the issue in correspondence to Beatrix Potter: 'The size is just a trifle larger than the figures you gave me. This, in the event of yours having them reproduced will be beneficial: They are in proportion. I have had to work somewhat in the dark, not knowing the story'. Aris to Mrs Heelis, 18 September 1916, (The Linder Bequest LB, V&A, 1469).



A Fairy Tale

Fig 2.27. *A Fairy-tale*
Illustrated by Ernest Aris and published in *The Art of the Pen* (1948)

each fragment within the image is both interesting and tells a story in itself. Aris wrote of this image that:

The “optical field” is the position in the picture upon which the eye most readily falls. It will be noticed that the greatest contrasts occur here. ... The diagonal lines leading to the optical field are steadied by the vertical and horizontal lines of the hut, which enclose the central figures.⁷⁷

Aris has drawn each part of the image as a unit, each leading to the centre of the design where the eye falls and the characters are placed. Aris has used different technical methods on each of the units within the image: dry- brush for the foliage and light behind the gnome which is a direct contrast to the minimal lines behind depicting space; and dots for the soft texture of the smoke. It is interesting to note Aris has avoided using cross hatching which he considers bad penmanship. He preferred to use dots and stippling for soft effects and horizontal or vertical lines of graduated thickness to illustrate the texture or surface of wood, water, reflections, foliage, trees and movement.

The importance of texture can also be seen in the illustration *Chiseltooth the Beaver*, (fig 2.28), where a clear comparison can be made between the texture of the beaver’s fur and the lines used for the owl’s feathers. Aris achieves the effect of the beaver emerging from the water with wet fur by using solid firm pen lines. The tail of the animal is hairless, coarse and wet which he has treated differently with dots, conveying the physical difference in the texture of the surface. The soft under-wing feathers of the owl are shown in dots and the texture of the coarse harder outer feathers are minimal dots and lines. The trees, rock and water also have their own special treatment. The illustration represents a bright moonlight night and, as a whole, has a sparkling effect. Night is suggested by the shadows and highlights within the foliage on the

⁷⁷ Ernest Aris, *The Art of the Pen*, (Oxford Pen-in-Hand Publishing Co. Ltd. 1948), p. 38.

Plate 17



Fig 2.28. Chiseltooth the Beaver
The Art of the Pen (1948)
illustrated by Ernest Aris

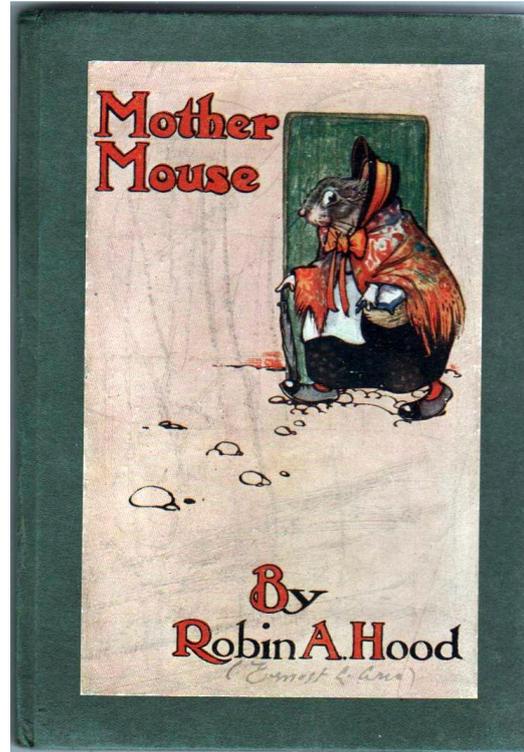


Fig 2.29. *Mother Mouse* (1918)
Robin A. Hood Series
illustrated by Ernest Aris

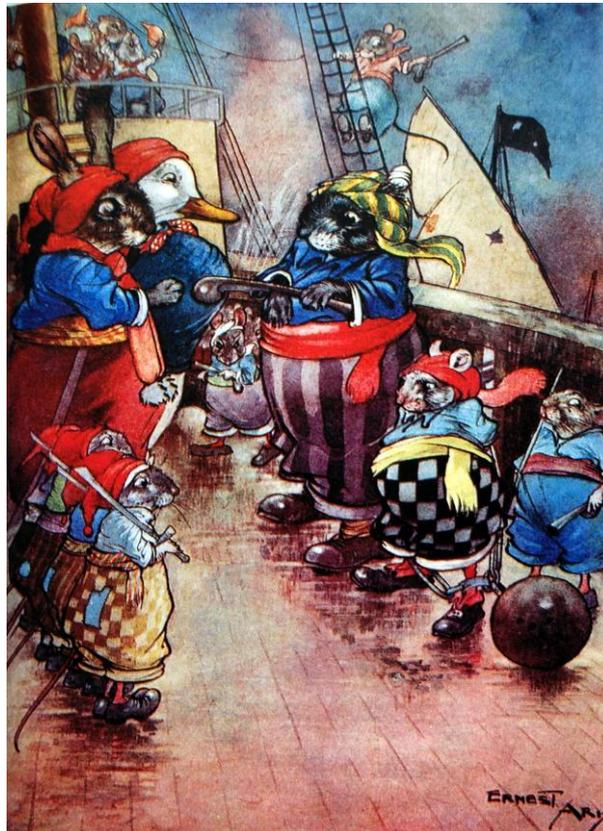


Fig 2.30. *Pirates Three* (1914)
Published by Cassell and Co

solid black background. Aris's different techniques applied by pen, which suggest colour, texture and the contrast between the textures, helps to give his images that elusive quality.

Aris's trademark characteristics

Aris developed very distinct trademark styles throughout his working career, the most prominent being the innovative way he displayed the narrative, vignettes and his recognisable personalities, combined with the distinct check pattern, which he incorporated as part of the design on his covers as well as his characters' clothes. These attributes make Aris's books and commercial designs instantly identifiable. Other features include his considered attention to the variation of text and font, relationship of image to text and the visual display of his vignettes or 'thumbnails'. These fundamental characteristics and assortment of innovative design concepts, feature throughout the body of his work.

Text and Font

As a commercial illustrator, Aris applied careful attention to all aspects of the visual book display including the narrative text and typeset font used for the cover design. Aris wrote in *The Artist*, 'I always prefer lower case letters. It is easier to read and is certainly in keeping with the overall general design'.⁷⁸ Although, there is no hard and fast rule, Aris ensured the font was always in keeping with the context of the book.

The internal display of his typeset varied from the traditional plain sepia, black and olive green typed font, to the handwritten style of black and white in the ribbon book series. In these short tales, Aris starts the beginning of the text on each page with a capital letter in red. Short phrases within the content of the text are also highlighted red, which serves to accentuate the phrase. In the Robin A. Hood series, Aris highlights the text by capitalising the chapter headings, short idioms and paraphrases in red beneath the vignettes and full-page illustrations.

⁷⁸ Ernest Aris, *The Artist*, February 1939, p. 185.

Using this approach, Aris enhances the image and provides interest to the narrative content, whilst drawing in the viewer's eye and making the overall book work as a unified whole.

Text and Image

Aris always gave careful consideration to the display of the text and image. His visual images were specifically designed and meticulously related to the text they were intended to represent, although there is much evidence to suggest that his images can work independently from the text. Additionally, it should be noted that Aris's illustrations have been used on multiple occasions by different publishers other than his own, in the form of a variety of sequels and even to accompany piracies of Beatrix Potter's books in the American market. However, I believe this was done without his knowledge as Aris always paid careful attention to the text and image display, which is not evident in the American pirated versions. Aris was vigilant regarding the arrangement of the text and image on the page. In the earlier books, the image is on the opposite page to the narrative text it was designed to illustrate because it was easier for the printer to reproduce. In his later books with technical improvements and lower costs, the images have been placed within the body of the text, which was simpler to achieve and visually more stimulating. The text and image relationship will be discussed in greater depth in a critical analysis of *The Treasure Seekers*.

Vignettes

The majority of Aris's books have full-page colour illustrations supported with small black and white vignettes which complement the narrative and add further curiosity for the reader. Artists were not required to submit vignettes; however, they proved popular, the cost being negligible to the publisher, and they created an added attraction for the child. From a young reader's perspective and personal experience, generally the smaller the vignette, the more captivated and enthralled the child becomes by the diminutive detail.

Aris's books are typically small for the child to handle, the thumb-nail vignette drawings in minute detail lend themselves more effectively than large drawings on a small page. Aris used vignettes profusely throughout all his works, remarking that 'they play a very important part in a child's book and serve to illustrate that part of the text not covered by full page illustrations'.⁷⁹ Aris's vignettes are not only there to fill space but to retain a child's interest, even if they are displaying an incident of minor narrative importance. They are capable of keeping the viewers' attention by representing an unimportant part of the story, or even a physical movement. Aris tended to sprinkle them throughout the text, relating to narrative moments that may be of insignificance or only require a small thumbnail image. They are usually represented in the same way and evenly displayed throughout the narrative context. The intervening text does not detract from the image, but together they enhance it and contribute unexpected information and add further fascination for the reader.

Aris's vignettes are a wonderful feature of many of his tales; by applying short captions beneath he also provides additional curiosity and creates further interest: 'I have often seen a child poring over a book, read the caption of the vignettes only. They become almost a story within a story'.⁸⁰ Aris clearly understood that, as children advance in age and knowledge, their minds and curiosity develop; they seek out the detail and can begin to interpret the image and look for hidden meanings. This is why vignettes play such a substantial role within Aris's work and prove captivating and intriguing for the reader.

⁷⁹ Ernest Aris, *The Artist*, September 1938, p. 24.

⁸⁰ Ernest Aris, *The Artist*, October 1938, p. 58.

Characters

Aris developed a very clear and conspicuous colour theme that is evident in the black and white stripe or check pattern that was used as a basis for the cover designs of the *Dainty Series*, the *Uncle Toby Tales* and the *Duck A Dandy Series*. The books' solid bold colours and pattern instantly attract the viewer's eye and became a trademark of Aris's covers as well as a distinguishing feature of the figures in his stories. Aris used this conscious form of repetition of the checkered pattern in the clothing of several of Aris's characters, most notably in the form of black and white checkered baggy trousers with patches on the knee, had the effect of enabling his readers to immediately recognise his anthropomorphic creatures. This feature was used throughout his career, from *The Twins of Bunny-ville* (1914), *Bunkum Brown Bandit* (1915), *Bunniken Brighteyes the Indian* (1916), Reynard Fox in *The Treasure Seekers* (1916), Benjamin Buntie Bertie Brown in *A Bad Bold Bunny* (1920), right up to the *Tasseltip Tales* (1947-1953). This bold design became one of Aris's trademarks and was an additional means of marketing to children who were invariably drawn to the eye-catching pattern, the 'chief merit was that it was striking and distinct from anything likely to be on the bookstall, and it was conspicuous'.⁸¹

In the numerous tales Aris wrote, he routinely used the same fifteen characters, rebranding them in multiple incarnations and guises, the most notable being Whiskers Rabbit and Willie Mouse. These same anthropomorphic creatures featured in all his literary tales, Cococubs, cigarette cards, board games. Akin to other commercial illustrators, Aris developed an individual style for his figures. All his characters have distinct physical features that are unique, making his characters easily recognisable. For example, the physical forms of his anthropomorphic rabbits have accentuated long ears and feet with bulging eyes, but under close scrutiny appear as human, which can be difficult for an artist to achieve. As Margaret Blount remarks of Aris's creatures:

⁸¹ Margaret Blount, *Animal Land: The Creatures of Children's Fiction* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1975), p. 157. Ernest Aris, *The Artist*, February 1939, p. 185.

In their field and hedgerow settings they are very ‘real’, but their eyes are human ... By this I mean that they have cornea, iris and pupil; the effect is a compromise of human expressiveness in a mouse face, and quite acceptable. When this is overdone in the coy, almond eyes of Disney animals, the sinister manic stare of Louis Wain cats, or rather arch appearance of Racey Phelp’s woodland creatures who have large eyes with glasses, monocles, human crows’ feet smiles, the effect is rather disagreeable.⁸²

Aris and the illustrator Harry Rountree, who drew anthropomorphic creatures in a very similar style at the time, depicted animals less like creatures and more like humans in disguise. Aris’s personalities have humanised expressions and a scruffy appearance that give an impression of the character: a mischievous personality with charm. Aris does not portray them as caricatures, which is often difficult to achieve when trying to illustrate anthropomorphic creatures taken out of their natural environment.

Aris’s figures are not elaborate in their clothing. His signature style for the male characters includes baggy balloon trousers, braces, and red spotted handkerchiefs around the neck, patches on knee, bowler hats and burnished shoes. In Aris’s children’s books, ‘The mouse children have a ragamuffin look, rather like the original Bisto Kids, again with shoes rather too large for them in the children’s styles of 1916’.⁸³ The female creatures commonly appear wearing shawls, aprons, smocked pinafores and carrying the old traditional large round baskets (fig 2.29-2.30).

Some of Aris’s popular works have survived the test of time: *The Browns of Brambledown* (1947) was republished as *The Brambledown Tales* (1989) and the *Tasseltip Tales* (1947), Ladybirds fifth series in six volumes was republished in 1975. Aris’s illustrations were

⁸² Blount, *Animal Land*, p. 157.

⁸³ Blount, *Animal Land*, p. 157.

redrawn by Roy Brown from the original series and the text was rewritten by Sarah Cotton, although the new books never captured the charm of the earlier tales illustrated by Aris and written by Dorothy Richards. However, Aris's name, by comparison to other historical writers and illustrators at that time (Beatrix Potter, Alison Uttley, Racey Phelps and Harry Rountree), whose works also continue to be published today, remains relatively unknown considering that this illustrated works continue to be admired long after his death in 1963. I believe Aris deserves further recognition for this accomplishment. Similar to many other illustrators from that period, Aris's tales remain popular, his characters and images have endured and continue a century later to be used by publishers.

Critical Analysis of *The Treasure Seekers*

As a way of drawing together Aris's technical merits and distinguishing features, in addition to substantiating my argument and validating the case put forward, I have focused on a single work. It was difficult to decide which book should be chosen, as he was the author and illustrator of over 150 books. *Pirates Three* is considered to contain a number of his best illustrations, whereas *Playtime stories of the Woodfolk for Wee Folk* demonstrates careful thought and imagination combined with outstanding design of the layout, which makes the book visually captivating, but the naïve storylines and narrative content are too simplistic for a complete analysis.

As a critic, I could have selected Aris's finest, or most popular book, or one that best encompasses his technical proficiency. However, I have chosen *The Treasure Seekers* (1916), which I consider to combine the elements that are most representational of Aris's work. This is very rare and a highly collectable book, which in my estimation is one of the most visually pleasing and blends an enjoyable narrative with artistic merit. I will try to validate the reason why I consider this to be one of Aris's finer books and why in my opinion it combines all the

essential elements of Aris's technical expertise, as well as bringing to the fore certain controversial issues, which may have affected Aris's continued legacy.

An initial impression of this large hardback book suggests that overall it is of good visual quality with an interesting layout of narrative text and illustrations. The format is manageable, but quite cumbersome in size and weight for the younger reader. This was traditional at that time and similar in style to other popular books by Aris published by Gale & Polden. The book has paper hard board covers with a paste down illustration in colour on the upper and lower boards and a bright red cloth spine. The cover image is visually pleasing and reflects the contents, showing the cuddlesome anthropomorphic character of Peter, with his characteristic large humanised eyes, reading a chart locating the pirates' treasure to enthralled listeners. The cover illustration created by Aris for *The Treasure Seekers* was produced in 1915 at the peak of his productive career; the composition and colours are very distinct for their intense clarity of colour and sharpness. Aris's palette is conspicuous for his striking use of vivid colours, particularly the bright red scarf of the main character Peter Rabbit, a typical trademark of Aris's creative design style. The red is placed in the centre of the optical field, with less details and muted colours to the rear of the picture, contrasting against the detailed bright colours in the foreground. The bold colour gives a wonderful exuberance in the images as a whole, whilst at the same time it captures the essence and flavour of the narrative story of the book. This combined with the bright burnt orange skyline, creates a warming sensation and merges the foreground with the background to make an aesthetically pleasing whole and entices the viewer to share the contents and secrets of the story (fig 2.31). Another of Aris's recognisable design characteristics featured on the cover is the monochrome checkered pattern design on the characters' clothing, which stimulates and attracts the younger reader's eye.

Aris has carefully considered the positioning of the group on the pictorial cover. Peter, our hero, is large and positioned facing the viewer and reading to the other characters in the

bottom right foreground corner of the design. The situation of the figures, combined with a receding background, gives the impression of a well balanced composition. The storyline is

Plate 18

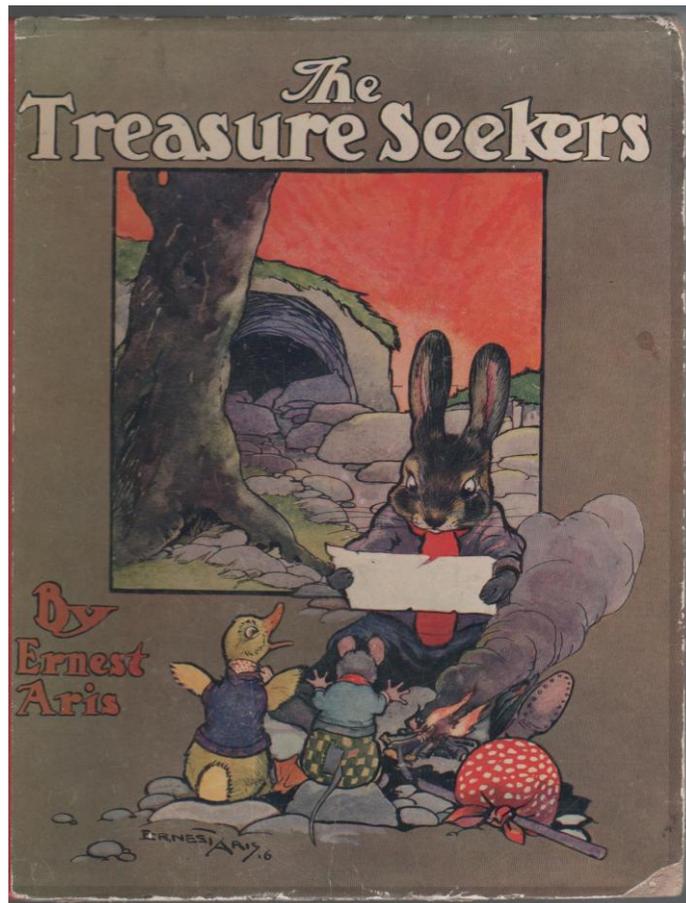


Fig 2.31. *The Treasure Seekers* cover image

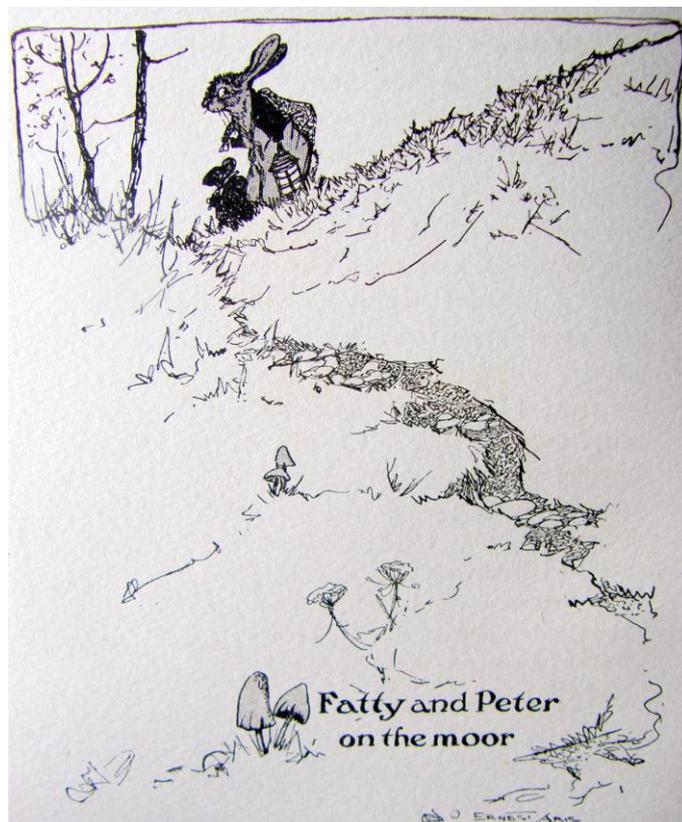


Fig 2.32. *The Treasures Seekers* illustrated by Ernest Aris

depicted on the cover as well as in the frontispiece and endpapers, the design encompassing and giving an overall synopsis and impression of the plot, characters and nature of the book's contents. Aris always believed consideration must be given to captivating his audience from the beginning to the end. *The Treasure Seekers'* frontispiece and endpaper line drawing is technically competent and humorous. However, on this occasion, the pale monochrome image on grey tinted paper that meets the viewer's eye is not as eye-catching as in some of Aris's other books. The title page is an imaginative simple black and white line drawing designed to fill the entire page. This has given Aris the opportunity to captivate his reader, as well as demonstrating his creative ability, and gives an indication of the book's interior and what is about to be discovered.

Aris has demonstrated technical proficiency in this book; his distinct simplistic style of design is evident throughout. The vignettes are bold and simple, but not unsophisticated. Vignettes can appear static and flat, but Aris's in this volume appear lively and full of movement, possessing a three-dimensional effect and adding further curiosity. Aris has also applied careful consideration to the composition of his illustrations, using one of his notable characteristics of enclosing a section of the image that frames the picture. This removes part of the boundary of the full-page illustration and, in this instance, gives a greater awareness of the depth of field on the horizon. Although the illustration is still squared, the focal image of the picture is not limited to the borderline. Aris's distinct attention to minute detail in the distance still allows the young reader to be drawn into the image and provides additional focus (fig 2.32). The characters are portrayed listening attentively to Peter as he reads from the book, giving a hint to the viewer of an adventure to come.

In this book, the visual can stand without the narrative and tells the story independently, which again is an indication of Aris's practical understanding and excellence. This is a technical skill that some illustrators can find problematic to achieve, as some pages may have

uninteresting narrative on the opposite page where an illustration is required. It entails skill by the illustrator to successfully interpret difficult parts of the text which might be less interesting to interpret. It is evident that each of Aris's images was designed specifically for the facing page, as all illustrations and vignettes clearly relate to the sequence of events in the passage. Each time the image is carefully considered and placed facing the correlating narrative text, allowing even the younger viewer who is unable to read, the ability to nonetheless comprehend and follow the storyline.

The text and illustration are compatible and it is evident that Aris has given careful consideration to the layout of the pages of the book. He provides visual interest throughout: the placement of the text is periodically indented and scattered with vignettes, while on other pages, there are small single images with short sharp chapter headings on the opposite page, allowing the reader to progress through the book. The type font is slightly oversized and clearly readable, which allows the younger viewer to read, especially the subheadings, which are displayed in blue under illustrations, and create a visual and narrative whole.

The Treasure Seekers contains a number of high quality colour illustrations specifically produced for this book that accurately reflect the narrative content. He has also included familiar and recognisable characters from his other books, which helps to provide interest and reassurance for the reader who has recognised the well-known characters. As Charles Bayne notes, Aris clearly understands the needs, psychology and mind of the child.⁸⁴ This book combines all the essential visual elements and contains within the story the psychological influences of fear, excitement, security, and comfort that a child requires to help with the development of thought processes and concepts of understanding.

⁸⁴ Charles Bayne, 'Foreword', Ernest Aris, *Famous Animal Tales* (Philadelphia: David McKay Company, 1935), p. 5.

There is no question that Aris was commercially astute, having worked for many years in that sector, so it is most probable that the majority of his work was done to order or to meet demand and, as a consequence was not creatively original. The fact that he was so prolific endorses this argument. However, *The Treasure Seekers* is a story full of wonderful anecdotes and Aris has found the right words and use of language to convey this delightful story. The tale is set in the woods and revolves around Aris's familiar anthropomorphic characters, Peter Rabbit the hero, Reynard Fox, Simon Fatty Mouse, Bristles Hedgehog, Dicky Duckling, Solomon Crow, Michael Mole, Bartholomew Badger and Farmer Hedge. Reynard Fox's plan is to make a treasure map and drop the chart outside Peter Rabbit's burrow. Peter believes the treasure to be turnips and sets out with his friends to seek the pirate's treasure buried in a cave on the seashore, the home of Reynard Fox. Inevitably, the characters have a narrow escape and Simon Mouse concludes by recounting the bravest deed he had ever heard:

One day in the forest my great-great -grandfather met the most savage lion that there ever was, and they fought. After a long fight my great-great-grandfather asked the lion to spare him, which he did. Some time afterwards, hearing loud roars from the forest, my great-great-grandfather hurried to the spot and found the lion caught in a net. He quickly gnawed the net with his sharp teeth, and very soon the lion was free. Don't you think my great-great-grandfather was very brave?" asked Fatty. "Very!" everyone cried; and they all laughed.⁸⁵

The end of the tale has little connection with the original storyline and suddenly becomes a tale within a tale, a characteristic of Aesop's Fables. This unexpectedly stops the momentum and flow of events. Although there is a moral lesson to be learnt from this finale (one good turn deserves another), I believe that the end of the tale is an anti-climax and emotional disappointment. Perhaps there is an argument that while Aris was an accomplished artist, he did

⁸⁵ Ernest Aris, *The Treasure Seekers*, (Aldershot and Portsmouth: Gale & Polden, 1916), p. 89.

not have the experience as an author to sustain interest in the narrative and bring the tale to a satisfactory conclusion successfully.

The prose that Aris uses in *The Treasure Seekers* is by no means simplistic. There is no repetitive use of the same word, which is a method frequently adopted by authors for educational purposes, and Aris's use of text is not limited to short words.⁸⁶ He is not averse to using long descriptive words that would be more interesting to a broader and older audience. To add more visual stimulation and difficulty, Aris has also been creative with the presentation of the text: the treasure chart, for example, is handwritten and reproduced as an image, making the layout visually stimulating, as well providing an educational element, in that the child has to scrutinise the handwriting to understand the detail. Aris generally uses phrases and language that are easily comprehensible in his children's books, unlike other popular classics such as *The Uncle Remus Tales*, which is difficult to understand and follow. Joel Chandler Harris's use of the American southern slang dialect makes it difficult to distinguish common words, a mannerism that many authors like Potter adopted, using some of his words and names such as '*Cotton-tail*,' in their tales: the use of recognisable names and language was popular and deemed a comfort for the reader.

Whilst making a fair critical assessment of *The Treasure Seekers*, however, there are a number of negative aspects that must be discussed. On examination of Aris's various names, characters and story lines, it becomes apparent that many are plagiarised from traditional stories and *The Treasure Seekers* is no exception. Aris's hero, Peter Rabbit, closely resembles Potter's Peter Rabbit, suggesting that there might have been some truth to Potter and Warne's allegations of plagiarism. The appearance of the anthropomorphised animals is similar: both are wearing blue jackets with shiny black shoes. However, Aris's

⁸⁶ Examples of repetitive text can be seen in modern children's literature, Janet and Allan Ahlberg, *Each Peach Pear Plum* (London: Puffin, 1978), and Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler, *The Gruffalo* (London: Macmillan, 1999).

Peter in patched trousers and ragged scarf suggests a more careless and mischievous appearance along with the characteristic devious bulging black eyes and elongated ears and feet. The storyline of *The Treasure Seekers* also follows a similar theme to Potter's with Aris's Peter slipping into a field in the same way that Potter's Peter Rabbit trespasses on to the turnip field of Mr MacGregor.

One could also speculate on the origins of Aris's character Dicky Duckling in this book. Could he possibly have been adopted from *Dilly Duckling*, which Aris illustrated for Mabel Mackintosh in 1912? Furthermore, Reynard Fox was probably based on either *Uncle Remus's* Brer Fox, or from medieval French folklore.⁸⁷ Reynard the Fox was medieval Europe's trickster figure, a nasty but charismatic character that was always in trouble, but able to talk his way out of any retribution. Alternatively, the character could be based on L. Frank Baum's story *The Road to Oz* (1909) where Dorothy encounters Renard, King of the Foxes.

Although many of the stories by Aris are simple, the majority of his tales revolve around a lively group of anthropomorphic creatures as in *The Treasure Seekers*. It is difficult to assess whether Aris's narrative text and storylines were influenced by the traditional storytellers of his childhood, or whether he was responding to popular literary demand at that time. A comparison of Aris's characters and themes can be drawn with those from *The Uncle Remus Tales* written by Joel Chandler Harris and illustrated by Arthur Bennett Frost. The tales were originally a newspaper column in *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*. Harris wrote ten volumes of his work on *Uncle Remus*, and his stories have been translated into twenty-seven different languages. He went on to become a national phenomenon in the 1870s, producing nearly 180 distinctive stories during his career. The tales became known throughout the world and were popular during Aris's childhood and may have influenced his future creative ideas for tales. Harris originally heard the

⁸⁷ Reynard Fox in medieval French folklore. Available online at: <http://www.crystalinks.com/trickster.html> [accessed 6 November, 2011].

stories recited by slaves working on a nearby plantation and converted them into written narratives. *Uncle Remus*, the central character, was an old slave who told moral fables to the son of a Union officer. The stories usually revolved around anthropomorphised animals Brer Fox, Brer Rabbit and Brer Wolf. Aris adopted this familiar theme of the rabbit tricking the fox and evading capture, similar to Harris's in characters in *Uncle Remus*. In Aris's *The Treasure Seekers*, like so many of children's tales in literature of that era, there was a comfortable and cosy moral theme or lesson to be learnt.

Aris was not alone in depicting an anthropomorphic fox and it is interesting to note the range of styles in the images of the various artists who have portrayed the Reynard Fox character (fig 2.33-2.35). The simple, black and white sketches by Arthur Frost portray a dignity about the character that contrasts with Aris's and Potter's; nevertheless none are caricatures, but representational of a universal human condition and human predicaments. I have concluded that it was common for authors to borrow popular names, characters and adapt classic story lines for their own tales. In this respect, it would be hard to say that Aris was different from other illustrators at that time.

In fact, *The Treasure Seekers* title was possibly itself unoriginal. One could speculate that this was plagiarised from Edith Nesbit's first book for children, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, published in 1898 which became a classic. A parallel can be drawn between the two authors, with Nesbit's themes and background settings in most of her stories revolving around a group of ordinary individuals in difficult circumstances who fight back. The reader shares in the bravery and determination of the small lively group, who are full of vitality and enthusiasm for ideas to escape from their situation.

Aris's *Treasure Seekers* is a wonderfully illustrated book and, on close examination of the success and quantity of his literary and illustrated work, he is vastly superior to many of his

Plate 19



Mr Tod from *Mr Tale of Mr Tod*



Gentleman with sandy whiskers from the
The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck

Fig 2.33. Illustrated by Beatrix Potter



Fig 2.34. *Uncle Remus* (1921)
Illustrated by Arthur Burdett Frost



Fig 2.35. Reynard Fox from the
The Treasure Seekers Illustrated by Ernest Aris

contemporaries. However, it is evident that Aris produced much of his work in response to popular culture at the time and it is therefore considered commercial rather than original. Many of his ideas, themes, names and characters have emanated from previous historical classics or contemporary literature and are not entirely of his own creation.

From analysing *The Treasure Seekers*, I would argue that Aris has attempted to reincarnate his anthropomorphic creatures into fashionable characters and rewritten the storylines of texts that were popular before and during that period. This book, although beautifully illustrated with enjoyable narrative, is not necessarily innovative nor representative of the golden period of children's book illustration and literature. It lacks the imagination and originality of a truly unique classic book and the legacy of Aris's *Treasure Seekers* is that it derives from a period where many authors reproduced similar ideas. However, Aris's achievement was to provide a book, which is enjoyable to readers of all ages. Aris's characters are timeless and a tribute to a man who possessed an outstanding artistic talent and understanding of what was required to produce a popular literary work.

Chapter 2

Aris's Professional Affiliation with Beatrix Potter

One of the most notable highlights of Ernest Aris's distinguished commercial career was the Aris's professional affiliation of a commission directly received from Beatrix Potter in August 1916, to produce a set of six drawings from provisional sketches she provided and intended to publish in a tale called *The Oakmen*. Circumstances at the time prevented this from happening and Potter's provisional sketches, Aris's designs and her original illustrated letter written in a loose-leaved book with six pages of text, each page illustrated by a water-colour sketch that was sent to Nancy Nicholson, remain archived in the collection held at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Potter commissioned Aris at a pivotal point in his career when he was enjoying success as an artist. He had just completed the poster commission for London Transport, which had been selected by Frank Pick for the national archive collection at the V&A, and he had also written and illustrated a series of popular books, which had been published by Gale & Polden and Lawrence & Jellicoe. Having seen the success of her books, the opportunity to work in partnership with the renowned Beatrix Potter would have been a prospect that a commercial artist like Aris would have relished.

The brief encounter between Aris and Potter, which I will analyse from their personal correspondence, could have provided history with an altogether different perspective on both artists. However, it unfortunately proved to be an emotional episode for Potter because of the secrecy she maintained surrounding her own identity, personal issues concerning copyright of *The Oakmen*, (to be discussed later in the chapter) and the allegations of plagiarism made by her publishers, Frederick Warne and Co. and herself against Aris.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, Frederick Warne & Co. had established a reputation in publishing children's literature and had produced books by eminent authors and illustrators including Edward Lear, Kate Greenaway and Walter Crane. When Frederick Warne retired at the end of the nineteenth century, the firm was left to his three sons, Harold, Fruing and Norman. Warne was among the six publishers to whom Potter originally submitted the black and white drawings for her first book *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* and they initially turned her proposal down. Potter's initial idea for her first book had originated from picture letters she had sent to the eldest son of a former governess when he was ill. The company changed its mind when the brothers saw a copy of Potter's limited private edition of 250 copies of *Peter Rabbit*, published in 1901. Warne were actively seeking new authors whose ideas and format could compete with the success of Helen Bannerman's *Little Black Sambo* and agreed to publish *Peter Rabbit*, providing that the illustrations were redrawn in colour. By Christmas 1903 it had sold 20,000 copies. It was the beginning of a forty-year partnership during which another 22 books would be published.

The standard format of Potter's little books featured a coloured picture on the front cover and dust jacket with illustrated colour frontispiece and end papers. The plates were grouped in pairs and printed on one side only with a small amount of text on the opposite page. All were published by Warne and printed by Edmund Evans using the three-colour half-tone process, which made reproduction of subtle watercolours now achievable. Potter's narrative, style and format clearly influenced other artists like Aris, who were inspired by the arrangement and the books' popularity to produce tales of anthropomorphic creatures in a similar vein. The authors' of children's book illustration Joyce Whalley and Tessa Chester pointed out about Potter's books:

Their small size undoubtedly appealed to little children, as did the well-balanced text and facing illustration. Her prose is deceptively simple.

In fact she writes with vigour and precision, and though each word is concise and controlled, her phrases are full of nuance, and her sentences of rhythm and a story-telling ease underlined by an ever-present gentle humour. Her stories are neatly constructed and contain shrewd observations of animal behaviour. The illustrations, so beautifully drawn and delicately coloured, show not only an attentive eye for wild life but also for landscape, and all of the setting for her stories, whether field and hill or hallway and stair, are real places with identifiable origins in the Lake District and other areas that she visited... The books are a superior example of perfect unison between word and picture.⁸⁸

Potter was and still is considered the leading children's author and illustrator. There is no doubt that the size and style of her books were completely new innovations for the time, and proved popular with readers and publishers. Aris and other authors like Cecil Aldin (1870-1935) and Mabel Lucie Attwell (1879-1964) would soon replicate this arrangement and the market saw an influx of this type of compact format during that period. However, no author ever truly emulated the success of Potter's books, which have remained classics.

The Background of the Partnership between Aris and Potter

Following Potter's marriage to William Heelis in 1913, Potter wrote and illustrated two tales and two books of nursery rhymes of revised work and not of notable interest compared to her earlier publications. With the exception of *Johnny Town-Mouse* (1918), these later books were assembled from unused remnants of drawings and stories brought together from those earlier years of intensive creativity. The design and technical quality did not compare with her

⁸⁸ Joyce Irene Whalley and Tessa Rose Chester, *A History of Children's Book Illustration* (London: John Murray with the Victoria & Albert Museum, 1988), p. 165.

previous tales, although the books did satisfy her publishers and the insatiable appetite of her young audience.

Little is known about how Ernest Aris and Beatrix Potter originally became acquainted. Although they had many mutual social and artistic interests, they came from very different social backgrounds. Potter was born on 28 July 1866 at No. 2 Bolton Gardens, West Brompton, a quiet and prosperous area of Victorian London. The family was well connected and overly protective of their son and only daughter. Potter's father was a wealthy gentleman barrister and her mother a socialite, both having inherited Lancashire cotton fortunes from parents who had prospered from ownership of dark satanic mills of the early nineteenth century. Potter had been privately educated at home by governesses, spending her entire childhood isolated; she found solace painting animals and in copying and drawing every aspect of natural history. Her childhood had been spent in isolation from other children apart from her brother, and as a consequence, she had devoted herself to pursuing her interest in natural history illustration and drawing her pet animals. Residing close to the Victoria and Albert Museum she had access to fossils, bones and a variety of species of butterflies and insects, as well as being able to study closely the engravings of Thomas Bewick and the work of Randolph Caldecott, which she greatly admired and which influenced her own work. Twenty years later in her thirties, she was still living the life of an adolescent child in her old school room at Bolton Gardens, which then became her studio. Potter's deep love of nature dated back to her childhood holidays, where she spent several months each year in rented country houses in the Lake District or enjoying the romantic Scottish scenery. Away from home, she was able to escape her parents' strict regime and enjoy outdoor pursuits such as fly-fishing, exploratory walks and studying plants, animals, flowers, eggs, butterflies and insects for her work.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ See Linda Lear, *Beatrix Potter: A Life in Nature* (London: Penguin, 2007), and Margaret Lane, *The Tale of Beatrix Potter: A Biography* (London: Frederick Warne & Co., Ltd., 1946).

Alfred Ernest Walter George Aris, by comparison, was born in Islington, North London on 22 April 1882. There is little detailed information about Aris's social upbringing. Nevertheless, social documentation at this time suggests that such a family depending on the sole income of the father, who worked as a lithographer in Islington during the late Victorian period, would have lived frugally, with any children attending the local school. Aris almost certainly acquired much of his design and technical skill from watching and working closely with his father. According to the 1901 census Aris's parents resided in Bradford (now in West Yorkshire) where his father continued to be a lithographic artist, while Ernest studied art at Bradford Technical College, earning his diploma. From there he went to the Royal College of Art (RCA) where, under Professor Gerald Moira, he worked on mural and decorative painting, studying portraits and working in charcoal and wash as well as watercolour.⁹⁰ He exhibited his work at numerous galleries and exhibitions and it took a while for Aris to make a name and a reputation for himself, which must have been discouraging. Disillusioned, he turned his talent to commercial artwork and book illustration, specialising in natural history, birds, animals and writing illustrated storybooks and nature articles.

Although Aris and Potter came from very different social backgrounds, it appears they had both inherited their artistic genius and inspiration from their creative fathers. Aris no doubt gained his expertise watching and copying his father at work and became a very talented pen and ink draughtsman, writing a technical book on the subject.⁹¹ Potter's father's sketchbooks also indicate that he was skilled, enjoying copying engraving, and book illustration. His sketches must have been a source of interest and influence for Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Jemima*

⁹⁰ Aris wrote in his biography for *Who's Who in Art* (1948) that he had worked under Chambers and Gerald Moira, although no material evidence can be found by the RCA to support this or of Chambers. It is possible he attended part-time classes rather than being enrolled as a full time student and that Chambers was a part-time member of staff. Gerald Moira was teaching at the RCA during this period.

⁹¹ Ernest Aris, *The Art of the Pen* (Oxford: Pen in Hand, 1948).

Puddle-Duck, published in 1908. It is more than likely that Potter had seen these sketches as a child, as the visual image of a flying duck wearing a bonnet so closely resembles the sketches by her father (fig 3.1-3.2).⁹²

Beatrix Potter drew in pen and ink and was commissioned in 1895 to produce twelve entomological lithographs, which were to accompany a science lecture at Morley Memorial College for Working Men and Women.⁹³ Although Potter's lithographs do not attain the same high technical standard as Aris, they both had a common interest in this field of reproduction and were stimulated by their fathers' knowledge of the arts, illustration, and engravings. It is evident that Aris and Potter understood the associated techniques for reproduction, which were to heavily influence their work. The two artists also had a number of similar personal pursuits in common, including photography. Aris had worked as a photographer's assistant in a studio in Windermere, which would have helped to develop and formulate his understanding of composition.⁹⁴ Potter used the camera as a visual reference and *aide memoire* for later sketches. She also discovered that the camera lens provided a different way of seeing nature and recording reality, and she incorporated this into her artwork, where it served to emphasise her artistic realism. Aris and Potter's common interests extended to natural history, botanical illustration, entomology, fly-fishing and ornithology. Both were accomplished scientific illustrators as well as having a deep love and awareness of the countryside. Aris's understanding of the natural world would have impressed Potter, who was passionate about depicting every detail of nature. One could assume that if Potter seriously thought to commission an

⁹² Rupert Potter's sketchbook. Inscribed R. Potter Sept 1 1853, Broughton in Furness, Dinting Lodge Glossop. Beatrix Potter collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

⁹³ The commission came from Caroline Martineau, Principal of Morley Memorial College for Working Men and Women.

⁹⁴ The fact that Aris was a photographic assistant in Windermere is referred to in a letter Beatrix Potter wrote to Fruing Warne, 10 November 1917, Judy Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter's Letters* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 239.

Plate 20



Fig 3.1. Jemima Puddle-Duck
The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck (1908)
illustrated by Beatrix Potter



Fig 3.2. Sketch by Rupert Potter,
Sketchbook (1884), archived at
Victoria and Albert Museum, London

accomplished artist, she would require one who could both interpret her imaginary natural world, whilst simultaneously displaying a good technical knowledge of animal anatomy.

Both Aris and Potter had a good understanding of the artistic and creative requirements needed for publishing children's literature, but I would suggest overall, throughout Aris's life he had a broader commercial awareness of other visual genres, having worked on newspapers, magazines, commercial postcards and cigarette cards, comics, transport posters and the successful Cadbury's Cocoa advertising campaign. He originally acquired much of his early book publishing knowledge by working closely with and illustrating books for other popular children's authors of the time, including Mabel Mackintosh in 1912, May Byron in 1915, and Mrs Herbert Strang c. 1915. Potter's experience within the commercial world had been limited to her previous work with Warne Publishing. However, she did have an intrinsic understanding of the industry and a commercial awareness of associated by-products connected with her own books.

A detailed look at the narrative and illustrative content of both Aris's and Potter's work suggests that both contain folklore, fables, rhyme, adventure and fantasy illustrations. Potter's governess in Scotland, Nurse MacKenzie, had read copious amounts to her as a child, favourites being *Aesop's Fables* and Joel Chandler Harris's *Nights with Uncle Remus*, which Potter illustrated in her early career. Aris and Potter both illustrated *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, a classic that appealed to many artists.⁹⁵ Potter and Aris blended fantasy and realism, recreating their own anthropomorphised characters, Potter in *Peter Rabbit* and Aris in *Billie Rabbit* and *Willie Mouse*. These were not animals with human feelings; rather, they were human beings with animal shapes, behaviours and instincts, dressed in human costume for the purpose of comedy. Both Potter and Aris interpreted animal nature, activity and satirical comedy within an

⁹⁵ Ernest Aris illustration for *Alice Adventures in Wonderland* appears in his book *Famous Animal Tales* (Philadelphia: David McKay Company, 1935), p. 2. Beatrix Potter illustrated early ideas for *Alice Adventures in Wonderland* which was not published and are now privately archived.

imaginary world. The humanised creatures are best seen in Potter's *Peter Rabbit* and Aris's celebrated *Famous Animal Tales*, his finest collection of tales produced towards the end of his career in 1935.

Professional Partnership

To understand Potter's motives for seeking a professional relationship with Aris, it is necessary to comprehend the reasons that brought about this affiliation. Even though the two came from very different backgrounds, it would appear that they had much in common. What did Potter hope to achieve by using another illustrator to undertake the technical work for her? There are a number of factors, both personal and professional, which ought to be considered. It was perhaps the national hardships of war, which brought emotional losses and social deprivation within Potter's local community, combined with her own difficult financial situation with Warne, that led Potter to seek and consider a supportive working partnership with another illustrator. Potter probably believed that working on a joint venture and purchasing copyright from another professional commercial illustrator would ease the personal creative burden upon her and would perhaps satisfy and end the constant demands that were made upon her by her publishers. This would also have allowed her the possibility to relinquish her annual obligation to produce new raw material for books, which had become cumbersome because of the personal and professional commitments that accompanied her marriage to William Heelis, a local solicitor.

Beatrix Potter had married on Wednesday 15 October 1913. By the spring of 1914 she had completed the acquisition of another sixty-six acres to add to Hill Top Farm at Sawrey. Hill Top was small and inadequate for married life, but it remained her private retreat where books, illustrations, old furniture and mementoes were kept, and where she could take refuge for periods of rest. Following her wedding, the years from 1902-1913, which had seen the production of her unique stories, her exceptional period of productivity came to a close, and she embraced a practical existence on the farm. There are suggestions that her creative and imaginative inclinations had diminished because she was no longer compelled to remain

secluded from others for long periods. It was this isolation that she had been dependent upon for inspiration in her earlier years and which allowed her to develop the imaginative fantasies that gave so much personal enjoyment to her and others. Without this strict, disciplined regime, she was perhaps unable to produce work to order. Potter's primary focus was to reduce her commercial work and concentrate on other important aspects within her personal life. This included helping to sustain and support the local rural community during the Great War (1914-1918) and was to become one of the most difficult periods in the nation's history, changing the nation and the countryside forever.⁹⁶

After the death of her father on 8 May 1914, Potter spent June relocating her mother and the London household to the country retreat that they had rented near Sawrey. 'I have tried to get on with the book, but there are no plates finished yet,' she complained in mid-July. 'I am interested in the drawings again – in the sense of getting my mind on it, and feeling I could make something of it – if only I had time & opportunity.'⁹⁷ Potter regretted that she had not been more pro-active with her painting during the late winter months of 1914. Her passion was dampened, it seems, by the lack of enthusiasm from her publisher for other products and ideas as spin-offs from her books. This resulted in her publishers failing to acquire any new little books from Potter for their Christmas list in 1914, the first time since *Peter Rabbit* had been published in 1902. Potter wrote to Harold Warne in 1915: 'my eyes are gone so long-sighted & not clear nearby... I suppose I shall have to take to spectacles,'⁹⁸ but Linda Lear suggests in her biography *Beatrix Potter: A Life in Nature*, that her lack of enthusiasm for producing any new work was a result of the unsatisfactory accounting methods and ambivalence of her publisher to accede to

⁹⁶ Lear, *Beatrix Potter*, p. 269.

⁹⁷ Lear, *Beatrix Potter*, p. 268.

⁹⁸ Beatrix Potter to Mr Warne, 18 May 1915, Judy Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter's Letters* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 221.

her requests to be remunerated on a regular basis, rather than her impaired vision as Potter suggests in her correspondence to Mr Warne.⁹⁹

During the Great War years, as the national economy contracted there was a steady decline of agricultural markets in rural areas. There was also a limited supply of experienced farm labourers, as most able-bodied men were required to enlist. Potter became a political crusader for the farming community, keen to support and promote women tending the land, which remained a highly skilled job at this time, although women were inclined to be attracted to the more remunerative posts, such as shop assistants, delivery girls or working in munitions factories. On 13 March 1916, *The Times* published a letter on the subject ‘Women on the Land’, written by Potter under the alias of ‘A Woman Farmer’. The commentary emphasised the loss of skilled and trained farm girls from the land into unskilled jobs, which provided a salary that farmers were unable to compete with. There was an ever-increasing burden on the diminishing agricultural community and farm owners, who were under constant pressure to provide produce with limited financial and physical means during a period of national hardship.

Potter’s personal family obligations and responsibilities, her fears over the diminishing agricultural market, the general physical hardship of working the land and her own advancing years caused her some despondency. She wrote to Millie Warne, ‘I do seem to have so little time; & my writing time is after supper, with eyes that – like your legs – are beginning to feel *anno domini* ... I hardly know what “legs” are, & seldom sit down except to meals.’¹⁰⁰ In her later years Potter appears to have lacked the physical time and motivation, which, combined with her failing eyes and stiff hands, prevented her from enjoying the artistic creativity of former years. These factors only served to increase her incessant apprehension and concerns about

⁹⁹ Lear, *Beatrix Potter*, p. 270.

¹⁰⁰ Beatrix Potter to Millie Warne, 15 December 1916, Judy Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter’s Letters* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 228.

Warne's accounting of her personal earned income from the books, even though she had previously agreed to forgo payments during this period, as business was volatile.

There is no knowledge of how and when Potter initially became associated with Aris. However, she later wrote to Warne that, 'He is (or was) a photographer's assistant....lived in Holloway but at one time been employed in Windermere.'¹⁰¹ It is possible that they met through their mutual interest in photography at Windermere, although no trace can be found of where or when Aris worked as a photographer's assistant. It is noted in *Who Was Who* (1961-70) that Aris was an Art Director at Windermere. However, there is no documentary evidence or payment receipts to suggest that he taught at any of the local schools. Chignall suggested in conversation that if he did, it is more likely that he was an art teacher at one of the schools in Windermere, either the Grammar School or The Old College, which was a prep school for Eton, Harrow and other public schools.¹⁰² Aris, like Potter's future husband, William Heelis, was an experienced and knowledgeable angler, Aris having written and illustrated a comprehensive guide to freshwater angling, *Fishing* (1947), so it is quite possible Aris and Potter initially met at Windermere through this common interest in angling.

Archival Correspondence

As well as angling, it is also possible that the relationship between Potter and Aris came about in a professional capacity. Aris regularly submitted proposals of work to publishers and companies, and in August 1916 he might have done so to Warne, believing his own little books and technical skill could complement their existing range of books. Whether the books were submitted by Aris himself or privately obtained by Warne's is unknown. However, the characters, stories and titles apparently resembled Potter's books too closely for Mr Fruing Warne's comfort. The publisher was concerned about the possible plagiarism in Aris's

¹⁰¹ Potter to Warne, 10 November 1917, Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter's Letters*, p. 239.

¹⁰² See also Dudley Chignall, *The Man Who Drew for Beatrix Potter - Ernest Aris* (Witham: private publication, 2010).

‘booklets’, which they considered to bear a striking resemblance to the tales of Beatrix Potter and so they forwarded to her a package enclosing Aris’s ‘cribs’ for comment, and it is at this point that Potter initiated communication with Aris.¹⁰³

There may have been other reasons or motives why Warne’s might have sent the enclosures to Potter. Perhaps they thought it would encourage Potter to be more active with her production of new literature. The package hinted at the fact that there were other artists who were keen to produce quality children’s literature quickly and along a similar theme, and this was desperately required by Warne’s in order to meet popular demand and maintain the business through hard times. Warne’s may have been seeking other animal artists for commercial gain or simply trying to replace Potter. This is a possibility supported by Warne’s publication in 1918 of *The Hamper of ‘Mr’ Books* by Lawson Wood, which consisted of six small booklets of animal tales in one volume with pictorial titles and endpapers. These books were not dissimilar to Potter’s compact books and proved popular, so there was no reluctance by Warne’s to publish work by other artists and authors similar to that of Potter.

On receipt of the package from Warne’s, however, Potter was not offended by Aris’s publications. Rather, she was impressed and described ‘his drawing excellent’ and seriously considered using him as a ‘second string’ in a commercial partnership.¹⁰⁴ The booklets enclosed by Mr Warne to Potter for her perusal in July 1916 were one of two series: either the Gale and Polden *Toy Book* series (*Billie Rabbit, Little Miss Duck, Wee Peter Pug, Willie Mouse, Bunkum Brown Rabbit, Little Robin Hood, Sir Francis Duck Adventurer, Wee Jenny Mouse, Wee Bits O’Things* and *Bunniken Brighteyes the Indian*), all published between 1912 and 1916 in small

¹⁰³ ‘Booklet’ is a nineteenth-century word meaning ‘tiny-book,’ which is how Beatrix Potter would have used the term at the time. Available online at <http://dictionary.oed.com/entrance.dtl> [accessed on 10 April 2008].

¹⁰⁴ Beatrix Potter to Mr Warne, 12 August 1916, Judy Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter’s Letters* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 227.

hardback format (5.25" x 4.5") with small stapled paper covers; or, alternatively, and more likely, the *Bold Bad Mouse Series* and the *Tufty Series* written by Aris, which were later

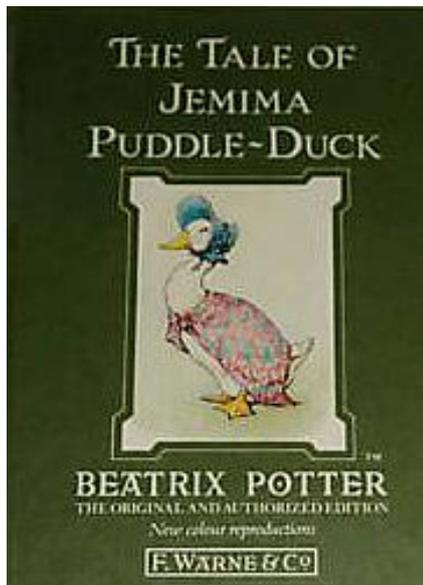


Fig 3.3. *Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck* (1908) illustrated by Beatrix Potter

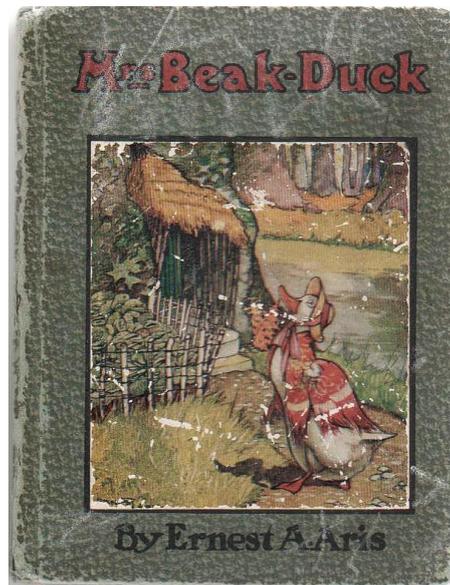


Fig 3.4. *Mrs Beak Duck and Her Friends in the Wood* (1916) illustrated by Ernest Aris

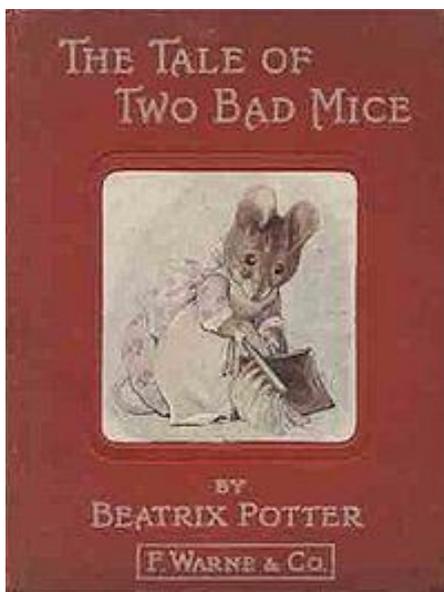


Fig 3.5. *The Tale of Two Bad Mice* (1904) illustrated by Beatrix Potter

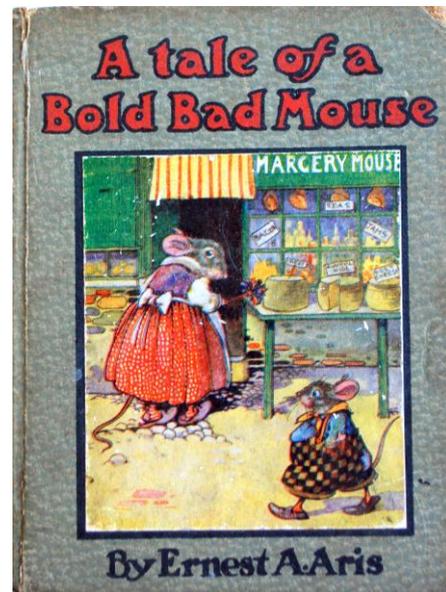


Fig 3.6. *A Tale of a Bold Bad Mouse* (1916) illustrated by Ernest Aris

published by Partridge. These books' storylines are similar to Potter's *The Tale of Jemima Puddleduck* and *The Tale of Two Bad Mice*. Aris's series included *Little Sinbad the Sailor*, (1916), *Mrs Beak Duck and Her Friends in the Wood & A Tale of a Bold Bad Mouse* (1916) and, from the *Tufty Series*, *The Three Bad Ducklings* (1917). Clearly, the titles and characters closely resemble those of Potter's. It seems that Warne's were right to be alarmed by the similarities between the book titles and its tales (fig 3.3-3.6).

Potter responded to Mr Warne in positive terms:

After a week's reflection I see daylight. You had better engage Mr E A 'Aris to illustrate the "Sly Old Cat". His plagiarism are [sic] unblushing and his drawing excellent. If you showed him Nellie's little booklet I would have little doubt that he would be sufficiently modest to copy the designs exactly, and do them really well. His mice have too large ears; he should be advised that rats have still smaller ears. He can draw cats much better than I can, and he would do the rats' clothing excellently. I wonder any self respecting publisher would publish such a crib of the shape & idea. The style of drawing is rather more cribbed from E. Dulac's than from mine. But I do not think it is actionable, and frankly it does not annoy me because it is good. But the stories are not so well written as might be, – poor grammar & rather slip shod, but nothing vulgar like "Harriet Hare". I should be glad to hear what you think about it. I should think he would accept a sum down for a set of designs, certainly I would do the same & a moderate one rather than the cumbersome royalty, for the use of my name & the letter press. I have wished for a long time that you could find some second string – this man to my thinking is just what we want if he would draw to order & take suggestions.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Potter to Warne, 12 August 1916, Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter's Letters*, p. 227.

It seems that Potter was seeking a partnership with an illustrator who would ‘draw to order & take suggestions’ and who possessed the technical understanding and ability, but not necessarily creative power; ideally, an illustrator who would readily accept a one-off lump sum payment rather than royalties. Potter clearly considered allowing the artist to retain credit for illustrations, combined with the privilege and recognition of being associated with her name, as she declares in her correspondence to Fruing Warne, ‘you might have seen a new book by a new author HBH & Arris [sic].’¹⁰⁶

The Oakmen Story - Potter commissions Aris

In 1916 William Heelis’s niece and goddaughter Nancy Nicholson, aged seven, visited Castle Cottage at Sawrey for an extended visit. She shared with Beatrix Potter a full imagination and love of fairy-tales. Nancy disclosed how she used to play with imaginary people called Oakmen who lived in trees: ‘I remember my amazement on my first visit to Sawrey’, she wrote, ‘when this new aunt left the grown-ups and came to me to imagine windows and doors in the trees with people peeping out.’¹⁰⁷

In 1916 Potter wrote a story called *The Oakmen* as an illustrated letter in a loose-leaved book with six pages of handwritten text, each displayed with a watercolour sketch, which was presented to Nancy at Christmas that year as a reminder of their initial meeting.¹⁰⁸ Earlier, in August 1916, Potter had corresponded directly with Aris, commissioning, and latterly purchasing with copyright, a set of six designs for *The Oakmen Story*. Potter sent provisional pencil sketches to Aris with instructions in the margins on composition and colouring,

¹⁰⁶ Potter to Warne, 10 November 1917, Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter’s Letters*, p. 239.

¹⁰⁷ Nancy Nicholson qtd. in Leslie Linder, *A History of the Writings of Beatrix Potter* (London: Frederick Warne, 1971), p. 240.

¹⁰⁸ Linder, *A History of the Writings of Beatrix Potter*, p. 241.

concealing the text of her story as well as her identity, by writing under her married name of ‘Mrs Heelis’.¹⁰⁹

On 14 September 1916 Aris returned six completed drawings for *The Oakmen* in a folder made from the hardboard covers of his recently published book *A Toy Town Tale*, taking an opportunistic advantage to demonstrate his recent success to Mrs Heelis. Aris forwarded the finished drawings to Potter’s ‘charming little ideas,’¹¹⁰ writing:

The size is just a trifle larger than the figures you gave me. This, in the event of your’s [sic] having them reproduced will be beneficial: They are in proportion:

I have had to work somewhat in the dark, not knowing the story:

However, I have followed your sketches as near as possible occasionally, I have altered the composition a little – although, in most cases, your composition is very good.

I have not quite adapted your colour schemes as there was a tendency to be a little on the sombre side. I hope you don’t mind my saying so. I think you will find the pictures nice and bright – this is most essential to children.¹¹¹

Potter went on to amend the provisional sketches she had presented to Aris in August 1916 in the light of Aris’s six finished drawings. Potter clearly adopted some of Aris’s advice, and modified her final pictures in the illustrated letter given to Nancy at Christmas 1916. For

¹⁰⁹ Linder, *A History of the Writings of Beatrix Potter*, p. 240. Linder claims that ‘The artist was Mr. Ernest A. Aris, with whom she had been in touch on several previous occasions to try out the quality and scope of his work.’ From my research, no evidence or archive material to date, suggests that Potter had previously had any correspondence or meeting with Aris, or that they had undertaken work in any capacity for Potter prior to *The Oakmen* designs. Where Linder obtained this information is unknown. However it is possible that they may have considered working on a project previously as she writes in this letter.

¹¹⁰ Aris to Heelis, 18 September 1916, (The Linder Bequest LB, V&A, 1469).

¹¹¹ Aris to Heelis, 18 September 1916, (The Linder Bequest LB, V&A, 1469).

example, the preliminary sketch of the introductory page of *The Oakmen* letter sent by Potter notes in the margin, 'gnome with red cap giving lumps of sugar to mouse....'¹¹² (fig 3.7.1.). Aris drew the gnome sharing a sandwich with two mice, which Potter reproduces in her final sketch, although the gnome is sharing his bread and butter with a hedgehog (fig 3.7.2 and fig 3.7.3). Potter notes, 'I have given Prickle-pin to the Oakmen to have for a little dog.'¹¹³ She also makes minor amendments to the figures from Aris's composition, hiding the left ear beneath the gnome's hat, which is tilted backwards rather than forwards as in her original sketch and changing the positioning of the feet, which were not in her provisional visuals. As Aris notes in his correspondence, the figures in his images are enlarged for reproduction. There is far more simplicity in his line drawings and the clarity and brightness of his selected palette of colours significantly enhance his final illustrations. By contrast to Potter's technical style, this makes a more appealing and memorable visual image for the child's mind and eye than Potter's translucent watercolours, which, although quite remarkable and appreciated more through adult eyes, are perhaps not so permanent on the young viewer's mind.

The plates in Nancy Nicholson's illustrated letter give an indication of the geographical location and inspiration for the designs that were drawn by Potter for *The Oakmen*. A recent conversation between Beatrix Potter's great nephew John Heelis and Miss Nancy Nicholson suggests that Beatrix and Nancy regularly walked through Sawrey village and up Stoney Lane to Moss Eccles Tarn.¹¹⁴ This route passes through a large area of forestation; (fig 3.7.4-3.7.5) even today tree felling is still undertaken as the sketches in the original illustrated letter suggest

¹¹² Beatrix Potter's preliminary sketches for *The Oakmen* contain notes written by hand for Ernest Aris in the margin. Beatrix Potter collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

¹¹³ *The Oakmen* from the original manuscript dated Christmas 1916. Beatrix Potter collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Reproduced in Leslie Linder, *A History of the Writings of Beatrix Potter* (London: Frederick Warne, 1971), p. 241.

¹¹⁴ Unpublished letter in the collection of Dudley Chignall, c. 2005.

Plate 22

The Oakmen drawings

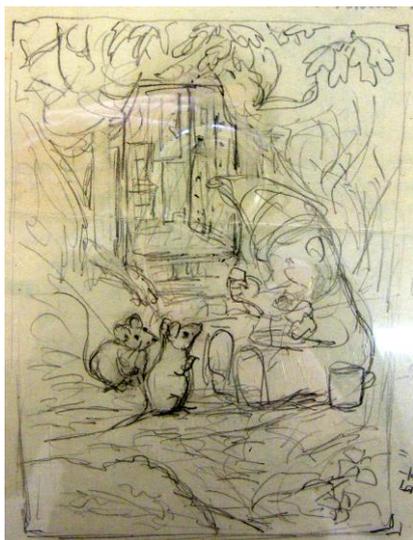


Fig 3.7.1. Potters provisional drawing - p. 1



Fig 3.7.2. Aris's final drawing - p. 1



Fig 3.7.3. Potter's final drawing - page. 1



Fig 3.7.4. Potters provisional drawing - page. 2

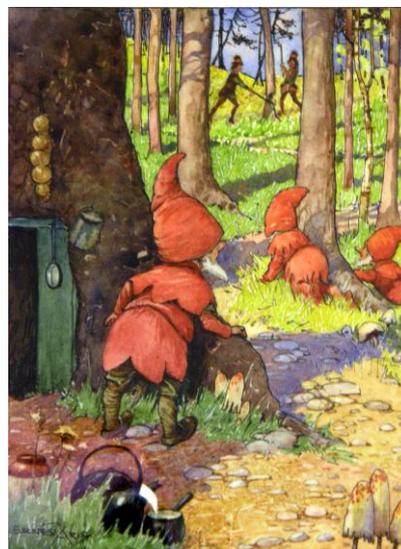


Fig 3.7.5. Aris's final drawing - page. 2

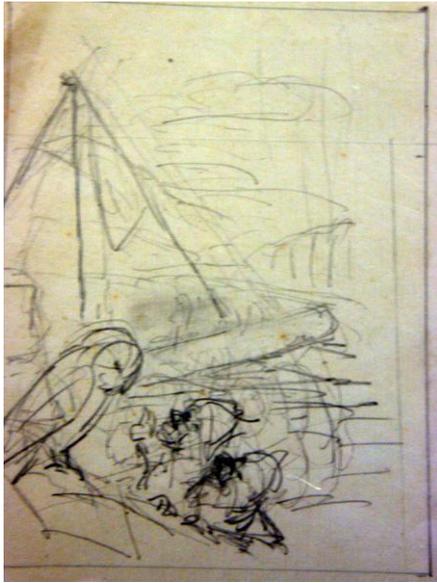


Fig 3.7.6. Potters provisional drawing - page 3



Fig 3.7.7. Aris's final drawing - page 3



Fig 3.7.8. Potters provisional drawing - page 4

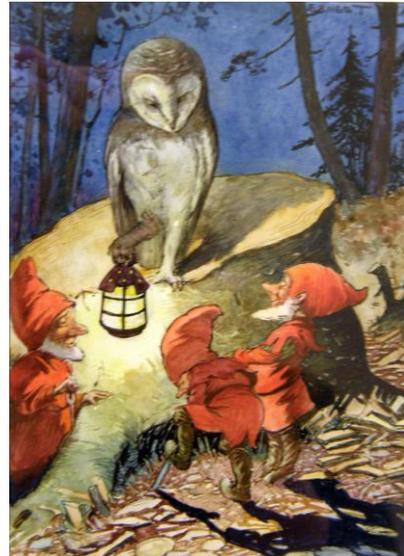


Fig 3.7.9. Aris's final drawing - page. 4

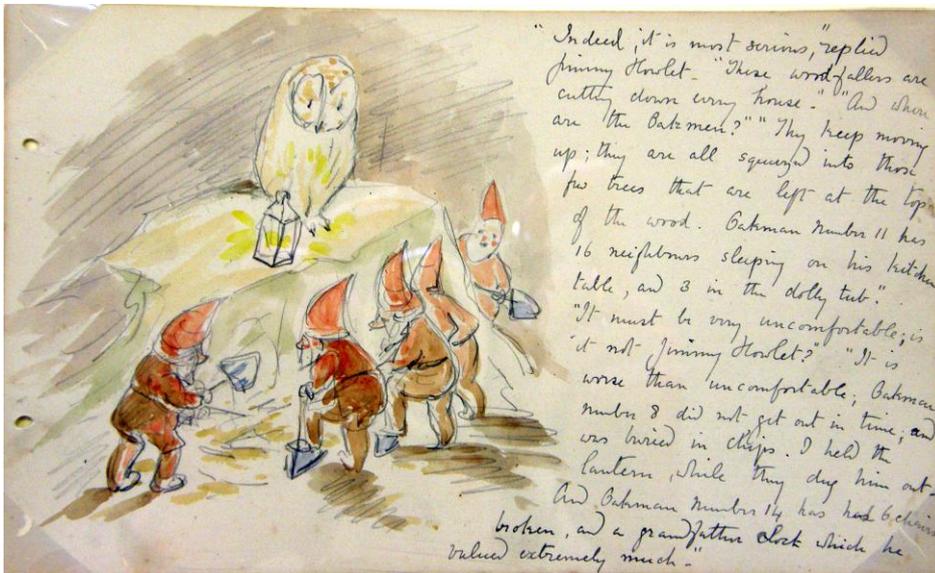


Fig 3.7.10. Potter's final drawing - page 4

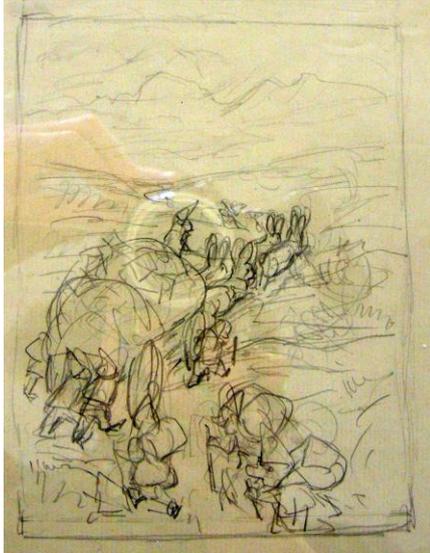


Fig 3.7.11. Potters provisional drawing – page 5



Fig 3.7.12. Aris's final drawing – page 5

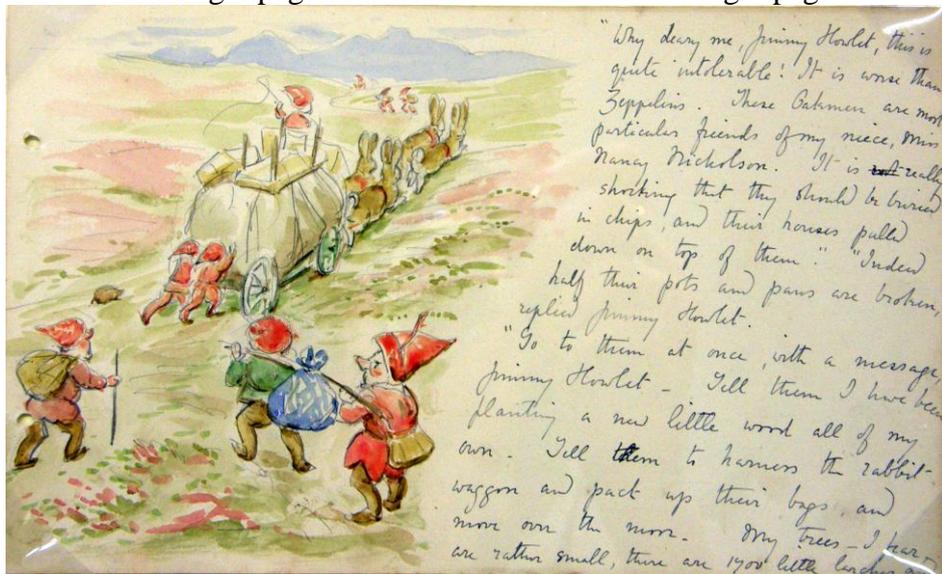


Fig 3.7.13. Potter's final drawing – page 5

"Why deary me Jimmy Horlet, this is quite intolerable! It is worse than Zepplins. These Babmen are most particular friends of my niece, Miss Nancy Nicholson. It is ~~not~~ really shocking that they should be buried in chips, and their horses pulled down on top of them." "Indeed hilly their pots and pans are broken," replied Jimmy Horlet. "Go to them at once, with a message, Jimmy Horlet - Tell them I have been planting a new little wood all of my own. Tell them to harness the rabbit-waggon and pack up their bags, and move on the morrow. My trees - I hear are rather small, there are 1400 little larches."



Fig 3.7.14 Potters provisional drawing - page 6

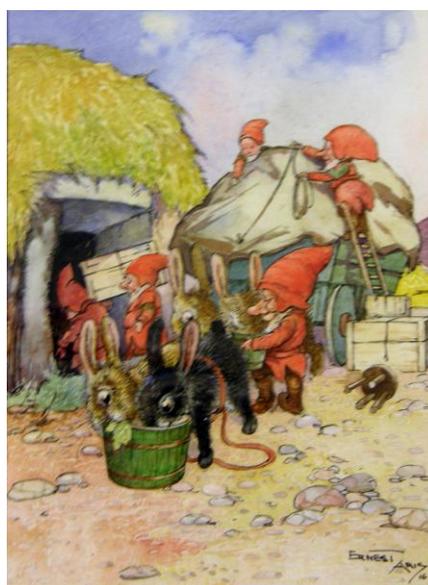


Fig 3.7.15. Aris's final drawing - page 6

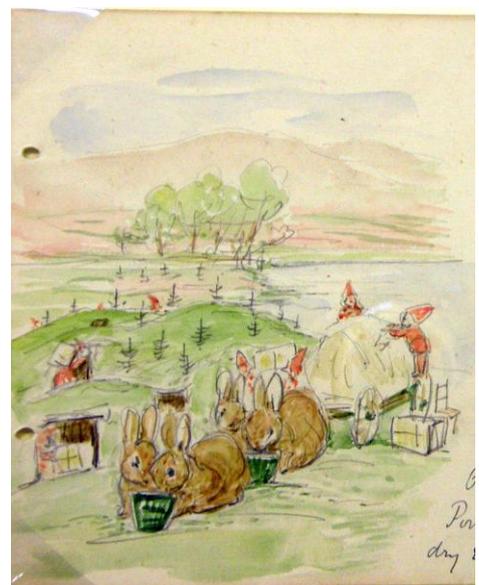


Fig 3.7.16. Potter's final drawing – page 6

(fig 3.7.6-3.7.7). This almost certainly must have been Potter's inspiration for *The Oakmen* story detail and setting (fig 3.7.8-3.7.9).

My research suggests two possible geographical locations for the landscape views of *The Oakmen* (fig 3.8). At the top of Stoney Lane, on the left side, is Moss Eccles Tarn, purchased in 1913 by Potter, the same year she married, which was a favourite place to spend evenings. The view looks across the tarn to coniferous trees, with the Langdale Pikes behind. However, the level of the geography suggests Potter's view of the Pikes would have been obscured by the height of the land behind the trees. Around Moss Eccles Tarn, Potter planted 3000 trees, over and above those planted by the Forestry Commission after the First World War for use as pit props. With a faltering economy, copious death in the trenches and the corn price slump in July 1921, this would have been a major boost for the local economy. However, it is unlikely this was the actual site for the provisional sketches, as the trees would not have matured at the time the sketches were made. It is a rocky area rather than agricultural land and a dam was built to the left of Moss Eccles Tarn in 1909, so the surrounding area would not have been the boggy environment suggested in the notes made by Potter in the illustrated letter, where she refers to 'a nice dry humpy hillock in the bog overlooking the tarn'.¹¹⁵

An earlier watercolour painted by Potter in 1895, a *Harvest Scene* clearly identifies the haymaking with the Esthwaite Water behind (fig 3.9). In Potter's provisional sketch for *The Oakmen*, there is a clear projection of land on the opposite side of the lake with deciduous trees rather than coniferous (fig 3.10). Today, this is surrounded by reeds, making it a boggy area and the Langdale Pikes can be seen in the far distance (fig 3.11). I therefore conclude that this must have been the site and area which Potter took as inspiration for *The Oakmen* Story. Additionally, the Langdale Pikes were important elements of the landscape for Potter as they could be seen from the top of the meadow behind Hilltop.

¹¹⁵ Linder, *A History of the Writings of Beatrix Potter*, p. 241.

Plate 24

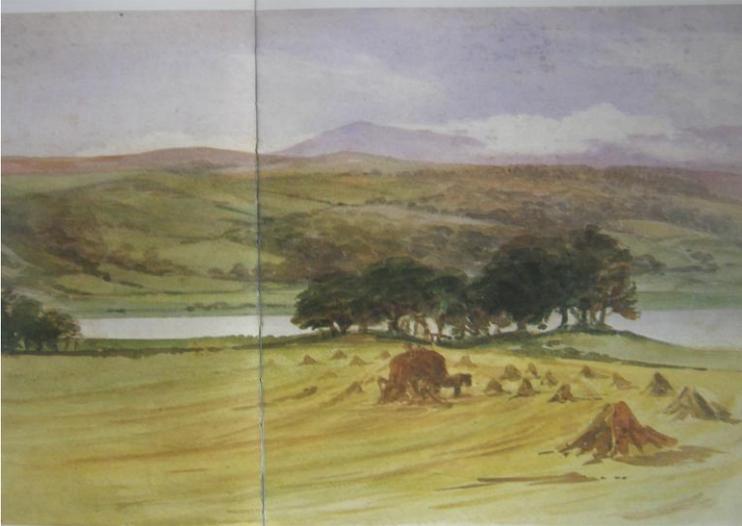


Fig 3.9. Beatrix Potter
'Harvest Scene', Esthwaite Water, c. 1895

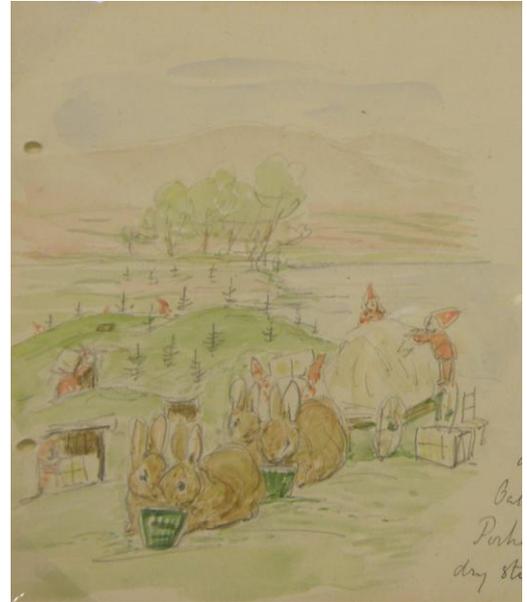


Fig 3.10. Beatrix Potter
The Oakmen manuscript 1916



Fig 3.11. Esthwaite Water, 2008

In the fifth sketch of *The Oakmen* letter, Potter has inserted the background landscape disappearing into the distance (fig 3.7.11). Aris makes the mistake of misinterpreting and removing this, replacing the horizon with a bright yellow meadow (fig 3.7.12). This leads the eye to the distance and at the same time draws the viewer closer into the frame, a technique that can also be seen in his previous plates. However, Potter in her final drawing reinstates the Langdale Pikes, which Aris had omitted in his design (fig 3.7.13). Additionally, according to Dudley Chignall:

From Beatrix's draft sketch it is obvious that the mountain horizon of Bowfell and the Langdale Pikes had an important role in setting the scene for her story. With her eye for detail she would have been most upset that Ernest had not drawn to order.¹¹⁶

Following discussions with the Curator at the Beatrix Potter Museum, in Potter's sketches the Cumbrian mountain range looms large. Potter appears to have imagined the geographical location for this tale to possibly be the area south of the Langdale Valley. This is borne out in another finely detailed preliminary sketch, which shows a deliberately detailed profile of the Langdale Pikes, which Potter would have seen from the vicinity of Sawrey. Evidently, Aris's only mistake was to misinterpret Potter's observations of a scene, which, from her provisional sketches, may have been difficult to recognise, even though he too was familiar with the area.

Potter retained many of Aris's other amendments in his sketch, such as the two Oakmen carrying a bundle suspended from a pole. Potter had not included this in her provisional sketch (fig 3.7.14), although it is inserted into her illustrated letter, it was an idea that Aris had introduced into the image (fig 3.7.15). Aris magnifies the subject matter in the design drawing the eye into the centre, which is also reproduced by Potter who has opened out the design in her

¹¹⁶ Dudley Chignall, *The Man Who Drew for Beatrix Potter – Ernest Aris*, (Witham: private publication, 2010), p. 18.

final sketch making it clearer (fig 3.7.16). She also uses red and brown for the elves' clothing, although she had initially instructed Aris to use russet brown and blue-grey check. A comparison of the provisional sketches by Aris and the illustrated letter by Potter indicates that she approved of his submissions. She clearly noted his remarks in the correspondence and the adjustments to the designs and it is evident that Aris's technical expertise was reflected in and influenced her final interpretations.

Plagiarism and Copyright

Academics and enthusiasts of Potter and Aris have speculated as to why *The Oakmen* was never published.¹¹⁷ I would dismiss the theory that Beatrix Potter felt Aris was 'not quite a good enough artist.' Aris's technical competence was never in question. As Potter herself wrote, 'Your work has considerable technical facility.'¹¹⁸ There was clearly no doubt in her mind about Aris's practical capability, as it was her idea to commission him. It would appear she was quite serious in her intentions to commission Aris for his technical and practical expertise in the subject area. In August 1916, when Potter had received Aris's work from Warne, and was seeking a 'second string' to alleviate the burden of work, rather than being offended, Potter wrote directly to Aris under her married name of Heelis, being rather blatant about her deceit in correspondence and believing it to be a disguise to Aris. She notified him that she required his expertise for his technical drawing skills rather than his creative originality, as she wished to retain the design and plan of the drawings in precise detail herself.

Potter was seeking an accomplished illustrator who was familiar with and understood the anatomy of animals, their habitat, and who was able to transcribe the visual images on to the

¹¹⁷ Linda Lear, *Beatrix Potter: A Life in Nature* (London: Penguin, 2007), Leslie Linder, *A History of the Writings of Beatrix Potter* (London: Frederick Warne, 1971), Dudley Chignall, 'The Man Who Drew for Beatrix Potter – Ernest Aris' (Witham: private publication, 2004).

¹¹⁸ Beatrix Potter's draft letter to Ernest Aris, 23 November 1917, Judy Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter's Letters* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 241.

page. Aris demonstrated that he was capable of undertaking this for *The Oakmen*, even though he admitted that ‘I have had to work somewhat in the dark, not knowing the story.’¹¹⁹ Potter’s correspondence suggests that she believed Aris’s ‘drawing excellent’...I would have little doubt that he would be sufficiently modest to copy the design exactly, and do them really well,’ and she adds that, ‘He can draw cats much better than I can, and he would do rats’ clothing excellently... The style of drawing ... does not annoy me because it is good.’¹²⁰ This correspondence with Warne indicates she considered Aris a suitable illustrator to work with and encouraged the idea of a mutually beneficial partnership. I believe that these comments support the fact that Potter did not doubt Aris’s technical competence.

Other issues such as copyright problems have emerged as possible factors why Potter never published *The Oakmen* story. Potter believed the initial tale she had discussed with Nancy Nicholson was an original imaginative fantasy tale. A year later in 1917, she asked Nancy if she could borrow her valued illustrated letter for possible publication:

Will you let me borrow the story about the Owl and the Oakmen for a short time?

I have no copy, and there is a plan of printing some other story, as these rhymes have sold so well-either *The Oakmen* or the story I told you of *Johnny Town-Mouse*... I don’t want to lose the story, I cannot remember the words.¹²¹

The Oakmen story was returned to Potter by Nancy, but before Potter had finished working the detail, she discovered that the idea about Oakmen had come from a storybook, which had been read to Nancy as child. As a result, this book was never published and *The Tale of Johnny Town-Mouse* took its place. It is probably safe to assume that *The Oakmen* tale was probably not an original story.

¹¹⁹ Aris to Mrs Heelis, 18 September 1916, (The Linder Bequest LB, V&A, 1469).

¹²⁰ Potter to Warne, 12 August 1916, Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter’s Letters*, p. 227.

¹²¹ Linder, *A History of the Writings of Beatrix Potter*, p. 240.

Plate 25



Fig 3.12. *Peter* in *The Treasure Seekers* (1916)
illustrated by Ernest Aris

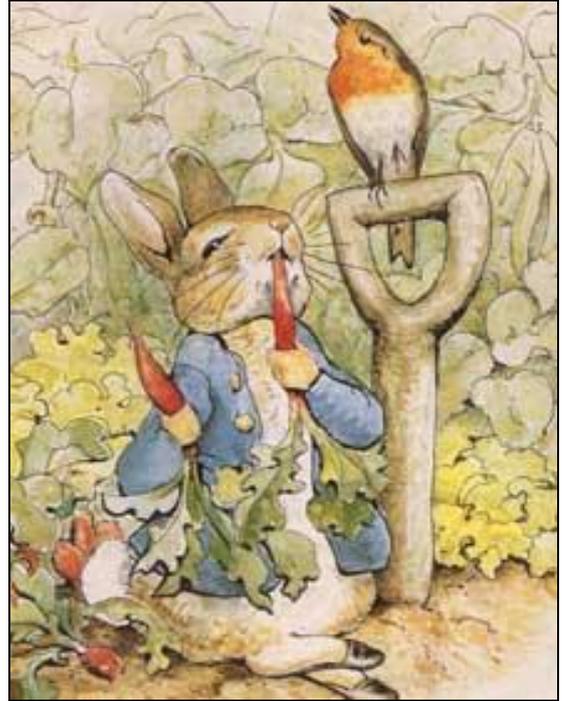


Fig 3.13. *Peter* in *Peter Rabbit* (1903)
illustrated by Beatrix Potter

Another possible reason why the tale was not published might have come from concerns of plagiarism on the part of Aris. In November 1917, one year after the completion of the sketches by Aris for *The Oakmen*, Potter was notified by Fruing Warne of Aris's blatant plagiarism in naming one of the rabbit characters 'Peter' in his recently published book *The Treasure Seekers* (1916) (fig 3.12). Whether this was coincidence is debateable. There is substantial evidence of Aris's habit of plagiarising popular characters and recreating his own and it is more than likely he copied Potter's mischievous Peter (fig 3.13). Potter was clearly affronted by his audacity and on 10 November 1917 responded to Fruing Warne:

I most certainly object to entrusting "Peter Rabbit" to that objectionable (but amusing) little bounder. But I do blame his publishers more than himself; & if you are communicating with them, please keep my married name out of it. He doesn't write a bad letter poor man, so artlessly conceited.

He is not truthful, at least when "Mrs Heelis" asked him what he would charge for illustrating a booklet in the style of "Jemima Puddleduck" by "Beatrix Potter" – he had the effrontery to inform the offended author that he had never seen that classic! If he has not – it is a strange case of two (dis similar I hope) minds running in one groove. It is a fact that he sent me a booklet, which was rather like a story of mine, which had never been published. I don't know whether he will return from the wars; but his publishers will find some one else to do dirty work if he doesn't. He lived in Holloway, but had at one time been employed in Windermere. I am sure he had no suspicion to the end of our acquaintance. He seemed pleased with my humble scribbles & even suggested that possibly we might 'corroborate' after the war.

He is the sort of person who will do anything for a few pounds; I was expecting an outbreak of his booklet this winter as he conceitedly said he was overwhelmed with orders. I got 6 useful illustrations from him for a story which I had made for a little niece. Mr Heelis has said several times I ought to hurry up with it for fear Arris [sic] gets a story with these drawings out before me. He never saw any Mss; at all events I can fight him on that having got his letter selling originals & copyright. It would want redrawing, as the animals are not good.

I await your parcel with anxious amusement, I'm afraid I don't take Mr Arris [sic] very seriously. But his publishers are rogues.

yrs sincerely

H B Heelis

P.S. I advised your brother to go for the publishers, but to buy Arris [sic] out. For some reason Harold chose to be much offended. But I think I was right – I took the man's measure correctly at all events, he works altogether for money, he was quite willing to redraw & colour the outlines of an unknown amateur. He is not quite a good enough artist. My feeling was that my eyes were failing & my hands getting stiff but I had still brains & ideas which I might get carried out by an assistant.

Also – do not be vexed with this – I was getting so annoyed & puzzled by H's prevarications – that I really think if the crisis had not come you might have seen a new book by a new author HBH & Arris [sic] – but it most certainly would have steered quite clear of FW. & Cos "Peter Rabbits". The copying is

very dishonest on the part of the publishers & in a less degree of the part of Arris [sic]. I think he is a bounder who doesn't quite understand.

I am sorry for Mrs Arris [sic].¹²²

Potter's recommendation to Harold regarding the possible plagiarism was to blame the publishers rather than Aris, who she sees as 'a bounder who doesn't quite understand.' Although, interestingly, she does acknowledge 'he sent a booklet, which was rather like a story of mine, which has never been published.'¹²³ This suggests that Aris was sending literature directly to Potter as well as the cribs sent by Harold Warne to her in August 1916.

On 21 November 1917, Aris, not wishing to be outwitted, wrote directly to Potter, addressing the letter to 'Mrs Heelis (Beatrix Potter), thereby acknowledging that he had known all along with whom he had been in communication and who the designs had been originally commissioned by, which might have added to Potter's irritation. In this letter Aris tried to preserve his honour by defending himself directly to Potter:

My publishers have just put on the market a book of mine entitled "The Treasure Seekers" that I should have used a character "Peter Rabbit" in my book has caused some correspondence between my Publishers & yours. They claim infringement of copyright with regard to your book "Peter Rabbit". That I should have used the somewhat common name of "Peter" in connection with a Rabbit is pure coincidence

I think you know my work sufficiently to see the absurdness of their suggestion.

¹²² Potter to Warne, 10 November 1917, Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter's Letters*, p. 239.

¹²³ Potter to Warne, 10 November 1917, Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter's Letters*, p. 239.

I might add that I had never heard of your book “Peter Rabbit” till now. It is probably one of your early ones.

It is an unpleasant business & my object in writing you is to repudiate the mischievous statement of your publishers.

I hope your knowledge of my work will be sufficient to exonerate me, in your mind, from any thoughts of plagiarism.

Ernest Aris

Ps Perhaps you would be kind enough to give me a signed copy of your book Peter Rabbit. I would be willing to compare “the two Peters”¹²⁴

It is not known how the first letter in Aug/Sept 1916 was addressed to Aris from Potter.

However in her second response to him, she writes formally:

Dear Sir,

In reply to your letter, I must say that I intirely [sic] agree with my publishers and leave the matter in their hands. You refer to my knowledge of your work. My opinion is this. Your work has considerable technical facility and no originality. After having had several of your booklets brought to my notice last year, I started a correspondence, in my own married name, with two objects – to see what you would say – and to obtain certain figure drawings, which I believed I could make use of.

You have written several statements in letters, which I have kept, and I have obtained some useful drawings, for the copyright of which I have paid.

¹²⁴ Ernest Aris to Mrs Heelis, 21 November 1917 (Victoria and Albert Museum, London: The Linder Bequest LB 1470).

It is quite possible I may some day wish to buy some more. But without a good deal of explanation, I regret that I am unable to believe that your statements are truthful. Coincidence has a long arm but there are limits to coincidences.

I have often wondered whether you had gone to the front – I am glad that your wife has been spared that anxiety, I hope she got safely through her troubles [probably referring to Aris's wife's pregnancy].

I remain yrs truly.¹²⁵

The correspondence makes quite clear that both parties are genuinely offended. Potter believes the resemblance of Aris's characters and the way in which they are portrayed is too coincidental. However, when Warne's brought the issue of plagiarism to Potter's attention the year before, she chose to ignore it and used the situation to her own benefit. It is likely that Aris's rejection of any form of plagiarism and his insensitive claim that he had no knowledge of Potter's familiar character Peter probably antagonised Potter and led her to withdraw from any possible thoughts of a professional affiliation.

Additionally, Potter may have been concerned by possible accusations of copyright infringement of another author's story, which would have had serious financial and professional implications on her, rather being overly concerned about any future plagiarism by Aris or his ability. This theory is confirmed by correspondence between Potter and Fruing Warne in January 1921, in which Potter reaffirms her personal view of Aris's competence: 'It is useless trying to have drawings of mine patched up by the worthy Mr Stokoe because he hasn't got it in him. The scamp Arris [sic] had!'¹²⁶ This suggests she had no reservations about Aris's superior

¹²⁵ Potter to Aris, 23 November 1917, Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter's Letters*, p. 241.

¹²⁶ Beatrix Potter to Fruing Warne, 12 January 1921, Judy Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter's Letters* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 267.

technical competence and that other factors must have been the true reason for withholding publication of the story. Furthermore, Potter had been made aware of Aris's books, which were similar to hers, prior to her commissioning him, and yet still proceeded with the venture, so plagiarism was not a high priority at that time. Therefore this would suggest that factors such as copyright infringement were probably the primary reason for her not publishing *The Oakmen*.

Critical Comparison of Aris and Potter

Analysing the ways in which Aris and Potter represent and portray anthropomorphised characters, it is clear that, although they are technically different, there is evidence of similar themes. Potter's characters almost have a physical reality; beneath their clothes, the animals are anatomically detailed, yet reveal no potentially offensive sexual signifiers. Animals inhabit primitive natural surroundings in lairs, dens, holes and burrows; everything is about smallness, neatness and tidiness, with little room for personality; clothes are portrayed as pretty rather a means of self-expression within a fantasy or imaginary world.

Aris, by comparison, gives his characters more personality and less of the animal characteristics: the mice and rabbits are dressed in a style reminiscent of a previous era, with baggy trousers, smocked pinafores and lengthened shoes, which combine to give a ragamuffin look. The rabbits have elongated faces and ears, with bulging corneas giving a humanised expressiveness. As Margaret Blount has observed about Aris's work, 'menacingly and accurately drawn but not in the right decade to be the one that frightened C.S. Lewis as a child'.¹²⁷ It is interesting to make a comparison between the two artists' techniques and success. Potter gained her skill in adolescence from copying great work and early visits to see the masterpieces at the National Gallery and the Natural History Museum in London, applying self-taught skills and standards to her work, unlike Aris, who had the benefit of a professional fine art

¹²⁷ Margaret Blount, *Animal Land*, (London: Hutchinson, 1974), p. 157.

education at Bradford College of Art and at the Royal College of Art. In this respect, Potter's success is all the more remarkable.

There is considerable evidence that Warne and Potter had good reason to express reservations about Aris and his intentions. Aris certainly seems to have turned to Potter's characters and storylines for inspiration in his titles and books. As Potter wrote, 'I regret that I am unable to believe that your statements are truthful. Coincidence has a long arm but there are limits to coincidences.'¹²⁸ The books published by Partridge that Harold Warne had sent to Potter in July 1916 closely resembled stories published by Potter. Aris's *Mrs Beak Duck and Her Friends in the Wood* resembles Potter's *Jemima Puddleduck*; his *Twinkle Mouse of Corn Stalk Cottage* (1917) is comparable with Beatrix Potter's *Twinkleberry*, the brother to *Squirrel Nutkin* (1903), while Aris's *Bold Bad Mouse* (1916) and *A Bold Bad Bunny* (1920) resemble Potter's *The Tale of Two Bad Mice* (1904) and *The Story of A Fierce Bad Rabbit* (1906). It is important to note, though, that prior to this, Aris had been publishing many other illustrated books whose central character and story revolve around a mouse, *Wee Jenny Mouse* (1912), *Willie Mouse* (1912) and *That Little Grey Mouse* (1916). So, although comparisons can be drawn with Potter's titles, characters and storylines, this must be put into context with Aris's previous tales and characters, which were consistently being recycled.

When Aris had completed *The Oakmen* commission, he was quick to publish his own books using the characters he was asked to draw and submitted to Potter. As Dudley Chignall remarks:

In 1917 Ernest introduced more Pixie characters identical to *The Oakmen*. They appeared in a series of adventures featuring two country children in Fairyland.

These were published under the pseudonym of Dan Crow and Ernest seems to

¹²⁸ Potter to Aris, 23 November 1917, Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter's Letters*, p. 241.

have got away with it; which is just as well for if Beatrix's tale had been published, she would have been furious with this blatant piracy.¹²⁹

Potter's comment that 'Mr Heelis has said several times I ought to hurry up with it [*The Oakmen*] for fear Aris gets a story with these drawings out before me,' proved to be correct.¹³⁰ Whether Potter ever saw the illustrations of the little elf dancing in *Wee Benjy Brown* (1918) or the pixie in *Wee Squirrelkin* (1918), written under Aris's new pseudonym, Robin A. Hood, is unknown. Although there are examples of gnomes and elves in earlier tales by Aris, there is little doubt of his blatant plagiarism of the characters from *The Oakmen* in these books, as they resemble so closely the work he produced for Potter from her original sketches in 1916.

Aris's stable of characters was continually being reinvented in different guises and themes. There is sufficient evidence to conclude that Aris drew on Potter for ideas, titles and characters, but also for the inspiration of the names of his figures in his books, as well as the lead figurine collection of Cadbury's Cococubs in 1934. This comment is supported on the Cadbury Cococub website, which also highlights the derivation of the names:

We can only speculate that Whiskers Rabbit with his blue jacket & black shoes is [Aris's] his answer to Peter Rabbit whilst Tom Kitten can only be a relative from Beatrix Potter's Tale of Tom Kitten, which had been published in 1907. Nutty Squirrel is too close for comfort to Beatrix's Squirrel Nutkin, (1903) whilst Freddy Frog owes something to Mr Jeremy Fisher (1906). Mrs Cackle-Goose must surely be based on Jemima Puddle-Duck (1908), the tale of whom features a bushy long tailed gentleman who we recognise as Silas Slink Fox. Dumpty Doo is a gentle parody of Puddle-Duck. We do not have to speculate much on

¹²⁹ Dudley Chignall, *The Man Who Drew for Beatrix Potter – Ernest Aris* (Witham: private publication, 2004).

¹³⁰ Potter to Warne, 10 November 1917, Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter's Letters*, p. 239.

Willie Mouse as Beatrix's Timmy Willie (Mouse) featured in *The Tale of Johnny Town-Mouse* (1918). Beatrix's husband, William, was referred to as Willie the solicitor, but perhaps all this is simply co-incidence as Ernest did also have his own Willie Mouse character that appeared in one of his first books.¹³¹

Finally, in 1920 Aris illustrated a pop-up story in the *Mrs Strang's Playbooks*, entitled *The Tale of Benjamin Bunny*, so there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that he did in fact use characters, titles and names from Potter. However, Potter was not a unique case. There are many examples of Aris's work that could be considered unoriginal: he regularly used ideas, titles, and characters taken from other successful authors. For example, *Hollow Tree House*, a stick book produced in 1910, resembles Mrs Molesworth's *Hollow Tree House and Other Stories* (1894). *The House that Jack Rabbit Built* (1920) is taken from Randolph Caldecott's *The House that Jack Built* (1877) and the title for *That Little Yellow Duckling*, (1916) is from Mabel Prendergast's *The Little Yellow Duckling* in 1907. There are several books that Aris wrote and illustrated, *The Treasure Seekers*, *Ten Little Bunny Boys* and *Babes in the Wood*, which are all previously published renowned classics by other authors and were illustrated by leading artists. Aris like any other commercial artist of that era, was responding to demand from publishers for texts, popular themes and trends in children's literature.

Cultural Influences

The correspondence between Potter, Aris and the publisher suggests a serious allegation of plagiarism against Aris, but there is strong evidence to support the fact that, although Aris was a commercial plagiarist, he was influenced by social and cultural trends.¹³² Most commercial artists were quick to adopt and adapt popular commercial ideas and characters in children's

¹³¹ Available online at http://www.cococubs.com/Cubs_Names/cubs_names.htm [accessed on 30 May 2008].

¹³² In this instance, a commercial plagiarist can be described as an artist who copies popular themes and ideas and claiming it as original.

literature at the time. Furthermore, from a historical perspective, Potter and Aris were both artists influenced by similar prominent and popular contemporary authors, illustrators and cultural themes prevalent in the golden era of children's literature.

Potter's, like Aris's, creative output was phenomenal, although she tended to produce recognizable stories in her own imaginative setting, which from an artist's perspective, would probably have taken a longer duration to create. In 1893 she produced a series of eight images of Joel Chandler Harris's *Uncle Remus*, the familiar story of *Brer Rabbit*, a well-known favourite. Children were enthralled by these apparently adolescent animal fables set in the context of everyday human life. Like most contemporary writers, Potter and Aris studied Harris and became fascinated by the way Harris's stories revolved around everyday situations and turned the life of his characters into extraordinary tales. It is apparent that many authors and illustrators during this era (Rudyard Kipling, Kenneth Grahame and A. A. Milne) adopted storylines using anthropomorphic creatures in settings for their own stories and illustrations.¹³³

Linda Lear has argued that:

The impact of Harris's talking animals on contemporary writers both in Britain and America was enormous, not only because of his cunning but likeable rabbit protagonist, but also because of the cadence and virtuosity of the colloquial dialect, the pacing of the stories and his subversive humour. *Uncle Remus* proved to be the great bridging text between the beast fable and animal fantasy.¹³⁴

Aris and Potter appreciated the works of distinguished artists like Walter Crane (1845-1915), Randolph Caldecott (1846-1886) and Kate Greenaway (1846-1901), who were the leading

¹³³ Rudyard Kipling, *The Jungle Book* (1894), Kenneth Grahame, *The Wind in the Willows* (London: Methuen, 1908) and A. A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh* (London: Methuen, 1926).

¹³⁴ Linda Lear, *Beatrix Potter: A Life in Nature* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 131.

artists during the ‘golden age’ of children’s book illustration. Potter singled out Caldecott as ‘one of the greatest illustrators of all,’ and wrote of her own ‘jealous appreciation’ of his work.¹³⁵ Indeed, there is an argument to suggest that Potter could have been accused of copying others as she conceived, influenced and developed many of her own characters and story ideas from well-known artists like Caldecott. From a letter Potter wrote to Jacqueline Overton, there is this suggestion of plagiarism, Judy Taylor notes ‘Beatrix maintained that her ‘best’ work was “done in imitation of Caldecott”.’¹³⁶ This is most typically exemplified in her exquisite sequence of drawings entitled *A frog he would a-Wooing go*. Beatrix derived her ‘disconsolate’ angler from Caldecott’s gentleman frog in his picture book, *A frog he would a-Wooing go*, printed by Edmund Evans for George Routledge in 1883 and later for Fredrick Warne in 1895. It was for this picture that Caldecott had prepared the two pen-and-ink drawings purchased by Rupert Potter in February 1884.¹³⁷ Caldecott’s skill lay in translating detailed observed scenes of people, animals and everyday events into brilliantly executed illustrations with a masterful simplicity of line whilst using an unrivalled feeling for colour. Aris, like Potter and many other artists at that time, were clearly influenced by Caldecott, recreating his style, evoking movement, humour and expression with minimum pen strokes, producing images which exude effortless spontaneity and are full of exuberance and energy. Aris embraced the idea of leaving out the detail, creating depth and background with fewer simplified lines. In his articles for *The*

¹³⁵ Letter to Jacqueline Overton, 7 April 1942, Judy Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter’s Letters* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 441.

¹³⁶ Letter to Jacqueline Overton, 7 April 1942, Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter’s Letters* p. 441.

¹³⁷ Available online at http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/prints_books/features/potter/illustrating/caldecott/index.html [accessed on 12 May 2008].

Artist (1938), he wrote ‘be human, be humorous, be interesting and be unexpected,’ a set of commandments which always governed his work.¹³⁸

It is too simplistic to suggest that Aris plagiarised Potter’s ideas and topics. Putting both artists’ work in a historical context, it would appear they were heavily influenced by other classic well-known authors and illustrators, whose work was popular during their own childhood. Many timeless legendary tales revolving around anthropomorphic creatures were produced during the Victorian period, as previously discussed in this chapter, and this combined with technical improvements in reproduction, enabled popular themes such as anthropomorphic animals in literature to become widely spread amongst children, with authors responding to the needs of this ever increasing popular market.

American Market Piracies and Sequels

Another dynamic in the Aris versus Potter plagiarism case emerges in the American market, which was quick to respond to European literary culture and produced blatant piracies and sequels of popular classic books. Warne’s had sent copies of *Peter Rabbit* to their New York firm and, due to a mistake, they were sold before copyright was properly obtained. In 1904 Henry Altemus & Co. published the first pirated version of *Peter* using the same format with pictures and text from the fourth printing (1903). Altemus, quick to realise the success went on to produce the *Wee Books for Wee Folks* series and started a whole series of *Peter Rabbit* sequels, each time including the original story as the ‘starter’ for the remainder.

In 1916 the Saalfield Publishing Co. published an edition of *Peter Rabbit*, which was a blatant pirated version written by Louise A. Field with illustrations by Virginia Albert, who subsequently illustrated the continuation sequels of *Peter Rabbit and his Pa*, which includes his Ma and Pa and Potter’s familiar characters Flopsy, Mopsy and sister Molly Cottontail. The Saalfield Publishing Co. appears to have a casual, careless attitude to authors and illustrators.

¹³⁸ Ernest Aris, ‘Illustrating Children’s Books’, *The Artist*, September 1938, 22-24, p. 24.

This is clearly demonstrated in *Peter Rabbit and his Pa* and *Peter Rabbit and his Ma* (1917), which was followed by *Peter Rabbit goes to School*. When *Peter Rabbit and his Ma* appeared in larger format, no recognition or acknowledgements were made to either author or illustrator. This is probably due to the fact that the text was accompanied by colour illustrations pirated from Ernest Aris's *Billie Rabbit* (1912). Whether Field, Potter or Aris knew of this is unknown. Also interesting to note is the confusion of copyright dates of 1908 and 1917 of *Peter Rabbit goes to School* (1908) and *Peter Rabbit and his Ma* (1917), which is probably an error in printing. As both books are matching editions they must have been printed simultaneously after the initial story of *Peter Rabbit and His Pa* in 1916. The large format book of *Peter Rabbit and His Ma* is anomalous, as most of the monotone pictures by Virginia Albert are naive. Over-simplified lines make the characters' appearance deficient in expression or personality and the illustrations lack any spontaneity of movement, humour or interest. Unsurprisingly there is a mismatch of narrative text with the images, so that Aris's pictures do not reflect the narrative. For example, the text reads that Peter 'Took off the nice red coat his Ma had made for him and hung it on a sumac bush to dry.'¹³⁹ Above the text, is Louise Field's original black and white line drawing of Peter, with his jacket laid out on the grass. On the opposite page is Aris's plate from *Billie Rabbit*, who is crossing a stream with a farmer following him and holding a shotgun. Image and narrative correlation, which is clearly abandoned here, was a technical observation Aris always adhered to and advocated in his books.

If Potter had been aware of these inferior narrative imitations of her work that contain illustrations from Aris's *Billie Rabbit*, it would have added to her suspicion of Aris. Although the supplementary colour plates are by Aris, it is unclear whether he had actually endorsed the work, or whether he had become a casualty of plagiarism himself. While he did travel

¹³⁹ Louise A. Field and Virginia Albert (illustrator), *Peter Rabbit and His Ma*, (Chicago: Saalfield Publishing Co., 1917), p. 36.

extensively in America, it is unlikely Aris was complicit with these pirated sequels of Potter's originals.

It would appear that Saalfield were quick to respond to and reproduce popular English literature for the American market and, to avoid copyright issues, they used popular tales and similar popular illustrations, which did not originally derive from the original story or even correspond in some instances. It is evident from the communication between Potter and Aris in November 1917 that Potter blames the publishers rather than Aris for his blatant plagiarism in the United Kingdom. It is not known if she was aware of the American pirated versions of *Peter*, which contained Aris's visual designs, or whether she considered Aris had worked in collusion with American publishers. However, it can be concluded that had Potter been aware of the American sequels, this would have only compounded her doubts of Aris.

Consequences of the partnership on Aris's career

Did Aris's association with Beatrix Potter and her publishers, Warne, actually have a damaging impact on his legacy and career? Potter and Warne enthusiasts and supporters have never brought this topic into an open forum for discussion, perhaps to limit any damage that could be caused to Potter's reputation. However, research suggests there is evidence this might be the case. In 1918, following the controversial accusations of plagiarism by Potter, Aris impulsively changed his publishing house and started publishing his books under a pseudonym.

Aris had originally published his early 'stick book' series, circa 1910, and the original ribbon series in 1916 with Henry Frowde, Hodder and Stoughton. From 1912 he went on to publish the *Playtime Picture Book Series* with Lawrence & Jellicoe Ltd. and remained with them until 1917, with Gale and Polden undertaking the *Toy Book Series*, which was considered by Warne to be too close to Potter's work and which proved to be so controversial. *The Treasure Seekers*, published in 1916, which included the character of *Peter*, was the last of his books published by Gale & Polden for several years. It is at this point that Potter and Warne were

making accusations of plagiarism, Potter writing to Warne's, 'I advised your brother to go for the publishers, but to buy Arris [sic] out.'¹⁴⁰ Whether Gale and Polden distanced themselves from Aris, or he consciously chose to leave is unknown. Similarly, Partridge's who had published five books by Aris between 1916 and 1917 (the *Bold Bad Mouse Series* and the *Tufty Series*) had probably already sent the books to print before the issues arose with Warne's. Partridge's did not publish any further works in the *Tufty Series* under Aris's name for three years until 1920, possibly because some settlement had been agreed or they needed to allow enough time for the issue to disappear.

Following the disagreement with Potter and Warne's over the plagiarism issues, Aris abruptly left Gale & Polden and moved to Humphrey Milford of Oxford University Press and published some of his most eye-catching work under the pseudonym Robin A Hood: *Just a Tiny Mite* (1918), *Mother Mouse* (1918), *Wee Squirrelkin* (1918), *Wee Benjy Brown* (1918), *Little Red Robin Hood* (1921), *Two Tiny Tots* (1924) and *Wee Dicky Duck* (1920). In 1920 Aris produced with his original publishers Gale & Polden, a further six-stapled paper covered books under the pseudonym Dan Crow (although it is not known where the origins of this name are derived, it can be surmised that it possibly emanates from Uncle Remus's Jim Crow). It was probably Gale & Polden who chose to publish under the established pseudonym to avoid any further possible confrontation. Gale & Polden also published two stories with verses by Hermon Ould, illustrated by Aris using the pseudonym Dan Crow, *The Ballad of Captain Timber Toe* and *The Ballad of the Pirates*, which were lodged at the British Library in August 1917.¹⁴¹

The reason why Aris selected the comical pseudonym Robin A. Hood is conjectural. Was it because of the familiar hero's name in popular culture and his association with nature?

¹⁴⁰ Potter to Warne, 10 November 1917, Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter's Letters*, p. 239.

¹⁴¹ The exact publication date of the book is unknown. The Bodleian Library notes the publishing date as 1919.

At the turn of the century, Robin Hood's distinguished myths and ballads were regularly re-enacted in schools and Robin Hood became a popular and commonly known name in children's education, whilst the initial 'A' was possibly inserted to represent Aris. Another theory why he selected this significant pseudonym is its connection to the woods. In the ballads, the man who is Robin Hood represents nature and freedom; he is a nature lover, and we know of Aris's love of nature from his broad knowledge and understanding of natural history and its environment and his tales set in these familiar settings. Crucially, the work he undertook at that time for Potter, *The Oakmen*, is a tale set in the woods. It is also tempting to think that Aris's pseudonym Robin A. Hood was selected because it is a name that refers to a person working as an outlaw who operated outside of the law for the good of all people. In popular culture Robin Hood is painted as a man known for robbing the rich to provide for the poor and fighting against injustice and tyranny, which Aris probably felt he had experienced from Potter and her publishers. Robin Hood is seen as the champion of the people, fighting against corrupt officials and the oppressive order that protects them. Interestingly, there is also an early ballad, *Robin Hood and the Potter*, which formed part of a manuscript collection written about 1503. The ballad is set in Wentbridge, Yorkshire. Robin and Little John are fighting with a proud Potter who refuses to make a 'payage' for passing through their territory. Little John has a fistfight and Robin fights him with a sword. The Potter knocks Robin to the ground with his quarterstaff and Robin, magnanimously conceding defeat, suggests for a joke they exchange clothes. Robin sets off to Nottingham dressed as a Potter to deceive the Sheriff. The Sheriff's wife invites him for supper followed by an archery contest, which he wins. The Sheriff, impressed with the 'Potter's' performance, asks if he knows Robin Hood and the outlaw's camp. The following day, the disguised Robin takes the sheriff to the woods where he is abandoned and forced to return barefooted and humiliated. Robin, in return, pays the real Potter for his goods.¹⁴²

¹⁴² Pyle, Howard, S. Knight (ed.), *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood of Great Renown*, in

Interesting features emerge from this story: firstly there is Robin Hood's usual dealings in early ballads with a woman, in this case the Sheriff's wife, and, secondly, the hero, Robin, loses the battle with the potter and finally masquerades under a disguise. All of these events are a common thread of Aris's experiences with that other 'Potter': Beatrix, whose correspondence with Aris was under the subterfuge of her maiden name to avoid revealing her true identity.

One can only speculate about the comparisons between Aris's inferior position in relation to Potter and her publishers, and those of Robin Hood and the Sheriff. It is understandable that Aris believed that Warne's had abused their position. His correspondence with Potter suggests that he believes he is entirely innocent of any form of plagiarism or any wrong doing, and perhaps he now felt that he had to operate outside the close knit publishing community under an alternative pseudonym as a disguise. Aris's sense of humour in selecting the pseudonym Robin A. Hood exaggerates this theme and romanticises his position.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Aris's brief affiliation with Potter does appear to have been detrimental to his career and lasting legacy, although perhaps unfairly so. If a comparison of the two artists were made alongside one another, I believe there is an argument to suggest that Aris was equally, if not more, successful with broader forms of commercial art than Potter and there is much evidence to support this case. Aris understood and attained a wider knowledge of other visual cultures than Potter from his previous experience and extensive working practice within the literary world, producing for a number of authors and many major publishers. Aris was commissioned for an extensive amount of work in the commercial media sector, which included newspapers, magazines, commercial cards and other products that enabled him to understand from a commercial perspective products or ideas that would have consumer appeal. Additionally, while Potter is

renowned primarily for her books, Aris should be widely recognised for his accomplishment of creating several popular advertising campaigns for leading corporate brands, Cadbury's Cocoa, London Transport as well as a colossal amount of commercial art for Imperial Tobacco. When making a comparison between the two artists, it is essential to take other factors into account when assessing the long term success of both illustrators from a commercial perspective. Although Potter produced a number of other commercial products such as cards, games, wall papers and figures, her success in these fields does not deserve or carry the same merit or respect as Aris. Aris has left a legacy in other broader visual cultures such as posters in the National Archive Collection of Posters at the V & A, his creative and educational cigarette card collections for Player's, the humorous post card series and the outstanding Cococub campaign, which, in comparison to Potter, are more enduring. For example Aris has left an outstanding collection of travel posters which he produced for London Transport, two were selected by Frank Pick to reside in the National Archive Collection of Posters at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. However, his finest example and most notable accomplishment was the huge success of the *Cococub* lead figurines, which became an integral part of one of history's most infamous commercial advertising campaigns promoting Cadbury's Children's Bournville Cocoa in the 1930s.

Additionally, Aris deserves consideration and further merit from a literary perspective in the wider field. Aris had a far more prolific output than Potter, who produced 23 quality books, while Aris was author and illustrator of 150 and illustrated a further 250 for other popular and renowned authors such as Enid Blyton, Dorothy Richards, Jane Thornicroft, Madeleine Collier and many educational books. Evidentially, it would appear Aris had a far greater impact on the literary field than his legacy would lead us to believe. However, a continued and constant comparison of his work and reputation is made with Potter, as both artists were publishing

similar tales at the same time. This is unjust and unfair, given the diverse backgrounds and type of work each was involved with at that time.

Another irony is that Aris, unlike Potter, was able to adapt to new forms and new needs in the commercial sector. Potter's limited background of reproducing natural history designs in precise detail meant she was restricted to working within her comfort zone, which limited and confined the work that she could undertake. By comparison, Aris, who trained as a professional commercial artist could respond to new forms in the visual art and literary world and was easily able to adapt his technique and style as well as respond to technical inventions in the commercial sector.

A comparison can also be drawn between the overall accomplishment of the visual book designs of Aris and Potter. Although both artists produced a phenomenal output of work, on close examination, it is evident Aris has taken a keen interest in the overall book design. The covers on the twenty-three books produced by Potter are not too dissimilar in presentation, and appear as a variation of characters printed on the same cover design in different colours. These are not as original as Aris's covers, although this may have been a deliberate strategy so that Potter's audience would recognise her work. By comparison, Aris has sought to select bold colours and original book cover designs, which would be visually stimulating from a commercial perspective, as well as eye catching to the young reader. Although Potter does give attention to this in her books, there is a greater variety throughout Aris's collection of work.

Potter rightly deserves her prestigious reputation, as her books were popular across all generations. Potter's work is neither factual nor fantastical, but demonstrates that fantasy cannot be separated from truth; her imaginative ideas and settings give new insights about reality and blend fact and fantasy harmoniously. Many of the scenes are set in human environments with characters standing; in others, animals are portrayed in their natural settings, fleeing a scene. Potter's ability is to combine the fact and fantasy from her expertly drawn meticulous

observation of animals and scenes from nature, which make the characters so endearing and draws the reader into her imaginative but realistic stories.

By contrast, Aris's status and reputation in the literary world is relatively unknown and has not been truly recognised. Aris's predominantly naïve narrative tales are based around his familiar group of reincarnated characters and deserve more recognition for their enduring interest. Although he had a true love of nature, his observations appear to have been produced quickly to order, a reflection of his experience of meeting strict deadlines and working in the commercial sector. Aris's images are visually captivating for their use of colour and his expertly drawn simple minimal lines capture speed and movement and are therefore quite different from the technical style of Potter's. Aris also uses a stronger palette with brighter colours to enhance and draw the viewer into the image. Aris's series of small books under the pseudonym Robin A. Hood convey detailed scenes and all have an overwhelming sense of life, which, I believe, is the ultimate value of art. However, it is evident that, although both artists use anthropomorphic animals, Aris's fantasy stories and settings are quite different and not comparable with Potter's technical style.

I have concluded that the affiliation with Potter, and her allegations and publishers concerns, did have a detrimental effect on Aris's career and may have resulted in a negative impact on his long-term legacy, primarily because he missed the opportunity to have illustrated and published alongside one of history's greatest children's authors, an association could have only have had a positive impact on his career. Secondly, it is highly likely that the issues concerning plagiarism and the comments Potter made in her correspondence to Warne's advising them to 'go for the publishers', which must have had a detrimental effect on Aris and his relationship with his publishers Gale & Polden. It is unknown if further action was taken by Warne's against his publishers, but it is likely that Aris or the publishers distanced themselves from any connection at that time and Gale & Polden were possibly apprehensive about financial

implications and reluctant to publish books under his name. Finally, we should consider the damage that may have been done to Aris's reputation amongst his peers and publishing houses following the allegations of plagiarism. Although Potter's comments were made in private correspondence, it is highly likely that others in the publishing industry would have been aware of the issues and this would have had a detrimental effect on his reputation at the time.

Chapter 3

Commercial Relationships

Introduction

Posthumously, Aris's legacy has proved to be the considerable quantity of books that he wrote and illustrated over a forty year period. However, unlike most prominent artists, who are celebrated for their expertise within a specific field of art, Aris is highly unusual in that he developed and built partnerships across numerous areas of illustrated design with leading brands and left a magnificent unknown unrecognised in other forms of commercial artwork.

Predominantly, notable artists have concentrated their expertise on a singular sector of art to gain recognition. Aris by comparison had considerable success in various commercial disciplines of art, which is what makes him so significant by contrast to his peer illustrators. I believe the only comparison is probably the illustrator Mable Lucie Attwell. Attwell is more distinguished than Aris because of the popularity and success of her illustrated books at the time, as well as postcards, posters and commercial products such as china ware. However, Aris should be recognised for his contribution across broader forms of art. Although he may not have had popular appeal, retrospectively he appears to have been equally if not more successful with his posters, cigarette cards and one of history's most popular advertising and marketing campaigns for Cadbury.

In addition to Aris's work with a number of prestigious authors of the time, most notably Beatrix Potter, Enid Blyton, Jane Thornicroft, Madeleine Collier, Dorothy Richards and May Byron, a critical analysis of Ernest Aris must also take into account and examine his commercial relationships and the role he played promoting leading iconic brands' products to a wide audience. Throughout his career, Aris was commissioned to provide the illustrations for a number of impressive advertising campaigns, building commercial relationships with major organisations

such as Cadbury, William Britain Ltd., London Transport, Raphael Tuck & Sons, John Player & Sons (Player's), Lambert and Butler, as well as being a contributor to a number of art and leisure magazines.¹⁴³ While Aris is predominantly remembered for his illustrated books, it is his extensive commercial work, which is of significant relevance and should play a central part when recognising his importance, even though historically it has been largely forgotten. Aris acknowledged the worth both financially and creatively of this type of work and more specifically, commercial work aimed at children, in an article he wrote for *The Artist* magazine:

*I recognised the value of appealing to the parents through children. I have done much important work in this respect since those far-off days. Advertisers have appreciated the value of this form of advertising, and consequently there is much work to be had, really remunerative work, for prices in this field are very much higher. Such work would be in the nature of strips, games, jigsaws and booklets containing illustrated stories, written around the advertiser's goods. Here the artist has more opportunities for making work, for he can suggest the ideas that will create it without being a literary man.*¹⁴⁴

Throughout Aris's career, he developed a number of important commercial relationships with Britain's foremost companies, which for the sake of clarity I have categorised into four sections. The initial section concentrates on relationships that Aris cultivated within the advertising industry in the early part of his career between 1904 to 1909. Aris had graduated from art school and his first paid venture was designing postcards in Bradford. At the turn of the last century collecting postcards was a widespread and a popular pursuit undertaken by people from all social classes and nationalities. It was affordable, accessible and provided much interest

¹⁴³ John Player & Sons and Lambert and Butler are a branch of the Imperial Tobacco Co., now Imperial Publishing Ltd.

¹⁴⁴ Ernest Aris, 'Illustrating Children's Books', *The Artist*, February 1939, 182-190 (p.185).

to young, old, men and women, rich and poor. It was commonplace and indeed fashionable among the middle classes to have an album of these pasteboard mementoes and families spent many hours perusing, discussing and writing cards, as it was an inexpensive and popular hobby, especially with the advent of cheap postage. Postcards reflected life; they commented on everything, illustrating every subject, theme, place and characters throughout the world. The cards were an endless flow and countless millions were designed and printed, the numbers fed by the widespread and fashionable hobby of collecting postcards, from the height of their popularity at the turn of the century until the start of the 1920s, by which time the craze for sending and collecting postcards had been forcibly curtailed by the 1914-18 War.¹⁴⁵

Aris, like most artists in the early part of his professional career accepted all types of commercial work including the ‘bread and butter work’ of picture postcards, a lucrative business during this period. Aris produced a varied collection of postcards with quite different styles of design from 1903 to 1909, which can be categorized into general, coastal scenes and seaside humour, which at the time was the fashionable British family holiday destination before air and sea travel. Other series included Raphael Tuck & Sons infamous ‘Oilettes’, as well as Aris’s *Bill Bailey* series that was influenced by and based on the legendary song.¹⁴⁶

The second section focuses on Aris’s work in London following the commercial and collaborative years, when Aris went on to design posters for the Underground Electric Railway Companies of London Ltd.¹⁴⁷ In 1915 Aris produced a series of six posters for the London

¹⁴⁵ C.W. Hill, *Discovering Picture Postcards* (Tring: Shire Publications, 2001), p 14.

¹⁴⁶ "(Won't You Come Home) Bill Bailey", originally titled "Bill Bailey, Won't You Please Come Home?" is a popular song published in 1902. It is commonly referred to as simply "Bill Bailey". Its words and music were written by Hughie Cannon (1877–1912), an American songwriter and pianist. It is still a standard with Dixieland and traditional jazz bands.

¹⁴⁷ On 1 January 1913 the London United Tramways Company Limited (LUT) and the Metropolitan Electric Tramway (MET) became subsidiaries of the London and Suburban

United Tramways Company Limited and the Metropolitan Electric Tramway, as part of a nature series that included the fox, field mouse, pheasant, kingfisher and squirrel in formal settings. Aris's career was then entirely focused for the next twenty years on producing his numerous books with well known publishers. The only exception was in the mid 1920s, on which the third section concentrates, when he designed four highly distinguished series of cigarette cards in partnership with notable manufacturers of tobacco.

The final section is dedicated entirely to Aris's campaign for Cadbury's Children's Bournville Cocoa. Aris made a significant contribution to their product marketing strategies. His lasting legacy of using alternative forms of advertising and design for promotional material, supported with spin-off products, helped to develop loyal consumers and increase sales of the brand's products.

It is interesting to note how clearly Aris recognised the reality and financial rewards of other forms of commercial design and went on to exploit the popular characters from his books in alternative forms of advertising, which appealed to a broader audience than children. Aris produced numerous children's books with a variety of trademark characters, but significantly these characters were continually rebranded and used in an assortment of commercial advertising campaigns and merchandise, which employed broader forms of art, design and media.

Section I - Aris's Postcards (1904-1909)

The main development in picture postcard design originated on the continent in Germany, Austria, France, Italy and Switzerland. The two main exceptions which developed in Great Britain were illustrated comic and humour cards like those that Aris produced at the turn of the

Traction Company (LSTC), jointly owned by BET and the Underground Electric Railway Companies of London Ltd., (UERL), shortened to Underground or Underground Group.

century and photograph cards of social, industrial and village history, the skill being the mastery of the photographer expressing the subject through the camera rather than illustrative design.

Publishers realised that for cards to be commercially viable, they had to be popular with the mass market; designs needed to have something extra to attract the public's attention. As a result, publishers started to hire the services of the very best talented designers and illustrators of the day. The highest standards were those achieved by the artists of the Art Nouveau period, especially in Paris and Vienna, where the Wiener Werkstätte group of artists produced outstanding designs, now rare and expensive. Alphonse Mucha is probably the most celebrated of the artists who worked in the postcard field and his designs have always been amongst the most sought after. His famous theatrical, poster-art style is instantly recognisable.¹⁴⁸ Raphael Kirchner is another distinguished artist, whose early designs appear crude but full of imaginative ways of expressing a simple idea. The best known were his 'girlie' designs of World War One, 'pin-ups' collected by the soldiers in the trenches, in a style which at the time would have been classed as risqué although they are relatively inoffensive by modern standards. It is said that his wife was the model for all his déshabillé designs.

The special skills needed to print the fine art designs created for these cards were highly developed by printers in Germany, especially in Saxony and Bavaria. The techniques for chromolitho and letterpress printing these multi-colour miniatures, often with gilding, embossing and die stamping, have never been surpassed. With the First World War the genre died; a very few examples of work with the old quality appeared from 1914-1919, but mostly these were of a patriotic nature and justified as being beneficial to the war effort. Most cards produced after 1916 were of a significantly lower quality, both of design and printing, due to the scarcity of manufacturing products and the increased costs involved in production.

¹⁴⁸ Bowers, David, and M L Martin, *The Postcards of Alphonse Mucha in the Art Nouveau Style* (New York: Vestal Press, 1980).

Postcards, as distinct from letters, were first used in Austria around 1869. The idea behind the introduction of the postcard was to provide a cheap means of brief communication. The creation of the postcard by Dr Emanuel Hermann set in motion a revolution in the communication of the ordinary message with no especial importance.¹⁴⁹ The private message, the mundane or jolly remark, the 'wish you were here', was a short note for which no real 'security' was required. Since postcards were lighter and more easily handled due to their standard size, form and format, postcards could be offered at a lower postal rate than a letter. They proved very popular with the public and were soon copied by other European countries. The first advertising card appeared in England in 1872. Initially they were just plain unadorned cards, with the address written on one side and the message on the other and could only be issued by the Post Office with a pre-printed 'stamp'.

These first cards are now known as 'correspondence cards', and were the forerunners of stamped postal stationery cards. Some included small illustrations, particularly in Heligoland in 1886 where the first picture postal cards appear, and in Paris 1889 of the Eiffel Tower which signalled the beginning of the mass popularity. The Picture Postcard as we now understand it first appeared in large quantities in the early 1890s with the arrival of hotel publicity cards. These were small pieces of pasteboard, similar to postal stationery of the period, for the use of holiday makers and guests, with images of the hotel that issued them usually printed as a little vignette at the top.

In 1894 the Post Office relinquished its monopoly on the publishing of postal cards, and allowed their private publication if they were issued with an adhesive stamp as proof that postage had been paid.¹⁵⁰ This led to the widespread introduction of illustrated postcards. The Post Office still insisted that one side be used for the address only; the size of any illustration

¹⁴⁹ C.W. Hill, *Discovering Picture Postcards*, p. 8.

¹⁵⁰ C.W. Hill, *Discovering Picture Postcards*, p. 12.

was limited by the need to reserve at least some space on which to write the message. Picture postcards of this type might allow space for only the very briefest of messages. This, combined with the poor range of subject matter, which was mainly limited to seaside and city views, meant picture postcards were not an immediate success. The major change that allowed the introduction of picture postcards came about in 1902, when an innovation in England by the Post Office permitted a divided back postcard. This allowed the message and the address to be contained on one side of the card, usually with a dividing line down the centre, thereby freeing up the whole of the other side of the card for the publishers to print a full-size photo or artwork.

Many early photographic cards were printed in Germany as photo-reproduction was more advanced there than elsewhere on the continent. This simple innovation of the divided back card led to a massive proliferation of the types of cards available as the publishers explored different subject matter, from places to people and cartoons to fine art. This period saw the explosion in the popularity of postcards which quickly became the standard medium for transmitting short messages. They were cheap and a reliable means of communication and could be used to set up appointments with just one day's notice. Many postcards became collectors' items; people purchased them to keep as souvenirs and exchange with friends and relatives. The card itself often became the reason for the communication as well as the means of its carriage. The only disadvantage of the postcard was that it was not enclosed in an envelope and therefore the message contained was not a private or secure means of communication.

The prime postcard expansion in Britain took place between 1895 and 1915. This breakthrough allowed a rapid development of the whole art of design for cards and created an astonishing variety of artistic expression contained within a standard size and formula. During this period, Aris was immersed in developing his professional commercial career and like other aspiring artists, used his artistic talent to provide artwork for postcard designs. In 1900, 419

million postcards were sent, ten for every person in the country and the number increased to 880 million in 1915.¹⁵¹

This was a period when the fashionable elite set a style which was influenced by the art and fashions of continental Europe. The era was marked by significant shifts in politics as sections of society that had been largely excluded from wielding power in the past, such as common labourers and women, became increasingly politicized. The economy and social changes created an environment in which there was more social mobility brought about as a result of rapid industrialization and this allowed greater freedom and movement for all social classes.

Aris embarked on his artistic career at this time of great social change in England. He had obtained a Diploma in graphic art from the Bradford Technical College in 1900 and commenced his professional career publishing in a weekly satirical and arts magazine called the *Jackdaw*, published in Bradford for a year from April 1904. Aris contributed cartoons and portraits of music hall and theatre artists and it was probably his commercial work and contacts at the magazine that provided him with the opportunity to design his first series for the Bradford Exhibition (1904), but whether it was a prize for a competition or a commission is unknown.¹⁵²

Aris provided a humorous series of ten illustrations for Pictorial Post Card. The collection promoted the Bradford Exhibition and was accompanied by a short verse providing information on the exhibits, attractions and amusements. Interestingly, each design is signed under the pseudonym 'Earis 04', possibly as a means of disguising Aris or disassociating himself from the postcard images, many of which were intended to shock or cause offence as well as

¹⁵¹ C.W. Hill, *Discovering Picture Postcards*, p. 14. See Murray, Martin, *The Story of Cigarette Cards* (London: Murray Cards, 1987). London Cigarette Card Company, *The Complete Catalogue of British Cigarette Cards* (Exeter: Webb & Bower, 1981).

¹⁵² The first series does not exist in the Publishers Index of Postcard Monthly and could possibly suggest these postcards were privately commissioned, a promotion or competition winner.

amuse their recipients. The popularity of Tom Browne, another well known illustrator of cartoons and characters, may have influenced Aris, as there are similarities between the two in technical style and subject. Aris, like Browne, introduced a foreign character into his collection, adding an exotic international interest (fig 4.1-4.2).

In 1904 Aris produced another comic humour seaside series entitled the “Star” series for Havelock Lonsdale. Each card design works standing alone or as part of the series as a whole, creating an interesting story about a family’s day visit to the seaside, a popular leisure pursuit during this era. ‘Off To See The Sea. The Start’ is followed by, ‘The Arrival’, ‘Dip in the sea’, ‘On The Pleasure Steamer’ and concludes with ‘Homeward Bound. Racing For The Train’ (fig 4.13-4.14). Publishers generally produced series in a uniform number of four, six, eight or twelve; it is likely, therefore, that one is missing or yet to be discovered. Aris, like the other eminent postcard cartoonists of that era, Martin Anderson and Tom Browne, may have compensated in the early years for his lack of skill by drawing with what appears to be an intense vigour in his sketches and unusually bright colours, with many of the accompanying strap line jokes relying for their humour upon the trials and tribulations of married life, amusing family predicaments or little husbands henpecked by their large wives (fig 4.3-4.4).

Aris provided another set of comic designs of individuals for Havelock Lonsdale which were postally dated 1909. However, Aris used his pseudonym signature Earis, which suggests that these were probably designed at the same time as the earlier seaside humour series (1904). Aris’s technical style of design and the composition here would imply that he was seeking to imitate another popular artist, Phil May, as the style and minimal composition is completely different in the Bradford collection and Star Series. May drew posters and cartoons, producing 800 drawings for *The Sydney Bulletin*, although it was for his studies of the London guttersnipe and the coster-girl that he became renowned. Similar to Aris, May had a sense of fun and his

comic humour was on a par with his artistic ability. Aris was clearly impressed and influenced by May's style of sketch. He collected numerous samples of his work, which he inserted into

Plate 26



Fig 4.1. Weary Willie and Tired Tim
Tom Browne (c.1895)



Fig 4.2. Bradford Exhibition Series
Ernest Aris (1904)



Fig 4.3. The City Man Takes His Country Cousins
Round The Exhibition
Pictorial Post Card - Bradford Exhibition, signed pseudonym Earis 04.



Fig 4.4. An Exciting Time

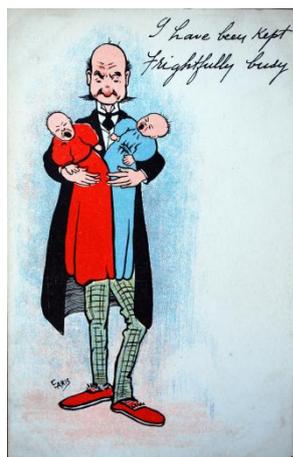


Fig 4.5. I have been kept frightfully busy
Havelock Lonsdale - "Star" Series (c.1908)



Fig 4.6. A caricature of William Gladstone.
Phil May. (c.1880)

notebooks, and it is evident from Aris's designs that he tried to imitate May's practice of using minimal lines in his drawings. This was a characteristic feature much associated with May that is believed to have resulted from the laborious technical process of having to eliminate lines for reproduction and therefore he deliberately kept the design to a minimum. Whether this was intentional or as a result of having to adapt to accommodate the deficiencies of the printing machines is conjecture. In 1910 and again in 1912 Aris entered drawings for the Christmas supplement of a national weekly illustrated newspaper, *The Graphic*, where he worked alongside the distinguished artists Tom Browne, Bert Thomas, Lawson Wood and Heath Robinson. May had worked in his later years exclusively for *Punch* and *The Graphic*, (1896-1903), prior to Aris's arrival. Aris's emulation of May's technical style of design and humour can be seen in the "Star" Series of cards (fig 4.5-4.6).¹⁵³

Among the largest producers of postcards were firms like Valentine and Sons Ltd of Dundee and Raphael Tuck and Sons Ltd. of Moorfields. Raphael Tuck introduced the infamous early picture postcards called 'Oilettes', which were coloured reproductions of views by famous artists of the day and became very popular.¹⁵⁴ *The Picture Postcard*, a monthly magazine for collectors which commenced publication in July 1900, offered a variety of packets of six postcards for six pence or twelve for a shilling of subjects ranging from Military Bands, Bonnie Barns, Heroines, Coaching, Gems of Nature, all by named artists. Aris produced an 'Oilette' Artistic series (numbered 1668) in 1909 for Raphael Tuck, which showed general scenes and was postally used 1906 – 1909. They include The Harbour, Market, Old houses of Robin Hood's Bay, East Cliff, Tin Ghaut and Runswick Bay in Yorkshire. This collection by Aris is

¹⁵³ It should be noted that Aris illustrated two "Star" Series for Havelock Lonsdale. Each card has a unique identifying number. See Ernest Aris Catalogue 2011 for detailed information.

¹⁵⁴ Oilette is a trade name used by Raphael Tuck to describe postcards reproduced from original paintings.

not artist signed or a distinct collection of any notable merit, primarily because his expertise and focus was graphic art as opposed to fine art. However, it served a purpose for those who visited these small tourist villages. During this period, many eminent artists were sent to principal beauty spots to obtain sketches for reproduction in the early days of the picture postcard, including the distinguished landscape painter, Edgar Longstaffe (fig 4.7).

Aris also produced a wonderful ‘Oilette’ – ‘Seaside Humour’ series for Raphael Tuck (circa 1906). This genre was popularised by the artist Donald McGill who produced over 12,000 designs in his illustrious career. Aris and McGill’s images and themes remain popular as the clothes fashion, beaches and promenades have changed almost beyond recognition and admired by collectors as representing a bygone era. Aris’s comic humour could be considered a social document of the period with women and children swathed from head to foot in voluminous clothing, children in brimmed bonnets, pinafores and petticoats demurely raised. It was only in these comic postcards or in poses from the French studios that girls were seen in bathing dresses. The colours Aris uses are gaudy, the figures are crudely sketched with an earthy comical humour and the humour derives entirely from the drawing supported by a short caption. Interestingly, Aris may have become more assured of his skills in this area, as he is confidently signing this series using his own full name (fig 4.8).

Aris could be criticized for the subject matter that was used for the Christmas series for Raphael Tuck. These cards he produced for the ‘Christmas Series’ (1904), numbered 8054 (dated 1904), convey little of the religious significance or association with the subject they were meant to portray. However, it is likely this unsigned series of designs were originally intended for general purpose (No. 8042), or were used at a later date by printers who over-printed the original design with phrases such as “A Merrie Christmase” or Christmas Greetings” as was usual at the time. This was an early series, designed in England and chromographed in Bavaria and issued internationally. This set is interesting for its simple use of a distinct black outline with

Plate 27



Fig 4.7. "Oilette" Artistic Series
Raphael Tuck & Sons Ltd., Ernest Aris (1906)



Fig 4.8. "Oilette" – "Seaside Humour"
Raphael Tuck & Sons Ltd., Ernest Aris (1906)

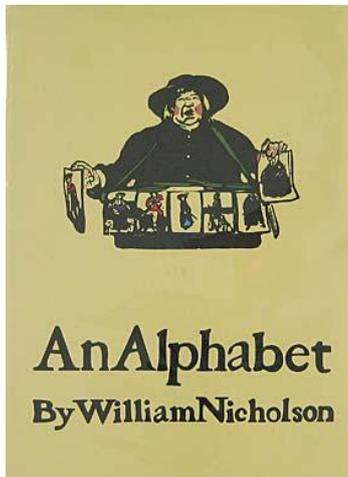


Fig 4.9. William Nicholson (c. 1897)



Fig.4.10. Ernest Aris, (1904)



Fig 4.11. Wont You Come Home Bill Bailey
Liversidge Ross and Co. Ltd. Signed with pseudonym Earis 04.



Fig 4.12. Bill Bailey Wont Come Home.
Liversidge Ross and Co. Ltd. Signed with pseudonym Earis 04.



Fig 4.13. Off To See The Sea. The Arrival



Fig 4.14. On The Pleasure Steamer

Havelock Lonsdale - "Star" Series, signed pseudonym Earis 1904

solid flat colours. Similarities could be drawn with William Nicholson's woodcut designs, which may have influenced Aris.¹⁵⁵ Nicholson and his brother, working under the pseudonyms The Beggarstaff Brothers, were the first artists to attract acclaim in Britain for their work; their images were considered to have the potential to develop a national style and they could be regarded as the most influential graphic designers of the time. Guided by designer and theatre director, Edward Gordon Craig, their production methods used a cut-out and stencil technique which created clear outlines and large areas of flat colour. Nicholson's unique style of original woodcuts used for advertising are instantly recognisable. Aris has similarly used broad strokes in black outline with solid shades, although with a brighter and more intense use of colour (fig 4.9-4.10).

Aris's most memorable comic collection for Liversidge Ross and Co. Ltd. was the unmarked version of 'Bill Bailey' (1904), reprinted as the 'Glydax Series' (number 452) and the 'Piccadilly Series' (number 2406). This series proved so popular it was also used by another postcard company called The Milton ('Bill Bailey' Series, number 536). The smaller publishers like Liversidge Ross tended to supply less formal cards, producing specialty ranges such as illustrated jokes in similar styles, with red-nosed inebriates, irate wives and burly policemen comparable in pose and appearance to pantomime or music hall comedians. Aris was an enthusiast of jazz, developing many of his design ideas from his leisure pursuit (for example, the characteristic black and white check distinct on the cover designs for the *Dainty Series* and

¹⁵⁵ Sir William Nicholson (1872-1949) was an English artist well known for his unique style of woodcut prints. In the 1890s he created posters with his brother-in-law, James Pryde, using the pseudonyms J. & W. Beggarstaff. The Beggarstaff Brothers opened an advertising design studio in 1894. In 1897 Nicholson produced a woodcut print of Queen Victoria that helped to establish his reputation with the British public. He also cut a series of wood blocks of *An Illustrated Alphabet* for publisher William Heinemann. This was soon followed by two other similar series of images, *An Almanac of Twelve Sports* and *London Types*. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/public/index.html?url=%2Findex.jsp>. [Website accessed 7 January 2010].

Uncle Toby Tales). In this instance, Aris has drawn his inspiration for the prose on his postcards from the popular hit song published in 1902, 'Bill Bailey Won't You Please Come Home', written by the American songwriter and pianist Hughie Cannon:

Won't you come home Bill Bailey, won't you come home?

She moans the whole day long.

I'll do the cooking darling, I'll pay the rent;

I knows I've done you wrong;

Member that rainy eve that I drove you out,

With nothing but a fine tooth comb?

I know I'se to blame; well ain't that a shame?

Bill Bailey won't you please come home?

Aris has used the first and last line of the chorus, which at the time was a very popular tune with familiar rhyming verse. The use of this well known song in his design would have added additional interest and appeal for the customer (fig 4.11-4.12).

Aris designed approximately sixty cards for various series from 1904 onwards, from the promotion of a local tourist attraction in his home town of Bradford to the commissions he received from the leading national publisher Raphael Tuck & Sons Ltd. Aris was therefore producing illustrated designs from the outset of the commercial period for this form of art at the beginning of the century. What Aris showed in a small display of six by four inches, only gives a taste of what was the dominating art form in the years before the First World War. Postcards were to the Edwardians what film and television are to us today. From a critic's perspective, Aris did not have a renowned reputation for this type of art; like most aspiring artists, he undertook it as a means to an end. His designs served a commercial purpose and gave Aris the opportunity to expose his talent.

When Aris was designing these series for the various publishers, it was at the beginning of his career and it is apparent from the very different variation in technical styles, from classic landscapes to humorous portrayals of family life and the bold Christmas series, that Aris may have been copying other artists like William Nicholson, Phil May and Tom Browne's techniques and ideas. Their work was popular and it would appear that Aris tried to adapt their styles and humour to suit his own methods and approach to design. I believe that Aris's lack of creative originality in technical design is probably the reason why he was not recognized for his work in this field and because there were numerous other artists able to produce a similar commercial type of artwork.

Additionally, Aris was unable to develop a unique recognisable style and his designs are very much short lived and transitory, such as the popular narrative used for *Bill Bailey* series which is largely unknown today. Geographical location would have played its part, with Aris's Bradford Exhibition designs limited to the local exhibition in Bradford and hence this series would only appeal to those living in Bradford or those who attended the exhibition; when the exhibition closed, there would have been no further use for this card series. The landscapes would have been used by those visiting York and would serve no other purpose. His comical series and the "Star" Series, 'Off to see the Sea' for Havelock Lonsdale would have appealed to retailers and holidaymakers in commercial resorts, although now appear unfashionable and passé. Furthermore, the print run of Aris's postcards would have been short as they were for a specialised niche market and therefore limited his public exposure and demand.

Ernest Aris's father Alfred illustrated a wonderful set of comical humour seaside cards at the end of the Edwardian era (1909). Technically, I believe Alfred Aris's designs to be superior to those of his son, although the style does appear similar and, like Ernest's postcards, it is evident they were designed for a particular period in time. Alfred's images appear to be considered illustrations with measured attention paid to detail rather than Ernest Aris's rough

sketches, though the subject topic and use of colour are similar. It is interesting to consider who may have been the most influential in this relationship.

Nevertheless, Aris should be recognised for his artistic merit in this field at the beginning of his career. Collectively, the cards reveal his hidden talent for comic humour caricatures. They are colourful, vibrant and humorous and present an interesting and amusing social record of the era. The cards as a whole are visually pleasing and are accurately portrayed and, most significantly, when seen alongside his poster designs, book covers and cigarette cards, the postcards add another dimension to his artistic talent. They also help us to comprehend the broader forms of art and styles that Aris was able to develop and master, as well as providing another medium and outlet to communicate his skill to a wider audience.

Aris's cards are collected today but hold no real monetary value. Although the cards may be difficult to find, they are not truly rare as they were a mass produced form of art and have no significant historical importance attached. It is highly likely there are many more undiscovered postcard illustrations by Aris, as his series do not appear complete because publishers generally printed series in uniform numbers.

The need for postcards and production changed overnight with the advent of the First World War. From 1919, with the world impoverished and wearied by war, the craze was not revived, not least because the main driving force of quality printing and ink manufactures had been very much centred on Germany, and the rapid development of the telephone negated the need for many of the previous uses of the postcard. As a result, there was a reduction in consumer demand to send cards. This was reflected by publishers who spent less on commissioning and manufacturing original designs and resulted in artists like Aris seeking other commercial avenues to pursue their artistic career.

II - Aris's Poster Designs for London Transport (1915)

After Aris had completed his Diploma in art studies at the Bradford College of Art (1900), he had worked as a commercial artist for a number of years on various magazines, newspapers and designing postcards. Aris moved to London and purchased a house in Hornsey, London (1913) as his commercial career started to progress. He had started to collaborate with other authors, illustrating their books, which gave him the commercial understanding and experience to write and illustrate his own books. In 1915 Aris received his first noteworthy commission for London United Tramways (LUT) and the Metropolitan Electric Tramways (MET) to design six tram posters for the garden suburbs of London.¹⁵⁶ From personal research undertaken in the archives at the London Transport Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), I would argue that these posters that have been stored away for nearly a century and are an almost unknown aspect of Aris' life. I believe, they ought to become one of the more significant features of his legacy and justify an argument that he deserves further recognition for his contribution and especially in this particular field of design.

London Transport has traditionally been at the forefront of the promotion and advancement of creative advertising design, which evolved from their idea to develop and encourage the use of public transport by means of artistic poster campaigns representing central and suburban locations. London Transport achieved this honour by producing skilful and outstanding poster designs and has for over a century commissioned and promoted an unsurpassed range of quality designs from exceptional artists, Ernest Aris being among the

¹⁵⁶ Hugh Robertson to Sian Dawson email dated 8 March 2007. 'By the end of 1912, both companies were associates of the Underground Electric Railways Company of London Limited (UERL or Underground Group)'. London Transport was the public name and brand used by a series of public transport authorities in London, England from 1933 to unify the identity of the previously separately owned and managed London Underground, bus and tram services including poster designs, tickets, train livery, seat upholstery and the station architecture of Charles Holden.

celebrated names. There is possibly no other equivalent international organisation or establishment that has played such an ambitious and artistic role in shaping the appearance, development and environment of a capital city.

The most exceptional of the London Transport poster designs from this era are now held as part of the National Collection of Posters at the V&A, a unique and outstanding collection of varied work created at the turn of the century, which includes three of Aris's tram posters. The V&A has a distinguished and continued tradition of archiving chosen works and the collection comprises posters that were submitted and accepted from the very best artists of the day.

There is much debate about what constitutes a successful poster design. A good idea can often be lost if it is too complicated or if the image does not attract the audience's attention, convey the message or is indistinguishable to the mind and eye. I refer to Oliver Green, Curator of the London Transport Museum, who writes:

The pictorial poster is a visual telegram and a concise means of conveying a message through a combination of words and images. At its best it is also an art form, albeit an applied art where the designer's skill and creativity is channelled towards a very practical purpose. The poster's function may be to sell a product or a service, to explain or to persuade. It may be used as advertising, publicity or pure propaganda. In any of these fields it can be a powerful means of communication which is difficult to ignore. A well-designed poster will attract attention and transmit an idea almost before the viewer has had time to think about it.¹⁵⁷

Frank Pick was a British transport administrator. After qualifying as a solicitor in 1902, he worked at the North Eastern Railway before moving to the Underground Electric Railways

¹⁵⁷ Oliver Green, *Underground Art* (London: Cassell, 1990), p. 6.

Company of London (UERL) in 1906. Frank Pick was given responsibility for all publicity and marketing of the Underground Group (UERL, Underground Electric Railways Company of London). He steered the development of the London Underground's corporate identity by commissioning eye-catching commercial art, graphic design and modern architecture and it was he who was the major instigator of promoting travel through art by using innovative poster design and established a highly recognisable brand. Pick accelerated the interest in poster design and was solely responsible for establishing the National Archive Collection of Posters, submitting and advising the V&A on poster contributions from London Transport. Tim O'Toole, Managing Director of London Underground, has written that Pick's commercial philosophy within the organisation at the turn of the twentieth century was that:

good design should be the unifying principle for running any business. As a founding member of the Design and Industries Association, he believed that the application of good design – 'fitness for purpose and pleasantness in use' – to every object and activity would yield efficiency, economy and the most pleasing service to the public.¹⁵⁸

By the end of 1912 Pick became Commercial Manager, working under General Manager, Albert Henry Stanley. He developed and promoted buses and Underground as integrated and co-ordinated services by introducing and enforcing a standardised advertising policy across the business and stations with a common advertising style which strengthened the identity of the brand in the public's mind.¹⁵⁹ Pick was overseeing the tramways posters including those that Aris was commissioned to design for the LUT and the MET, which were incorporated associates of the UERL. Pick developed a unique and strong visual style, combined with a vision for

¹⁵⁸ David Bownes and Oliver Green (ed.), *London Transport Posters: A Century of Art and Design* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries in association with London Transport Museum, 2008), p. 7.

¹⁵⁹ Bownes and Green, (ed.), *London Transport Posters*, p. 45.

public art for which London Underground would later become famous. As O'Toole's quotation above suggests, careful consideration was given by Pick to all aspects of design even including the design of the underground transport system stations. His objective was to create a distinct identity for the brand through its creative and architectural design. This was achieved by commissioning a range of the very best commercial and fine artists including Aris, who designed and illustrated posters, and the celebrated London Underground tube map, which was inspired by Frank Beck from diagrams of electrical circuits and which abandoned geographical accuracy by showing the tube lines as verticals, horizontals and diagonals. In 1915 Pick commissioned calligrapher and typographer Edward Johnston to design a clear new typeface for use on all Underground Group buildings, rolling stock and publications. Johnston's typeface, known as Johnston Sans, was first used in 1916 and was so successful that, with minor modifications in recent years, it is still in use. Johnston was again commissioned in 1918 to design the London Underground logo, the roundel or 'bulls eye' device, a symbol instantly recognisable at all underground stations and still used today. Many of these distinguished design ideas have become internationally adopted and are recognised symbols worldwide as iconic emblems of London and Britishness. As a result of Pick's enthusiasm for commercial design, artists like Aris were eager to be commissioned and to become involved in what was an ambitious project and a very prestigious programme of developing and promoting commercial art through travel.¹⁶⁰

Traditionally, the French had led the international scene of poster development. Jules Chéret trained in lithography in London (1859-1866), where he was strongly influenced by the British approach to poster design and printing processes. Chéret returned to France and he developed a new colour lithography as an autographic process, creating contrasting and vivid

¹⁶⁰ Edelstein, Terri, and O. Green, N. Harris, P. Skipwith, M. Twyman, *Art for All: British Posters for Transport* (New Haven and London: Yale Center for British Art in Association with Yale University Press, 2010), p. 73. Bownes and Green, *London Transport Posters*, p. 51.

coloured posters in conjunction with innovative typography, which were considered by the audience as overwhelming and innovative for that period.¹⁶¹ His designs were placed in cabarets, music halls, and theatres and he went on to expand his business to provide advertisements for the plays of touring troupes, municipal festivals, and to design commercial products which included beverages, liquors, perfumes, soaps, cosmetics and pharmaceutical products. Eventually Chéret became a major force in advertising, adding the railroad companies and a number of manufacturing businesses to his client list. The consumer appreciated the accessibility of high art through mass print culture as it offered a modern artistic medium in opposition to the traditional approach and standards set by the art academies.¹⁶²

Chéret's success inspired an industry that saw the emergence of a new generation of poster designers and painters such as Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. The emergence of the poster as a potential form of high art began with the work of Toulouse-Lautrec, who started to use the poster as a way of displaying bold decorative designs. He became one of the great popular artists of the modern age in the 1890s and early 1900s in France and the first artist whose career was driven by the culture of advertising (fig 4.15). Lautrec's posters are considered rare historical and cultural records of their time, but more importantly, he believed they were works of art, even framing his posters like paintings and exhibiting them at the Salon des Independents. His interest in lithography led him to make it a major part of his work and his astonishing lithographs and posters had an overwhelming influence on the artists of his time and since, foreshadowing later twentieth-century artistic developments in his flat treatment of forms, curvilinear contours and daring freedom of line, colour and composition. Interest in the French poster spread as posters were exhibited in exhibitions, hoardings, in publications, print shops and portfolios. As a consequence, speculation and interest grew and specialist criticism and

¹⁶¹ Bownes and Green, (ed.), *London Transport Posters*, p. 17.

¹⁶² 'Jules Chéret'. Available online at: < <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chéret> > [Website accessed 31 November 2010].

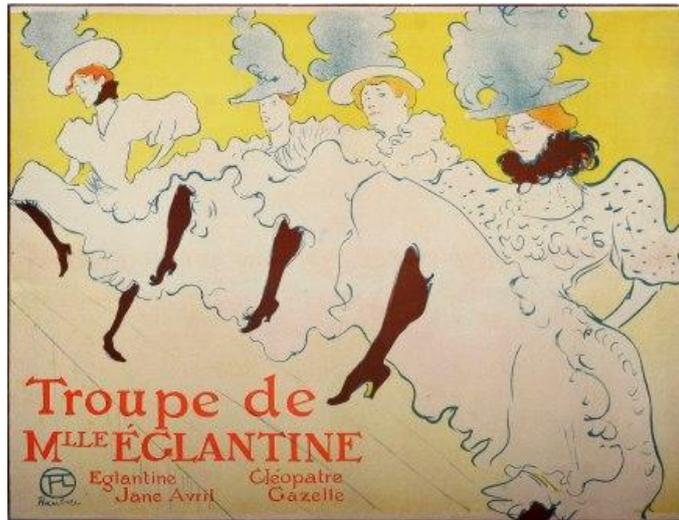


Fig 4.15. Henri de Toulouse Lautrec

PLACES OF INTEREST	NEAREST STATION	METROPOLITAN RAILWAY				DISTRICT RAILWAY	NEAREST STATION	DISTRICT RAILWAY				
		FARE	TIME	FARE	TIME			FARE	TIME	FARE	TIME	
FARMINGDAN ST.	FARMINGDAN ST.	8	6	4	1	5	6	21				
ALDERSGATE ST.	ALDERSGATE ST.	8	6	4	1	9	6	23				
MOORGATE ST.	MOORGATE ST.	8	6	4	1	9	6	25				
BISHOPSGATE	BISHOPSGATE	8	6	4	1	9	6	27				
ALHAMBRA	ALHAMBRA	8	6	4	1	9	7	30				

Fig 4.16. Metropolitan Timetable (1886)



Fig 4.17. State Visit poster by unknown artist (1902). Published by the Metropolitan Railway

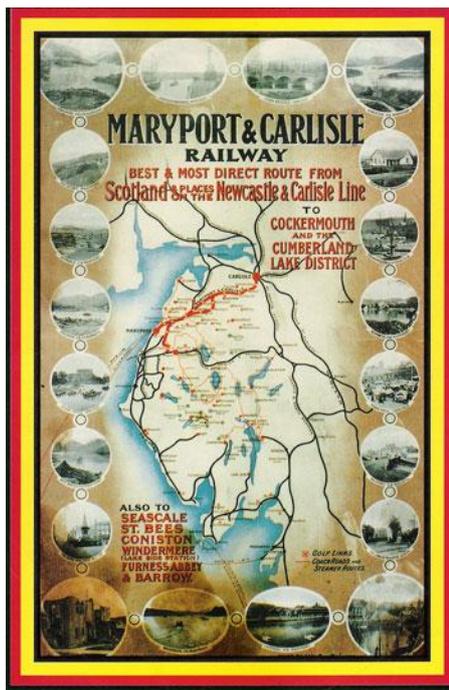


Fig 4.18. Maryport & Carlisle (1910-1920s)



Fig 4.19. Skegness Is So Bracing John Hassall (1908)

Commissioned by the Great Northern Railway

scholarship developed as posters became collectable. A 'poster enthusiasm' was emerging internationally and reached Britain in the 1890s.

British poster design in the nineteenth-century had been predominantly letterpress with announcements in black text-only format. Oliver Green describes early British pictorial posters from the 1890s as 'rendered in the gaudy, often sentimentalised, style of chromolithography familiar from commercial ephemera such as greeting cards and scraps. Others employed a medley of elaborate lettering and vignettes reminiscent of lithographic sheet music covers.'¹⁶³ It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that pictorial advertising promotions on hoardings began to emerge (fig 4.16). The introduction of lithography and then colour and the scale of this unique concept of advertising were considered a modern phenomena, which quickly became popular. Although lithographs were originally developed in the middle of the nineteenth century, it was towards the end of the century, when expensive foreign tariffs drove British manufacturers to use this process for the home consumer market that it rapidly became widespread in advertising. Increasingly manufacturers were seeking innovative ways to capture the attention of the passersby within a short time frame. This resulted in technological, economic and imaginative developments having to adapt and keep pace with the demands of the consumer as the poster form became rapidly considered to be the 'public voice'. With the construction of new railway stations, the external hoardings attracted attention; the booking halls, lifts and escalators were the perfect place to communicate messages to the continuous passing mass market, as well stimulating visual interest for the traveller on a journey, which at that time would have been dirty and unpleasant.

Billposting had become a reputable trade and spaces were carefully regulated as hoardings were hired out, providing this brand of commercial promotion, poster design and

¹⁶³ Bownes and Green (ed.), *London Transport Posters*, p.17.

display with respectability.¹⁶⁴ The industry became more competitive as promoters vied for space and the transitory audiences' attention. Further technological developments and improved machine printing in the colour lithography process enabled the production of larger scale pictorial coloured images. These posters, adjacent to several others, created greater impact; they instantly drew the public's attention (fig 4.17-4.18) and interest and the poster very quickly became a popular form of advertising that previously would have been uneconomical as the printing process was lengthy and expensive.¹⁶⁵

At the beginning of the twentieth century, following the heady artistic aspirations for the poster, there was a more pragmatic deliberation of how the developments of poster design could be reflected in the commercial field. The Beggarstaff Brothers were regarded as the most influential graphic designers, using broad stroked outlines and large bold areas of flat colour. Although their designs were considered rather morbid because of the weak colours and simplicity, the Beggarstuffs were reputed to be one of the foremost British contributors to poster design up until 1899. Evidence of their technical influence can be seen in the early postcards that Aris produced for Raphael Tuck & Sons in 1904.

At the turn of the century, the two most influential and dominant people in the development of British poster design were John Hassall and Frank Pick. At this time, the quality of design varied considerably, but it was an era when the public were becoming more aware of visual advertising and promoters were exploring different ways to claim a visual identity and presence in unusual spaces such as railway stations, embankments and alternative forms of transport like trams, trains and buses. John Hassall became the principal artistic poster designer in the following decade with his traditional style of bold decorative colours with humorous phrases. Hassall's personal approach to poster design was explained in an interview with the

¹⁶⁴ Bownes and Green (ed.), *London Transport Posters*, p.17.

¹⁶⁵ Bownes and Green (ed.), *London Transport Posters*, p.17.

journal *Modern Business*: ‘The idea is everything ... and should emphasise as far as possible the leading selling point ... one might make a very artistic poster without making a good selling poster.’¹⁶⁶ It was John Hassell’s dedication and inspirational ideas of engaging with the product and the public that led the way for artists like Aris.

John Hassall, like Ernest Aris, was one of a few artists at this period to produce a significant output of commercial advertisement work. From personal research in the John Hassall Archive Collection at the University of Essex, where Hassall’s entire private records reside have revealed that he left a complete catalogue of all details, including prices and clients, relating to his design work throughout his career and this gives a useful indication of other artists like Aris’s costs and commissions at the time.¹⁶⁷ The catalogue does not include Hassall’s traditional range of painting and illustration, which included illustrated volumes of children’s nursery rhymes and fairy storybooks. At the age of 20, Hassall emigrated to Manitoba, Canada to take up farming with his brother. It was while in Canada and taking a similar commercial route to Aris, that Hassall submitted his first sketch to *The Graphic*, which was accepted and was destined to change his life. Hassall returned to Great Britain and subsequently found employment in 1895 as an artist for the leading advertising and poster company, David Allen & Sons. Hassall became a well-established illustrator, cartoonist and poster designer. His most famous posters were for household products, theatre productions and railway companies, including ‘Skegness is So Bracing’, commissioned in 1908 for the Great Northern Railway (fig 4.19). In his day, Hassall was dubbed ‘The King of Poster Artists’, producing more than 400 designs in a year. His output was prodigious and both his poster and postcard art work is now

¹⁶⁶ John Hassall qtd. in Bownes and Green, (ed.), *London Transport Posters*, p. 20.

¹⁶⁷ The John Hassall Collection includes 150 books and periodical volumes with illustrations, diaries, correspondence, prints, photographs, commissions, agreements, portfolios and ledger, and press cuttings. The John Hassall Collection, Special Collections in The Albert Sloman Library, University of Essex.

highly sought after. An early member and later President of the London Sketch Club, Hassall, along with Dudley Hardy, Phil May, Cecil Aldin and Tom Browne, had broken away from the traditional Langham Sketch Club in 1898.¹⁶⁸ These members had a more commercial attitude, approaching drawing promotions and adverts as an extension of black-and-white illustration. They met weekly to socialise and make timed sketches on a theme, their collective skill at quickly producing humorous work ensuring that they became one of the most successful and prominent groups in British poster design. These artists influenced Aris, who collected a large amount of Phil May's cuttings of sketches for reference in his private notebook.¹⁶⁹ The new Sketch Club's public profile increased immensely during this period and made the individual artists into recognisable names.

The period after 1900 was marked by the increasingly entrepreneurial activities of the London Sketch Club and others in this new field of art, who became regarded as contemporary art educators, taking advantage of the cheap popular press and the market for humorous illustration.¹⁷⁰ This type of art was, of course, greatly frowned upon by the traditionally established art schools, Heatherley's, Slade and The Royal Academy. To meet the demand, a number of correspondence courses were launched to train new illustrators in this medium. The programmes of study, much derided, were intensive and considered good value. The teaching manuals of the better schools were models of innovative distance learning, and a wide range of celebrated visual humorists emerged. These institutions also trained the commercial artist who

¹⁶⁸ Local artist Cecil Aldin produced some of the finest examples of posters and press advertisements and considered classics within the advertising field. These posters were used on sites throughout the country and the artwork formed the basis of early magazine campaigns. The earliest promoted the virtues of Cadbury's cocoa. Available at: http://www.cadbury.co.uk/cadburyandchocolate/ourstory/Pages/OurstoryDetail.aspx?id=1900_cecil_aldin&category=advertising&era=1861_1900&mode=detail [Website accessed 15 October 2011].

¹⁶⁹ Ernest Aris's private reference notebook is in the private collection of Siân Dawson.

¹⁷⁰ Bownes and Green (ed.), *London Transport Posters*, p.21.

wished to specialise in humour. Possibly the best course was that run by Hassall, who believed that specialised training was required in this technique as it was stifled in the art schools. In 1900, Hassall founded the New Art School and School of Poster Design in Kensington specifically to develop talented poster designers, which included Donald McGill and Harry Rountree amongst its alumni scholars (it later became the Hassall School of Art).¹⁷¹ The school was closed at the outbreak of the First World War but, following the war, Hassall ran the very successful John Hassall Correspondence School, which allowed artists to study poster and graphic art in their spare time on a home correspondence course. Later in Aris's career, he wrote *Poster Work* (circa 1943-1947), a comprehensive learning manual on the education of poster design, for the International Correspondence School (ICS). Although elementary, the book is very concise and informative, with detailed technical observations for artists who wished to concentrate in this field of art. It is possible that from previous commercial work Aris undertook for London Transport or through *The Graphic*, Hassall and Aris may have been acquainted and this book may have been produced as an educational book for the course on poster design at John Hassall's Correspondence School. Following extensive research, however, I believe it is more likely that Aris updated the original version of the Advertisers' Pocket Book by the ICS (1913), which was a handbook of terms that included type specimens, sample pictures, advertisements and definitions of key terms. Although this fact cannot be verified, the ICS was based in Kingsway, which is where Charles Bayne and Aris had established an office.

Frank Pick and the Underground Group

During the first decade of the twentieth century, various British museums were advocating the association between commerce and art, and it was this idea that possibly influenced and inspired the renowned Frank Pick to use art as a means of promoting commercial awareness in transport. The use of art in a commercial and civil setting is familiar to us today; however, in Aris's time it

¹⁷¹ Beverley Cole & Richard Durack, *Railway Posters 1923-1947* (London: Laurence King, 1992), p. 155.

was considered extremely radical. In the early part of the twentieth century, before television and the internet, posters were the most effective way of communicating a message to a wide audience and were used to advertise and inform. Early Underground publicity was considered very poor. Frank Pick was required to increase passenger numbers and any decisions relating to publicity were motivated by this consideration alone.¹⁷² He had been critical of previous publicity and considered the early posters contained too much text and were visually too complicated to effectively convey a message. Pick seized his opportunity and endeavoured to improve the brand, by creating a strong corporate image in the minds of Londoners through art.

In 1908 the Underground Group were facing possible closure unless they increased their passenger capacity. Pick had been appointed to oversee and develop all traffic promotion, instigating a poster campaign to change the way the public felt about the underground and promoting the benefits of the new integrated system as an economical and popular means of travel with inclusive appeal for everyone. The promotion would also include the Underground station, lifts and platforms, which were also environments that lended themselves to areas for graphic design. The aim of the campaign was to encourage travellers to take leisure journeys they had not previously undertaken to popular destinations and attractions. Pick's policy on poster design was to have perpetual change, which sustained the customer's interest and he limited the life span of posters to three months, with a wide variety of pictorial styles.

Pick understood the potential and the dilemmas of the modern pictorial poster. He wanted the Underground Group, London's transport and its facilities to be seen as modern, progressive and a role model for good business practice. Pick ensured good design and commerce were brought together, applying arts and technology which collectively enabled the business to flourish and achieve its objectives whilst giving social rewards for the users. It was

¹⁷² 'Bownes and Green (ed.), 'Appearance Values: Frank Pick and the art of London Transport', *London Transport Posters*, p. 37-60.

Pick's aspirations and influence that transformed the reputation of the Underground Group, revolutionising its commercial status to one of an educating influence for the passengers and the people of the city of London. Experiencing the artistic environment on the underground was an attraction in itself and much acknowledged by the public for whom travel had become an education in applied art.

Pick approached poster design from every angle, trying different methods until he found a successful formula. Like Aris, Pick realised that for a poster to work, it had to both attract and hold attention, and convey a message that would influence the viewer. Pick was no artist or designer; he was a businessman, albeit a very creative one. In 1908 he commissioned his first pictorial poster, 'No Need to Ask a P'liceman' by John Hassall. This very simple and effective poster was an instant hit. Hassall was already a familiar artist and his poster, designed in a new style, appealed to the public. Following this success, Pick began to commission artists and designers to create posters with the same criteria: the poster had to have a simple and uncomplicated message and prove popular with the public.

Pick believed all posters had an essential purpose, even those which were developed as spin-offs before and during the First World War. These posters included niche marketing which was directed to young audiences such as the large format poster of an illustrated alphabet by Charles Pears, that could also be bought as a booklet in aid of the benevolent fund to support families of UERL Train, Omnibus and Tram staff who had perished in the war, and Macdonald Gill's illustrated poster maps which were available to purchase and used for educational purposes or for the home.¹⁷³

Pick was enveloping the consumer in not only the actual experience of interesting travel, but also broadening the attraction beyond the urban environment as he developed his growing

¹⁷³ *An Alphabet of T.O.T.*, illustrated by Charles Pears, was submitted for approval to the National Collection of Posters at the V&A on 21 June 1915 and accepted alongside Aris's three posters illustrated for LUT on 24 August 1915.

publicity programme. The poster programme was a critical part of London Transport's 'appearance values', and a powerful tool for visual communication. Between 1900 and 1914, as transport improved between the City and the suburbs, there was a substantial increase in suburban development around the London area; this owed much to accessibility as well as speed by the modern tram system. It was during this phase of suburban development in 1913, at the age of 30, Aris purchased his first and only home in the suburbs, 9 Oak Avenue, Hornsey, North London, where he resided for the rest of his life until his death in 1963.

The adventurous commissioning policy by Pick gave the Underground Group a reputation as one of the country's foremost art patrons and it was through the poster campaign scheme that Aris, as a promising young talent, was commissioned for the LUT and MET. In 1914-1915 Aris designed a series of nature and wildlife posters for the London tram system, which carried passengers seamlessly from their inner London homes to the river or gardens of the suburbs. At the time, these geographical areas were visited for rural and leisure pursuits and Aris was probably selected for his personal interest and expertise in natural history. Under Pick's supervision, the LUT and MET used pictorial posters to promote the suburbs and improve the company's image and services; Pick would also have overseen or supervised the poster commissioning process as it came under his auspices. In 2007 Hugh Robertson, Curator of Photographs at London's Transport Museum advised me that:

By the end of 1912 both companies were associates of the (UERL or Underground Group). In 1915, the date the posters were published, the UERL publicity department would have controlled company advertising. The publisher of the posters confirms this, being credited as Underground Electric Railways Company Ltd.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Hugh Robertson to Sian Dawson email dated 8 March 2007.

Pick wanted to ensure there was consistency throughout the organisation and in the quality of standards that artists and printers adhered to, combined with good poster design which was reliant on an understanding of the needs and deliverables by both the commissioner and the artist.

The tram was an efficient, fast and relatively cheap method of travel. For the user, it was essentially a modern method of transport that made the journey more pleasing and visually stimulating, as well as an interesting experience rather than the dirty underground and was a means of transport that provided for all social classes of society. The LUT gave considered attention to design detail and advertising, differentiating themselves from competitors by decorating the external paintwork of the trams in traditional style, with unique colours for each route allowing the illiterate to distinguish the routes by colour.

It is not known whether Aris submitted work or was perhaps recommended by another artist like Hassall who he may have come into contact with. The majority of poster designers were approached by the Underground Group directly and given a brief with which to work rather than submitting work speculatively. Aris would have produced initial ideas presented as unfinished 'roughs'. Once these were approved, the design would have been redrawn as a finished artwork, usually in a similar size as it would appear on the final printed poster. Aris provided a series of six natural history posters of wildlife in 1915, including three for the London United Tramways: *The Kingfisher at Home* to Hampton Court or Kew Bridge, *The Dragonfly at Home* to Malden Fountain and Kingston Hill, *The Pheasant at Home* to Buckinghamshire Woods at Uxbridge. Three further posters were designed for the Metropolitan Electric Tramways: *The Field Mouse at Home* to Middlesex Meadows and Sudbury, *The Fox at Home* to Hertfordshire Fields and Enfield, *The Squirrel at Home* to Waltham Cross. The V&A Acquisition form for the only three that remain in existence states the size for each panel as: *The Kingfisher* 11 7/8" x 7 3/8", *The Dragonfly* 11 13/16" x 7 3/8", *The Pheasant* 11 7/8" x 7 3/8". Five

hundred copies were ordered of each lithograph and the edition was printed by Johnson Riddle & Co. Ltd., London (printers of the first London Underground Map), at a cost of £90 each between 15 April 1915 and 8 May 1915 (fig 4.20).

We can only speculate as to why Aris was probably selected to undertake the commissions for the MET and LUT routes. He already had an established reputation from his books, cards, postcards and was an accomplished natural history illustrator, having worked for a decade in the commercial sector on various newspapers and magazines, and he would have appeared the obvious choice as an artist to design posters for these particular rural suburbs. The destinations which Aris was commissioned to illustrate for the MET and LUT were at that time popular rural areas very much associated with nature and leisure. Kew Bridge is the location of the botanical gardens and Hampton Court a rural area close enough to London for a day visit. It would be reasonable, therefore, to suggest that Aris was selected for his skill and in depth knowledge and understanding of natural history.

Considered treatment was also given to the placement of Aris's posters inside the tram as well as at the stops and this would have transformed the journey from one of tedium to pleasure as travellers were surrounded by his displays of nature (fig 4.21). Aris's exceptional posters delivered a comprehensive and varied collection of illustrations of animals, birds and wildlife that appealed to passengers on the daily routes and psychologically provided a feel good factor which would attract and encourage travellers to use transport to the surrounding suburban areas.

From a technical perspective, I believe Aris's colour lithograph posters are fine examples of quality poster design and he deserves recognition for his achievement in this field of art, particularly as they emerge from a period where there was not yet a long tradition of poster production. Aris's posters were printed using the mechanical process of lithography and were produced during an age when the processes and techniques for this type of printing were labour intensive, and the quality of the paper and surface make Aris's posters incomparable to today's



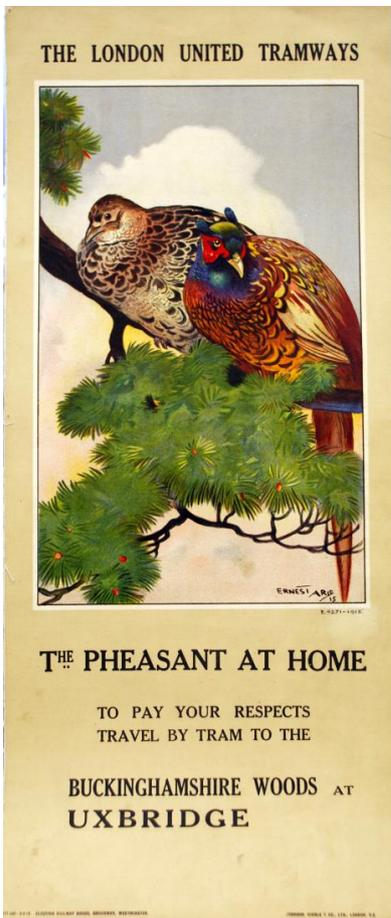
The squirrel at home, 1915



The field mouse at home, 1915



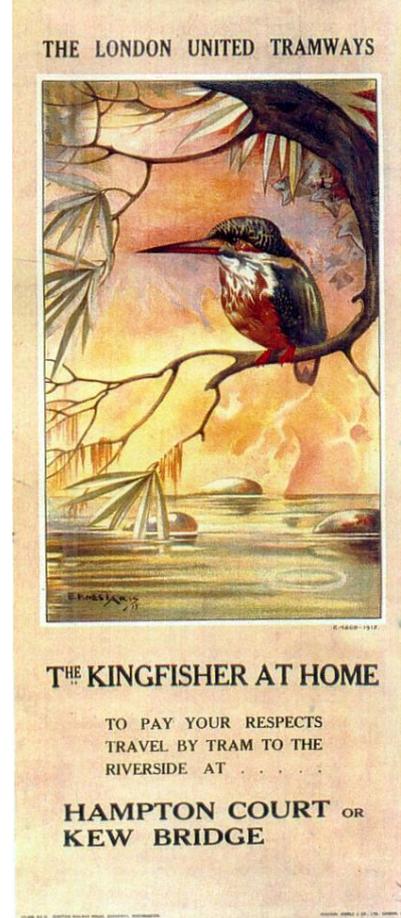
The fox at home, 1915



The pheasant at home, 1915



The dragon fly at home, 1915
Fig 4.20.



The kingfisher at home, 1915

commercial posters. Although this medium has limitations, it was imperative that Aris understood the process to achieve the best results from the printer. Aris's father was a lithographer and evidently Aris inherited many of his technical skills, as well as attaining a good working knowledge about practical reproduction and the mechanical processes involved from his commercial work.

Artists would often have to over compensate in their illustration for poor reproduction of their image through the printing process. Most artists assumed on completion of the design that a good printer would be able to replicate all elements of the technical detail exactly, including the colour and tonal contrast, whilst expecting the expense required to be met by the advertiser, which was not always the case. Evidently, Aris took account of the technical problems with the printer and used vibrant colour and skilful artistry to achieve truly outstanding results. Aris recognised that advertisers had a limited budget and that his reputation would therefore suffer if the public were not impressed by the quality of the poster on the hoardings. If the product failed to sell, it would be a poor reflection on the artist rather than the printer. As Aris wrote:

a moderately good printer will produce an excellent copy of a design which has been made by an artist who understands the process for which he is working ... and who used his imagination to overcome the difficulties imposed by the limitations of the process'.¹⁷⁵

Consequently the artist's reputation will be enhanced if the public are attracted by the poster and he will have provided a good advertisement. From close observation of the posters, I would suggest that Aris may have used a coarser effect of lithography. The posters have a rough surface obtained from the lithographic printing and appear to be finished off with chalk and rough stipple work. In most cases, posters were printed on manila glazed paper which is best suited for the conditions of display (hoardings, trams, railway and tube stations). Posters were

¹⁷⁵ Ernest A. Aris, *Poster Work*, (Unknown publisher, 1943-47), p. 29.

printed on tough paper so they were able to withstand extreme weather condition for a reasonable period and hence it is more than likely that this is the reason why those at the V&A archive collection are believed to be the only Aris originals to have survived.

The six posters that Aris designed for the LUT and MET are drawn with great accuracy and precision of detail. Evident in all Aris's poster work is the very well thought out composition of his subject; his technical understanding enables him to make the arrangement on the paper interesting and original. This, combined with the brilliant use of a bold palette for his colours, which appear translucent, make the images lively and attractive for the viewer. This may be due in some respects to the technical reproduction by the printers. What is clearly evident on seeing the original poster is the vibrancy and quality of these lithographs. Today, such quality is not replicated for publicity of this nature and Aris's limited editions of five hundred prints per image are exceptionally rare and are a truly valuable collector's item.

So what does constitute a successful poster? Aris set the out the answers in *Poster Work*, his educational book on the subject of poster design:

The poster must first of all attract attention and then, having pleased the eye and satisfied the mind of the beholder, which it must do 'right away', it must bring to his notice the goods which the advertiser wishes to sell – and in such a way as to make him desire to buy them. The poster, in short, has been aptly termed a *silent salesman*.... In so far as a poster sells the goods, it is accounted a success; but if it does not sell them, or if it does not sell them in sufficient quantity to pay for itself and leave the advertiser with a good margin of profit, it is a failure, no matter how good it may be as a work of art. There is therefore something in a poster which is not necessarily to be found in a picture; something which can influence the minds

of men and women in such a way as to arouse their interest in some other thing and cause them to act in a certain way.¹⁷⁶

Aris believed there were many basic essentials that make a good poster, which must appeal to the human eye and to the human mind instantaneously. Aris's skill in poster illustration is his ability to simplify and convey the message whilst producing a pleasing drawing which brings together all these essential ingredients as well as using his experience and judgement to leave out certain details. For example, the fur of the foxes, squirrel and mouse in the three posters designed for the MET, is a simplified shiny texture, yet it clearly represents fur.¹⁷⁷ The shadows and lines in the foreground convey the rough texture of wood and grass. Clarity is another important element: the eye must instantly recognise and understand the image or subject that is being portrayed and this is clearly evident in Aris's posters. They are not over complicated or full of activity and detail for the viewer, who is easily able to understand the message being conveyed. Many pictures are simple and distinct but do not retain interest. These original designs by Aris capture interest, initially because of the wonderful use of varied contrasting green colours and the topic and composition, but Aris's technical excellence of drawing and the appeal of the subject matter in its natural habitat is fascinating and engaging for observers of all ages. Even the composition of the series has been carefully considered by Aris, each of his six posters being designed to stand alone, although it is evidently clear that they are related and the total combination work together as a whole series. Aris's technical merit and competency in this discipline, although limited, should not go unnoticed.

¹⁷⁶ Aris, *Poster Work*, p. 2.

¹⁷⁷ *The Field Mouse at Home* to Middlesex Meadows and Sudbury; *The Fox at Home* to Hertfordshire Fields and Enfield; *The Squirrel at Home* to Waltham Cross.

The National Collection of Posters

Aris's legacy and great achievement in the field of poster design was to have had his work recognised and selected for the National Collection of Posters at the V&A. The psychology of poster design as a means of direct communication with the public had changed quite radically within a short of period. In 1909 Frank Pick, who had a level of pride in the early Underground posters, wrote to Cecil Harcourt Smith, a director at the Victoria and Albert Museum requesting details about the state opening of the Museum's new buildings 'in order that we may advertise the event in connection with the District Railway'.¹⁷⁸ The museum were perplexed by the promotional opportunity and replied that 'as the museum will not be open to the public on the day of the opening, I should have supposed that it was hardly worth your while to advertise the event'.¹⁷⁹

From 1911 Pick vigorously encouraged a policy of collecting posters at the V&A. Persistent with his enthusiasm and endeavours, in 1912 Pick wrote to the A.P. Oppé, Esq. at the V&A:

We think that perhaps we might be of some service to you in connection with any specimens of commercial lithography which you might wish to have as not only do we print a great many posters and leaflets ourselves but we are connected with printers and advertisers of all kinds. Sometime in the end of September or the beginning of October I could call and see you and ascertain exactly the scope of any collection of this kind which you are making and could then arrange that you are supplied with desirable specimens.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ London Transport Archive: MA/1/L/1907, 1 June 1909 (V&A, London).

¹⁷⁹ London Transport Archive: MA/1/L/1907, 12 June 1909 (V&A, London).

¹⁸⁰ Frank Pick letter to A.P. Oppé Esq., 13 August 1912, Frank Pick and London Transport Archive 4347M (V&A, London).

Pick commenced selecting and donating quality designs and those of unique interest and importance along with other travel posters that now comprise the National Collection of Posters. By 1915 Pick's poster campaign had radically changed the museum's attitude and, at the time Aris's designs were commissioned and retained by the V&A for their archive collection, they were actively lobbying for a poster featuring the museum.

From personal research and archival correspondence in the Frank Pick and London Transport Archives at the V&A, I have discovered that on 24 August 1915 Frank Pick submitted 52 posters for approval for the Collection of Posters. 30 were kept by E.I.D. (Entered in Day Book Folio), 8 were sent for Circulation by the museum and 14 were destroyed. Pick included three of Aris's designs, *The Dragon Fly at Home*, *The Kingfisher at Home* and *The Pheasant at Home* to be submitted for approval. Aris's and the celebrated poster of *The Alphabet of T.O.T.* by Charles Pears were accepted by the museum curator and entered into the Department of Engraving, Illustration and Design Accessions book in 1915, and now reside alongside the other great posters designers of the early twentieth century: John Hassall, E. McKnight Kauffer and Fred Taylor, as part of the national archive of posters. The importance of Aris having had his work personally selected by Frank Pick to be submitted to the collection of the museum, I believe, can be considered a great accolade because historically, Pick played such a fundamental and eminent part in the chronicles of poster design and the creation of the National Collection of Posters.

At the turn of the century, many of the firms who printed posters, such as David Allen & Sons, had a permanent staff of poster designers, who at that time had a low status and were generally not permitted to sign their work. Though Aris was relatively unknown to the establishment at this time, his poster designs are signed and I believe that this is an acknowledgement and an indication of his status amongst the establishment and his peers, as well as suggesting that he was recognised as a successful commercial artist within this field,

even though he made a limited contribution. The more prestigious commissions for the underground lines were generally sent to commercially renowned or established artists like Hassall and Fred Taylor.

Although Aris had a brief encounter with and a minor role in the grand scheme, he did play a part within an organisation that had rigorous design standards set by Frank Pick. It was under Pick's guidance that the transport poster output was such that it has never been matched by another organisation. Pick's initiative of delivering the best in advertising and publicity encouraged other commercial enterprises to use superior quality design work and creative use of the poster, though few matched the success of the London transport system, which was commissioning fifty or more pictorial posters a year and experimenting with designers and new subjects. Pick did see that there was more to a poster than selling transport, although he never wished to create some sort of art gallery. He recognised that by commissioning fine and commercial artists such as Aris, their art produced and reflected a broad range of tastes and styles and, ultimately, would enhance the daily lives of Londoners.

The extent to which Aris might have contributed to the Underground Group's promotion of transport art is unknown because so few of his posters exist and many only survive through archive records at the Transport Museum. From research through photographs in archival reference books, I have been able to identify another work by Aris.¹⁸¹ The panoramic silhouette design was evidently Aris, and on close inspection, a signature was revealed and the characteristics of the design are similar to the illustrations Aris created for a series of tales that were illustrated silhouettes.¹⁸² The photograph in the archives and the size of the image would

¹⁸¹ I identified a photograph of a panoramic silhouette design labelled Plate 145, p. 68 in Book 5 of London Transport Archive Record books, which is a collection of photographs of published posters by London Transport located in the London Transport Museums private office.

¹⁸² Ernest Aris silhouette series of tales were published by Humphrey Milford, London, 1921.

suggest it was most probably designed for the interior of an underground carriage above the seats (fig 4.23).¹⁸³

Additionally, from Aris's private journal dated January 1916, there is further evidence of a preliminary sketch for London Underground, dated after Aris had completed the series for the MET and LUT between 1 January and 31 December 1915, so we can conclude that Aris had intended to continue a working partnership. On the opposing page there is a handwritten reference note by Aris which reads, 'L.M.S. poster idea ... a steel bridge with the girders small up of LMS. Slogan. The holiday Spa'.¹⁸⁴ Undoubtedly there is evidence to suggest Aris may have provided other work for London Underground at a later date and was possibly in negotiation or submitting another idea to the London Midland and Scottish Railway (fig 4.22 and 4.24).

I would conclude that it is more than likely that, had Aris not been conscripted to the Royal Army Medical Corp in November 1916 at the outbreak of war, he would probably have continued the association with London Underground, or perhaps he did as it is not known when the panoramic silhouette was done. Being a commercial artist with an awareness and understanding of the needs and demands of high profile commissions, Aris would have wanted to maintain the association because for many years the status of winning a commission for London Transport was equalled only by designing stamps for the Post Office.

From a critic's viewpoint, it was a considerable achievement to obtain a commission from the Underground Group. Furthermore the association with Frank Pick certainly elevates

¹⁸³ It should be noted the date of the silhouette advertising image is unknown. It could have been illustrated before or after the posters for LUT and MET. In Aris's later years he made notes and drawings of ideas in his 1916 diary about commercial work.

¹⁸⁴ The preliminary sketch for London Underground and the LMS are taken from Ernest Aris's private journal dated 1916 which now resides in Dudley Chignall's private collection. It should be noted the LMS reference cannot be 1916; the LMS was formed on 1 January 1923 under the Railways Act of 1921, which required the grouping of over 120 separate railway companies into just four.

Plate 30



Fig 4.21. Fig Interior of tram circa 1915. Posters would have been placed either side

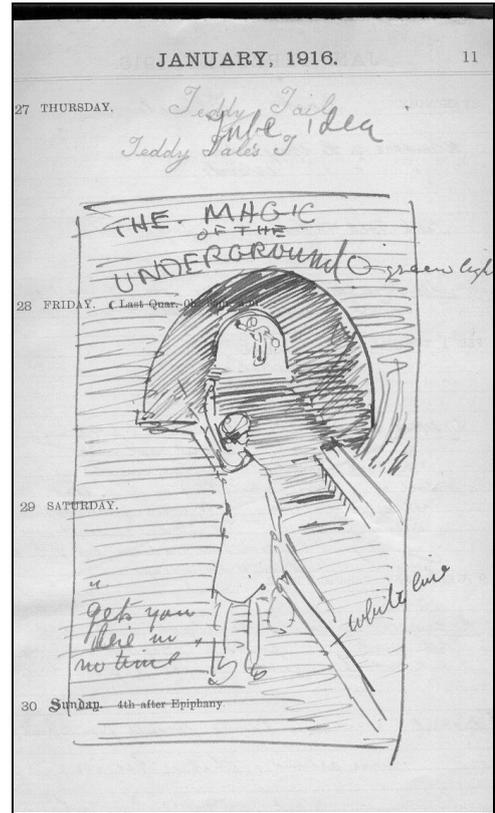


Fig 4.22. Preliminary sketch for London Underground. Page from Ernest Aris's personal diary of the door behind glass

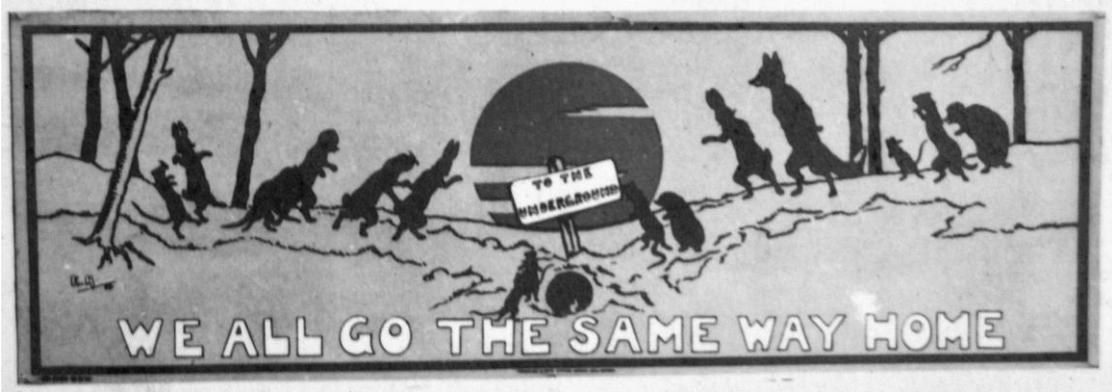


Fig 4.23. Silhouette for Underground. I recently identified in London Transport Archives Book 5, page 68, plate 145

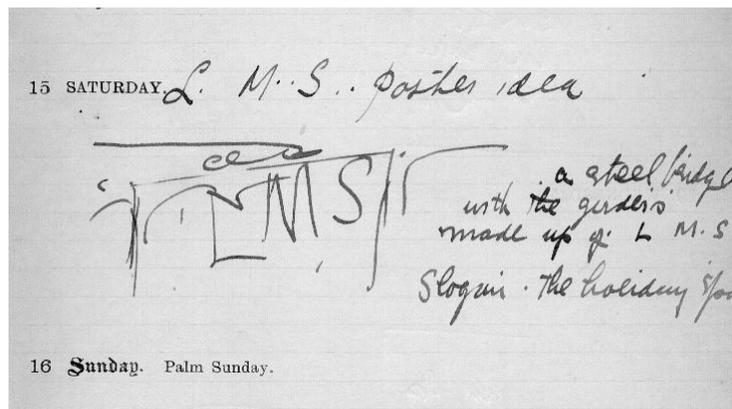


Fig 4.24. Preliminary sketch for London Midland Scottish Railway. Extracted page from Ernest Aris's personal diary

Aris's position in this field of work, as it happened at a critical time in the development of poster art. It should be noted, however, that today Aris remains relatively unknown by London Transport and is not truly recognised for his accomplishment, possibly because he was only able to provide a small contribution by comparison to other leading posters designers at the time, such as Hassall.

Posters remain the most direct form of mass communication, a brightly colored and visibly interesting image can catch the attention of a large number of people in a short span of time. The message of Aris's designs were brief, uncomplicated and focused, reaching a broad audience every day, with a function to inform and influence. Poster art in Aris's time was very much about advertising products and enhancing the lives of everyday people. Aris was part of an era that provided stimulating visual images in the form of information posters, produced on a scale not really seen before or since. It is interesting to note that at the end of Aris's illustrious career, he authored *Poster Work* (1947). His knowledge, understanding and expertise in the subject would lead any critic of this book to believe Aris was a key authority on the subject.

III - Aris's Player's Cigarette Cards (1926)

Origins.

Between 1915 and 1925, Aris had concentrated solely on being an author and this period of creative activity produced the very best illustrated publications of his literary career. During this ten-year period, which was to be Aris's most prolific, he completed 111 books, including 71 for Humphrey Milford and those under his pseudonym Robin A. Hood. Following this productive period, Aris's output was probably exhausted and, by choice or necessity, he reverted to the commercial sector to earn a living. Aris throughout his life had the luck or astuteness to be involved with a whole range of commercial products that were breaking new ground and were at the cutting edge of artistic creativity. In this instance, it was the start of the pioneering era for

the development of cigarette cards in the 1920s. The mass market for cigarettes had expanded enormously as packaging had improved and retailers tried to retain consumer loyalty by manufacturing pictorial cigarette cards across a wide range of subjects. Consequently, cartophilia became a popular leisure pursuit.¹⁸⁵ After Aris had completed his national service and was discharged from the army in March 1919, he concentrated solely on publishing up to 1924, *The Betsy Trot* (published by Geographia Ltd., 1924) was to be the last of his literary publications that he wrote and illustrated; the few that were completed after this period were *The Brambledown Tales*, along with educational or republished books. It appears Aris had reached the peak of his career and concentrated his efforts over the next couple of years on illustrating four series of cigarette cards that were published by major tobacco manufacturers.

The origins of the first cards were in France around the 1840s. Tradesmen's cards were handed to potential customers as an informal means of advertising the name and address and the speciality of the proprietor's business. Cards were required to impress the potential customer; therefore, the design had to be symbolic of the firm's standing. Many of the early cards had fine lithographic pictorial images with thumbnail sketches pertinent to the trade. The idea was appealing since the designs were attractive and more likely to be retained. In addition, the production cost was relatively small and the card was an excellent form of subtle commercial advertising. The next obvious development was to produce cards in series to be given away to customers periodically, such as every week or on a particular day, with the intention of improving sales at a quiet time of business. Therefore, success for the proprietor and the card was dependent on the quality and appeal of the cards and, as the majority of shoppers were ladies, the cards were very much designed to attract the female audience. From the 1850s to the end of the century there would not have been a shop in France that did not provide at least one

¹⁸⁵ The definition of cartophilly is the hobby of collecting cigarette cards.

series. The fashion became widespread in Belgium, Germany, Austria and most continental countries; however, Britain was slow at this point in time to accept the concept of trade cards.

There were two further significant developments: firstly, manufacturers realised the advertising potential and began taking mass produced series from printers and having their names and advertising printed on the reverse. This was passed to the retailer for their customers and allowed any additional space on the reverse for the shop to add its own publicity. Secondly, this then allowed manufacturers to use exclusive sets of cards for particular retailers or commodities, such as coffee, chocolate, biscuits and soap. Interestingly, British companies like Cadbury were exporting products to France and issuing cards abroad, but not in the home market and as that time it was not considered a necessary part of marketing strategy.

The leading distributors of cards were Au Bon Marche, issuing over 400 different series in different sizes and exquisite colours, and Liebig Extract of Meat Co, (Oxo) who, over one hundred years issued more than 2,000 sets of cards with titles ranging from *Strange Feminine Hair Styles* to *American Skyscrapers*. Over time there was no product that did not advertise itself with cards, whether it was puzzle cards, calendar cards, folding cards, perfumed cards, die-cut cards and every possible variant that could be circulated. Amongst the distributors of cards in the States, a number were handed over to the purchasers of tobacco products and the suppliers later became well known for their cigarette cards.

The development of non-insert trade cards coincided with the increase in the sales of tobacco products centred in America, from where Sir Walter Raleigh had brought the first tobacco to England three centuries earlier. Cigarettes were a cheap method of consuming tobacco; nevertheless, there were considerable difficulties in handling the paper packets and the solution was to insert in each pack a stiff piece of cardboard to make the packet firm. It is not known who provided the idea for printing a picture or advertisement on the stiffener in the

cigarette cards, although it is more than likely it was probably someone within the tobacco industry, who realised the potential advantages of merging the trade card and the stiffener. By 1890 every American tobacco firm had issued at least one card series. American brands launched their products on the British market, sometimes with re-issues of American sets with a plain type set.

Companies promoted brand loyalty by the introduction of series of cigarette cards. The idea was to encourage customers to collect the whole set by selling one random card per pack. This meant smoking numerous packets of cigarettes with the added bonus of appealing to younger potential smokers like Aris. Aris, who was born in 1883, would almost certainly have grown up with an exposure to cigarette cards and like most young boys had an interest in cartophilia. Young boys of his age were often the keenest collectors of these cards. Initially, they would ask for them from their fathers or uncles, but it was hoped by the manufacturers in due course they might go out and purchase their own.

In 1887 Wills were one of the first UK tobacco companies to include advertising cards in their packs of cigarettes, but it was not until 1895 they produced their first general interest set of cards, *Ships and Sailors*, followed in 1896 with *Cricketers* and by 1901 with a very fine series of *Soldiers, Sailors, Beauties, Seaside Resorts and Sports of all Nations*. Other British firms, like Lambert and Butler and Player, followed suit. This saw the beginning of a period of production of many fine sets. The earlier sets are generally designs of interest for men as it was mostly men who were smokers and the purchasers at this time. Cigarette cards were often beautiful works of art painted by teams of skilled draughtsmen and artisans about fascinating themes and aspects of contemporary life and reflecting the changes and influences of everyday life, such as the big and powerful: technology, famous actors, patriotic scenes of soldiers and uniforms and military, particularly as the patriotic fervour meant that any information related to the progress of War was received with enthusiasm.

Tobacco War to Great War

At the time of the Boer War, British sales of the American Tobacco Co. (ATC) had declined rapidly due to the high cost of import duties and, as a result, the ATC bought Ogden's, the largest British tobacco firm, for one million pounds. As a consequence, within two months thirteen companies had merged to form the Imperial Tobacco Company Ltd.¹⁸⁶ Within a year the 'Tobacco War' was concluded. The Americans retreated and the British retained the home market and the British American Tobacco Co. Ltd. was formed (29 September, 1902) to manage sales throughout the rest of the world.

The period after the Tobacco War was considered the golden age of tobacco cards.¹⁸⁷ The actresses and beauties gradually disappeared and were replaced by cards of current and general interest, which continued until 1917 when all issues ceased due to the shortage of raw materials and paper.¹⁸⁸ From 1918, like any other industry, the smaller firms gradually became eliminated by their larger competitors as the tobacco industry rapidly increased. Because of the competition from the larger firms who were able to produce quality series at a lower price because of the cost margins, the smaller firms, who had shortages of skilled labour and materials due to the Second World War, they simply closed. The days of the printer being able to produce ready-made to sell series had for the moment disappeared; only the larger firms were able to afford the development costs of even a modest set of cards. Led by Imperial, the larger firms began to provide information and brief descriptions on the reverse of their cards when cards were reissued after a short break in production from 1916-1923, sacrificing the advertising to make the card more interesting.

¹⁸⁶ The date of the merge was 2 November, 1901. The firms included Wills, Lambert & Butler, Mitchell, Churchman, Faulkner, Player and Smith. Murray, Martin, *The Story of Cigarette Cards* (London: Murray Cards, 1987), p. 27.

¹⁸⁷ Murray, *The Story of Cigarette Cards*, p.28.

¹⁸⁸ Murray, *The Story of Cigarette Cards*, p.30.

The finest period of cartophilia developed in Britain between the two World Wars. It was regarded by collectors as the high point of cigarette card production, and considered quite distinguishable from other trade cards. Cigarette cards had the issuer's name printed on the rear, which meant the card became its representative, and they were produced to be collected and also used as a means of identification by the consumer. From a commercial perspective, this meant that the quality and subject matter had to be associated with the product and of sufficient appeal and interest that the consumer was persuaded to collect complete sets. For this reason, each card preserved a high standard in order to retain the consumer's enthusiasm, and this was achieved by providing attractive cards with a pictorial image on the front and interesting facts on the reverse with accompanying advertising or logo.

At the end of the Great War, none of the major companies wished to be the first to recommence issuing. The role was taken on by Player's, who came to the forefront of re-introducing cards by re-issuing in 1923 three of their earlier series. Player's embarked on commissioning an assortment of new series covering a wide range of topics from the in-house Artists' Department or employing freelance artists like Aris, who was commissioned to design two series for Player's and who specialised in fauna: *Curious Beaks* (1929) and *Sea Fishes* (1935) (fig 4.25.1).¹⁸⁹ Other Imperial firms followed, including the manufacturers W.A & A.C. Churchman of Ipswich, who were considered more enterprising and produced a broad range of unusual topics that would appeal to their existing traditional market: *Pipes of the World*, *Interesting Door Knockers* and the series illustrated by Aris, *Frisky* (6 February 1926 issued in 1935). Lambert and Butler followed with the motoring series, which included Aris's designs for *Motor Index Marks* (17 June 1926 and issued 1926) (fig 4.25.2).

¹⁸⁹ It should be noted that the index card shows the date of Player's *Curious Beaks* was completed 11 November 1926 and the issue date was 1929. *Sea Fishes*' production date is unknown and, it was issued in 1935.

Plate 31



Frisky

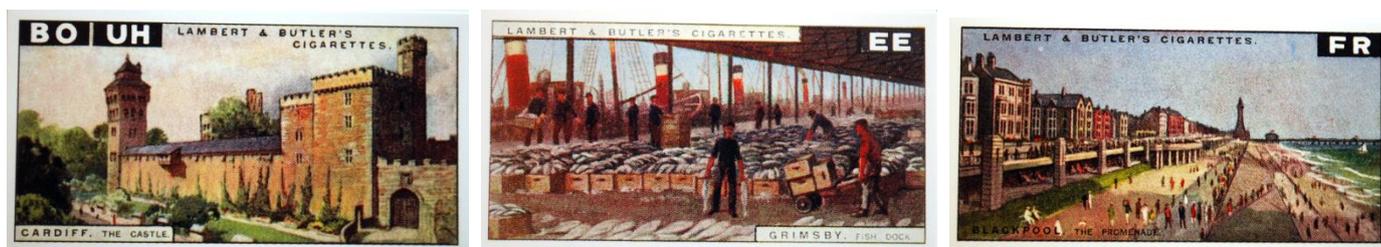
Foxy Sly

Tiny Tusks

Ma Mouse

Daisy Duck

Fig 4.25.1. Churchman, Frisky - 6 February 1926. Issued 1935



Cardiff

Grimsby

Blackpool

4.25.2. Lambert & Butler, Motor Index Marks - 17 June 1926. Issued 1926



Lump Sucker

Cuckoo Wrasse

Corkwing Wrasse

Fig 4.25.3. John Player and Sons, Sea Fishes. Issued 1935



Common Scoter

Australian Jacana

King Vulture

Fig 4.25.4. John Player & Sons, Curious Beaks - 11 November 1926. Issued 1929

Aris's Series.

Aris's first cigarette card commission was for the *Frisky* series of fifty-two cards for Churchman's, which have been noted as *Frisky II* in the index card as completed on 6 February 1926 and issued as *Frisky* 1935. The reason for this is unknown. However, it would explain the very dated characters, which are dressed in Aris's trademark Edwardian dress and based on the usual band of anthropomorphic creatures in his tales he had created earlier in his working career. There is additional further interest in this series of cards. Noted in the Player's Notebooks, a catalogue of the company records, there is a specific reference to *Frisky* - May 1925.¹⁹⁰ Murray Martin, recognised as one of the leading experts in the world on the subject and a Member of the Cartophilic Society of G.B. Ltd., advised me that this series was never published. Perhaps the illustrations submitted by Aris to Cadbury for the Cococubs (see Chapter 4) could have possibly been this set of illustrations, which were unpublished, and Aris may have found an alternative use for the illustrations. In the original drawings submitted to Cadbury, which are now in a private collection, each image is numbered on the reverse, suggesting that they are part of a series. This idea is speculation and cannot be verified. However, it should be noted there is a close resemblance between the *Frisky* series of cigarette cards and the illustrations Aris provided for Cadbury in 1934; undoubtedly they appear related and possibly the drawings are the additional characters that were meant for publication but never were. Perhaps it was as a consequence of success of the Britain's Cococubs, distributed by Cadbury in 1934, that led to the publication in 1935 of the *Frisky* series of cards, which had been in storage since 1926.

Clearly there is a relationship between the characters and the names of all the individuals featured in the *Frisky* series of cigarette cards and the various personalities that feature

¹⁹⁰ The London Cigarette Card Company created cards as an organised hobby and lists *Frisky* as May 1925, possibly *Frisky* 1. It appears these were another set that were not issued. Noted in the Player's Notebooks, a catalogue of the company records are archived at the Bristol Record Office.

throughout Aris's tales. It is no coincidence that Aris based this set on his infamous woodland folk. For example, Frisky is Peter from *The Treasure Seekers* or based on characters from *Wee Benjy Brown* (1918), *Bunkum Brown Rabbit* (1915) and *Bunnikin Browneyes-The Indian*. Tiny Tusks can be traced to Aris's collaboration with Madeleine Collier, *The Tale of Tiny Tusks* (1926); Foxy Sly is Reynard Fox from *The Treasure Seekers*; Ma Mouse from *Just a Tiny Mite* (1918) and Daisy Duck is based on Barbara Duckling in *The Mystery of Cabbage Patch House* (1917).

Aris, ever the opportunist, has subtly included his role within the narrative on the reverse of the *Frisky* series of cards, (as we shall see later with the Cococubs he incorporated himself into the cartoon strip) and has managed to introduce himself into the story and this adds extra interest for the collector. In this sequence of cards, the supporting narrative texts are a mixture of mischievous anecdotes and comical jokes with naive sexual undertones about the characters, which make me believe these were probably written by Aris, who had a mischievous sense of humour; they also make a reference to his own personal health ailments. Aris had been conscripted to the Royal Army Medical Corp in November 1916 and managed to avoid Overseas Service due to a hearing disability and, according to Army records, his rheumatism. On the card Ma Rabbit, the narrative on the reverse reads, "When I meet that artist chap he's going to get a piece of my mind; fancy him a-putting me out in the rain-and me with the rheumatics. He supplied me with a gamp, but that only proves he knew it was going to rain, the villain. Wait till I see him!"

The initial purpose of the *Frisky* cards was to become a collector's item; however, whether the choice of subject matter was Aris's or the publisher's idea is unknown. In 1935 a set of instructions was published so that the cards could be used as a game, providing additional further appeal. This set of cards proved to be very popular and was reissued by Imperial Publishing Ltd., with the additional instruction cards in 1994. In the same year Aris conceived

the *Frisky* series, he was commissioned by Lambert & Butler to formulate the *Motor Index Marks* which he completed 17 June 1926 and which was issued that year by Imperial Tobacco Co. (fig 4.25.2). This series was part of a broad collection of sets, all related to motoring, which proved to be popular as motoring became more accessible and affordable. This series of cards is based on historical sites in cities around the country and represent the different regional index numbers of motor cars.

From a technical perspective, producing cigarette cards requires a great amount of creative skill, broad imagination and thought in order to envisage the final collection. Firstly, the most important element was the picture: Aris had to provide fifty different images for this series, representational of a specific region or city and of sufficient imaginative quality to help to increase the sales of cigarettes, whilst at the same time working to a small scale. It can be assumed that for this series, Aris's research information was from archival photographs, as it would have been physically excessively time consuming and costly to visit each of the locations, taking into account his fee which was two hundred and fifty guineas per set.¹⁹¹

Mardon & Sons of Bristol were printers and packers and were employed by the Imperial Tobacco Co. to take responsibility for the production of their cards.¹⁹² It is well documented that Mardon's had a research and copy-writing facility at their location and firms would contact them for a set of cards on a topic. The artist would provide first roughs and when these were approved, the labour intensive work commenced. Mardon's had a research section of 80,000 books from which the narrative text was researched for the reverse of the cards, which was

¹⁹¹ As noted by Ernest Aris in archival material in the collection of Siân Dawson.

¹⁹² In the 1930s Mardon & Sons became involved in the manufacture of playing cards. Available online at: <<http://www.wopc.co.uk/uk/mardon.html>> [Website accessed on 20 January 2010]. Aris designed a set of bridge cards which are unmarked. It is quite possible through his association of cigarette cards that he became involved with providing other commercial products for Mardons.

usually 120 words. Freelance artists like Aris did not have this facility available, and the personal notes in Aris's private archive, record that he 'Painted for the Imperial Tobacco Co. 50 in each series....It was Win's idea and she wrote the text.'¹⁹³ Evidently Aris's wife was undertaking the time consuming research, finding the information on each of the cities he was depicting in the series.

Player's, based in Nottingham, were innovators of pre-packaged tobacco. They were the major provider of cigarette cards as they were selling more than any other firm and were keen to retain their market, hence their relentless pursuit of providing such an informative and broad range of interesting cards. For Aris, it would have been quite an achievement to receive a commission from the foremost provider of cards in the market. Aris notes that he had undertaken six series for Player's, although from archive notebooks at Imperial Tobacco, only two are indicated as series by Aris and identified as being commissioned by Player's. *Curious Beaks* was completed by Aris on 11 November 1926 and not issued by Player's until October 1929 (fig 4.25.3). I believe, this set of cards to be Aris's finest. From an aesthetic point of view, the colours and range of birds is captivating and the narrative text provides informative facts about each type of bird and its origins. Aris has also provided additional interest with his selection of birds because of their unusual features, varied colours, sizes and shape of the types of beak around the world. This collection obviously had appeal and was not exclusive to Player's, as Lambert and Butler acquired the series and distributed the set in December 1926 prior to Player's (1929).

In addition, Aris illustrated for Player's the very appealing *Sea Fishes* Series which was issued in 1935; the date of completion is unknown (fig 4.25.4). Similar to *Curious Beaks*, this series really is a testament to his illustrative skills. Aris had been a contributor to various magazines and gazettes on fishing and illustrated a visually stimulating and appealing series of

¹⁹³ This information is obtained from handwritten notes by Aris in the private collection of Siân Dawson.

cards for those interested in fishing, which was his primary interest and possibly the reason for producing this educational and attractive series. From the foreword narrative, we learn there are over 160 different types of fish common to the coasts of Great Britain and Ireland, but only thirty one of these can be found in a fishmonger's shop, others will provide excellent sport for anglers, and the collection illustrated in this series are selected species of sporting or economic value. The colours are not as vibrant as the hues of tropical fish, but the species Aris depicts are those uniform shades of fish that swim in open sea and the spotted or mottled patterns whose habitat is amongst the rocks and weeds.¹⁹⁴

In the 1930s albums for cigarette cards became another important innovation and was an area in which the companies could generate more income from the purchaser. The special album for the *Sea Fishes* cigarette card accommodated the adhesive backed cards and sold for one penny (fig 4.26). Each album was designed to encourage the collector to insert the authentic coloured pictures of *Sea Fishes* to complete the collection. At the beginning of Player's *An Album of Sea Fishes* for Aris's series, there is a foreword which introduces the subject. It is hoped that it will be of service in assisting the collector to keep the attractive series in a permanent form and it includes instructions on the placement of the cards beside the related narrative. *Sea Fishes* is a unique set which Aris would have obtained much pleasure from, as natural history and angling were his primary leisure pursuits. I put forward the suggestion that he believed this collection to be his finest, the reason being that of all the series he produced, this was the sole series he retained in an original Player album amongst his personal archive.

In conclusion, the outbreak of the Second World War and the immediate need to preserve raw materials and natural resources brought about the end of tobacco cards in their original form. Aris's cigarette cards are a beautiful product of their times and provide a unique perspective on a

¹⁹⁴ John Player & Sons, *An Album of Sea Fishes*, (Bristol: John Player & Sons, 1935).

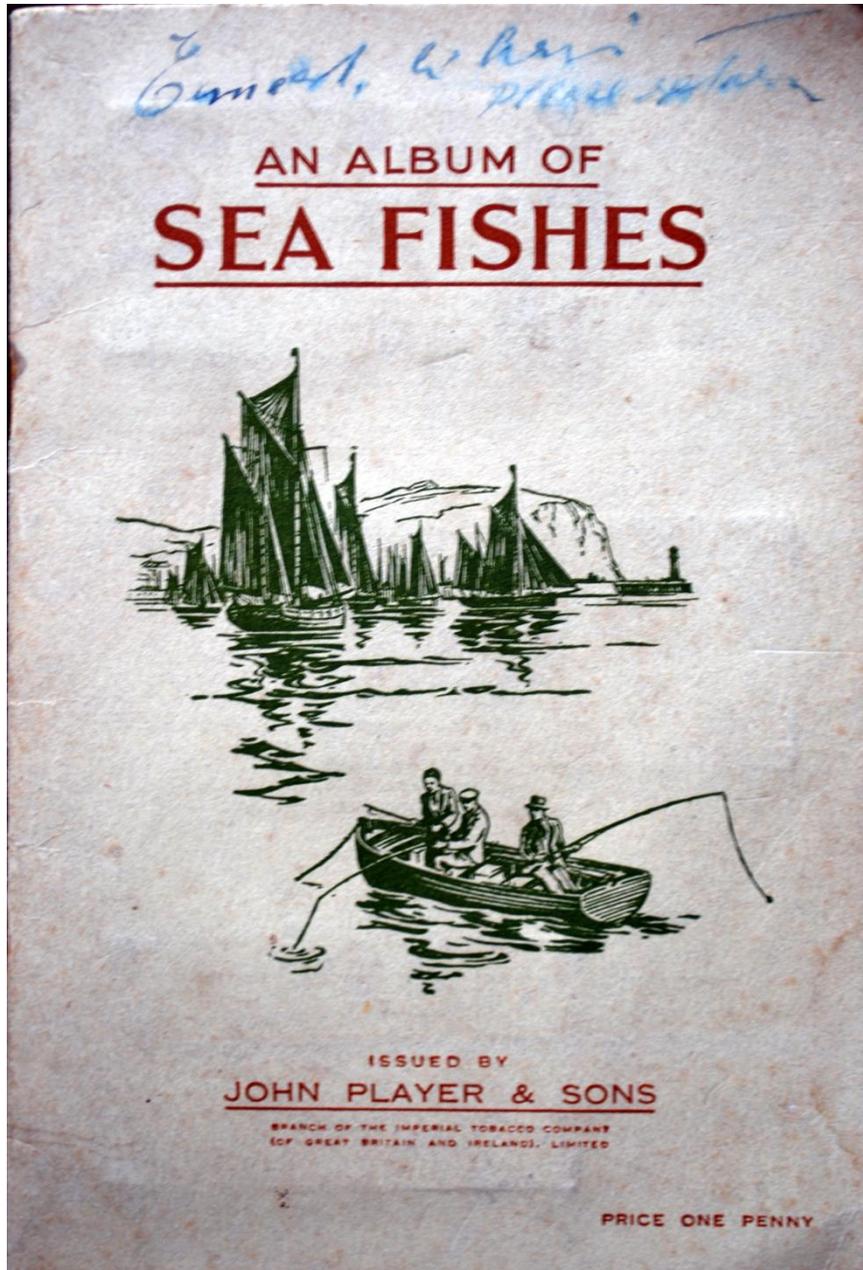


Fig 4.26. Aris Album of Sea Fishes. Issued 1935

period. Many of the landmarks in cities shown in Aris's *Motor Index Marks* may have changed substantially yet present a wonderfully interesting legacy of a bygone age.

Aris wrote, 'I've done six series for Players', although this cannot be verified from records. He also produced cards for Churchman and Lambert & Butler. This is a prolific amount of work, particularly considering 50 illustrations were necessary for each series; the total amounts to possibly 400 designs. Aris's collection of cigarette cards can be described as a pictorial encyclopaedia of illustrated texts that cover a broad range of his own personal areas of interest, from fishing, birds, and travel to his successful caricatures in the *Frisky Series*. Later in life, Aris was a collector of matchbox covers from around the world, which were discovered amongst his personal archives. Perhaps the innovative designs displayed on a small everyday item may have influenced Aris and given him the inspiration and imaginative creativity for his ideas on cigarette cards.

Unfortunately, the very nature of this type of work and scale meant all pictorial illustrations were unsigned and the numerous sets that were issued make it impossible to identify Aris's other series or whether they were actually issued. Furthermore, none of the original illustrations have survived, possibly lost in bomb damage during the war in Bristol. As a successful commercial artist and having illustrated numerous books with different publishers, postcards and posters, I believe that at this point Aris had reached the peak of his creative career and was clearly able to apply his talent and skill to any medium of illustrated artwork. It was a great accolade for Aris to be commissioned to produce these series for Player's, the leading provider of cards. They have become highly sought after as a collector's item and are truly worthy of note.

IV - "The Mysterious Man" behind Cadbury's (1934)

Introduction

Aris's most successful corporate relationship was with Cadbury, where he provided the creative ideas for the brand's Children's Bournville Cocoa. In 1934 Aris developed a marketing campaign so successful that it helped to build the brand's consumer awareness, gave added value to the consumer and encouraged customer loyalty. This was achieved through his humorous and appealing Cococub figurines, manufactured by William Britain Ltd., and inserted into tins of Children's Bournville Cocoa. The slogan 'A Toy In Every Tin', incorporated in the cartoon advertisements that appeared in newspapers and magazines, was remarkable for the excitement that it generated in young children. The working-class family still had only a limited income available to purchase extravagant items such as toys because the country was suffering the effects of the economic hardship from the war years and the depression. The advertisements for the product induced mothers to purchase Cadbury's Children's Cocoa when it was launched with a free toy for children to collect. This led to the creation of a massive supporters' club for the product, called the Cococubs, which, in turn, provided more spin-off products designed by Aris, such as *The Cococub News*, games and other highly collectable and attractive ephemera.

To understand Aris's role, we should explore the background to the Cadbury brand and understand their ideology and corporate ethos as well as the way in which they fought off competitors to survive in an evolving industry. Prior to the recent American takeover by Kraft Foods for £11.5bn, Cadbury had represented a highly successful British family business that had grown into a global phenomenon, a position which could only have been achieved through an understanding of their customer needs, decisive marketing strategies and commissioning the very best people and artists to communicate the corporate message, which historically was not an integral part of their corporate marketing strategy until the early 1930s.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ Deborah Cadbury, *Chocolate Wars: From Cadbury to Kraft – 200 Years of Sweet Success and Bitter Rivalry* (London: Harper Press, 2010).

Cadbury's development of an advertising, marketing and branding strategy

Historical documentation suggests that initially Cadbury did not rely upon advertising and marketing as the sole means for promoting and selling the product range. In the early days, the business strategy was determined by a combination of factors: the economy, consumer market changes, competition and evolving methods of business production. Different circumstances and conditions made some factors more critical and relevant to the business than others. It was these factors that influenced the marketing, advertising, branding identity and product development, resulting in a retailing revolution at Cadbury, as the scale and organisation of mass production and distribution was transformed to satisfy specific modern consumer requirements.

In 1831 Cadbury, established as a retailer of tea and coffee with a small secondary activity in cocoa, became a manufacturer of cocoa products. From an economic perspective, cocoa was expensive and consumed by the privileged who could afford the luxury. In 1832 the Government reduced duties on cocoa, resulting in a radical change in the market consuming the product. As a result, there was a fivefold increase of sales over the next eight years, making the drink accessible to the mass population. This was amplified by the technological revolution and expansion of the steel, shipbuilding, engineering and coalmining industries, which brought great economic and social change. The growth of the consumer market was a result of higher wages and cheaper transportation, which provided low-priced food and, in turn, improved the general standard of living. This social change had a huge impact on Cadbury and was reflected in the transformation and development of its core business into a large-scale manufacturer of consumer products in the confectionary industry sector.

Although it was an ever-increasing market, Cadbury's initial problem was to distinguish its product from competitors such as Fry's, which had the distinct advantage of size, a prolonged existence in the market and an established reputation in this sector combined with retailer trust and customer awareness. Cadbury overcame these issues, differentiating the brand's product by

enhancing the taste and seeking new concepts and innovations to address alternative methods of improving quality and giving added value to the customer. These changes were implemented successfully into their core business and cemented their position as market leader in the product sector.¹⁹⁶

Cadbury realised that to sustain their market advantage a major internal reorganization was required through expansion and centralising productivity to maintain large-scale production. Cadbury required an infrastructure that could maintain supply to meet demand and coordinate the business strategy, processes and workers whilst preserving the ethos of quality and value. On 18 June 1878 a site was found for a new factory, fourteen and a half acres of land four miles south of the centre of Birmingham. The site was a meadow with a cottage and a trout stream called the Bourn. The name 'Bournville' was chosen for the works, 'Bourn' from the stream of that name and 'ville', the French word for town. At the time, France, and French confectionery in particular, were very much in vogue. The Bournville works, located alongside the stream and the West Suburban railways, allowed ease of access for the importing of ingredients and exportation of the finished product, accessibility being the key objective and enabling cost advantages over competitors.

The greater economies of scale allowed for increased sales, at no extra cost except ingredients and labour. This was the beginning of the golden era for Cadbury, who built Bournville, a mass production factory line alongside new social housing and local amenities for workers, which improved work life and became known as the 'factory in a garden'. The economic and consumer market changes, combined with expansion, meant Cadbury were able to

¹⁹⁶ John Bradley, *Cadbury's Purple Reign: The Story Behind Chocolates Best-Loved Brand* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), pp. 8-10.

offer more products at lower prices than their competitors and, consequently, possessed a greater budget for modern marketing and advertising techniques and the branding of their lines.¹⁹⁷

It was not until the turn of the century that Cadbury really begin marketing with what was considered at the time a modern marketing approach, using processes and techniques that would identify, anticipate and satisfy customer needs and attract audiences to their brand's products. In 1905 William Cadbury visited Paris and commissioned the first official Cadbury logo from George Auriol, who was an acquaintance of Toulouse Lautrec. However, this attempt at appointing a well-known name to design and illustrate visuals for marketing purposes proved unsuccessful. Auriol was famous in the typographical field of art for his typeface, used for the Paris Metro signs and the technical similarities with these signs can be seen in his work for Cadbury (fig 4.27). Although his image is visually pleasing, the logo is not distinct to the eye and therefore does not convey the message. As John Bradley, who worked in Cadbury's Brand Management and Market Research, remarks, the image presents, 'A bold Cadbury name brought to life with the 'y' inter-twined around a stylised cocoa tree.'¹⁹⁸ Unfortunately, Auriol's idea was short lived in advertising brochures, cards and as a logo on vans and merchandise because the cocoa tree logo was indistinct. Furthermore, a large proportion of consumers did not realise that cocoa grew on trees, so the allusion was wasted and consequently this idea was abandoned.

By 1934 Cadbury recognised the benefits of scale and efficiency through mechanising their production lines. As a result, the corporate sales and marketing strategy concentrated on directing their customers towards lines that Cadbury were able to produce more cost effectively, rather than providing a broad range of products to suit the customer needs, which was not economically viable. At the Conference of Representatives in 1934, Cadbury's head of advertising argued that a new business strategy was required 'Otherwise the factory would be at

¹⁹⁷ Bradley, *Cadbury's Purple Reign*, p. 90.

¹⁹⁸ Bradley, *Cadbury's Purple Reign*, p. 97.

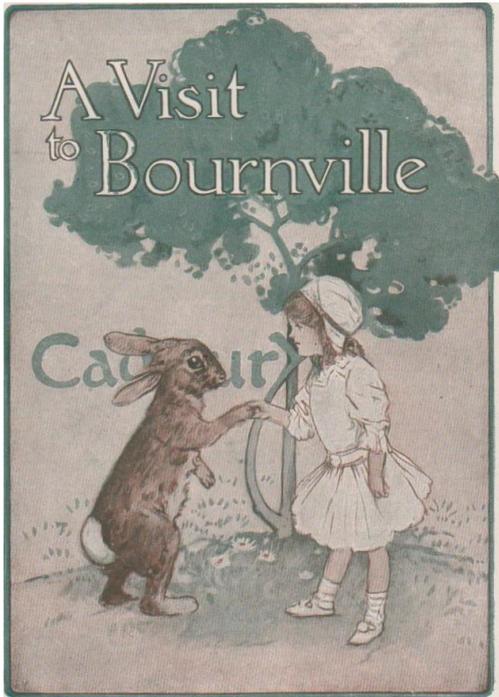


Fig 4.27. Elsie and the Bunny
George Auriol's Cadbury logo (c. 1905)



Fig 4.28. Bournville Cocoa tin (c. 1934-35)



Fig 4.29. Aris's provisional drawing of the Cococubs for Cadbury (c. 1920s)

the mercy of the individual preferences of our Representatives, our trade customers, and members of the public, and we would have to sell four thousand articles instead of four hundred.’¹⁹⁹ Representatives were encouraged to sell the ideals of Cadbury and this would help carry out the firm’s policy of trying to induce the public to ask the shopkeeper for the lines which the manufacturer wished to focus on and concentrate its efforts.

Mechanisation had transformed the industry and the market, but this was not Cadbury’s only advantage over competitors: they were developing and focusing their advertising campaigns, which would result in the Cadbury brand name becoming the biggest and most loved in the country. Cadbury had started to position itself in the market and customers’ affections with an impressive array of original marketing and advertising techniques. Inviting customers to the ‘Factory in a Garden’ was hugely popular, particularly as customers were given tours, films, tastings and samplings. The brand’s name became synonymous with the values of trust, integrity and quality. This would become engrained on the customer following a visit to the factory works, which also provided an intimate insight into the production methods as well as a close and personal experience, creating enduring links and loyalty to the firm and their products.

Simultaneously, in the early 1930s, Cadbury ‘embarked on an ambitious experiment to improve the aesthetic quality of its packaging.’²⁰⁰ Cadbury commissioned ten famous artists to illustrate and design a unique fancy box, including Arthur Rackham, the illustrator of fantasy tales, whose masterpieces included *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (1906) and *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1907). Cadbury had broadened their appeal by introducing the fancy boxes of chocolates, which required attractive packaging for the modern marketing era. However, Rackham’s designs for the boxes were unable to stimulate the consumer and this was

¹⁹⁹ Cadbury’s head of advertising to the 1934 Conference of Representatives qtd. in Bradley, *Cadbury’s Purple Reign*, pp. 85-86.

²⁰⁰ Heather Forrester, ‘Chocolate Box Art’, *Antique Collecting 40th Anniversary 1966-2006*, (June 2006), 36-41 (p. 37).

reflected in the sales. Even though consumers would have been familiar with and enjoyed Rackham's illustrated works, it appears he lacked the commercial understanding or awareness that was required to supply artistic designs that attracted and provided consumer appeal, and ultimately his designs did not increase sales of the product.

As the strategy of commissioning highly acclaimed fine artists to design an everyday simple product had failed to be popular with consumers, it was not replicated and Cadbury sought a new strategy that would appeal to the majority rather than the minority. Bradley has asserted that Aris was commissioned because 'Cadbury found that the artistic *genre* of the Beano was more in tune than their venture into the world of modern art. The inclusion of a range of small toys – the Cadbury Cococubs – in tins of Bournville Cocoa was supported by a comic strip written and drawn by one of the country's leading comic book illustrators.'²⁰¹ I would disagree with Bradley's view that Cadbury considered Aris to be a 'leading comic book illustrator.' The description at the time of Aris in the *Bournville Works Magazine* was that he was 'a well known artist who has specialised for many years in children's illustrations,'²⁰² The three comic illustrations for *The Graphic* that Aris had already designed would not constitute the work of a 'leading comic artist', although his technical style may possibly be construed as cartoon-like to the amateur eye.²⁰³ There is no other documentation or evidence of previous comic work undertaken by Aris.

On 14 February 1934 at the Bournville Board meeting it was noted that:

²⁰¹ Bradley, *Cadbury's Purple Reign*, p. 92.

²⁰² H.M.R., 'The Cococubs', *Bournville Works Magazine*, June 1935, 208-209, p. 208.

²⁰³ Panic in Fairyland: The belated worm surprised by the early bird, *The Graphic*, November 1910. 'The bookworm', *The Graphic*, December 1910. Other articles/illustrations appeared in *The Graphic* in July 1911 and December 1912.

Preliminary suggestions were submitted for the introduction of Bournville Cocoa packed so as to be especially attractive to children with a gift included in each tin. The proposal is that in the first instance the gifts should take the form of a series of toy animals. The Board approve the idea in principle and authorise the Marketing Group to prepare a scheme with a view to its introduction in the autumn.²⁰⁴

I believe that Cadbury commissioned Aris for his original ideas and technical skill. He designed a series of colour sketches of anthropomorphic animals branded the Cococubs, which were then manufactured by William Britain Ltd. and inserted into Children's Bournville Cocoa. The concept was supported by a comic strip written and drawn by Aris as a marketing promotion in the national press. Aris had provided a totally original advertising campaign, which he believed would appeal to the audience: a recognised brand name for his characters that gave the product personality, combined with a toy, which added the essential 'unique selling property' that differentiated the product from its rivals.

It is debateable as to who made the initial approach and who provided the actual marketing proposal idea in this relationship. Whether Ernest Aris approached Cadbury or vice versa is not known, nor is it established whether the original illustrations in Chignall's private collection, were either submitted by Aris or were designed specifically for Cadbury. There is a case to suggest that the drawings were not originally done for Cadbury and were perhaps sketches from an earlier period. The design for the boy, for example, is Edwardian and appears dated for a commercial submission in the 1930s. Secondly, the drawing for Piglet Pig has the character holding a cricket ball in his hand; the lead figurine is holding a mug of cocoa (fig 4.30-

²⁰⁴ Minutes of the Bournville Board, 14 February 1934, *Annual Homes Sales Reports 1930-1945 also Annual Export Sales Reports 1933-1943*, p. 34. Cadbury Archive, Bournville production site, Birmingham.

4.31). I would suggest that, with Aris's commercial acumen, he would not have put a ball in the hand of the character in this provisional drawing, but

Plate 34



Fig 4.30. Piglet Pig
William Britain's Master Mould 664
15th June 1934



PORKY-BAGS.

Fig 4.31. Ernest Aris provisional drawing
Porky Bags. Britain's called him Peter
Cadbury called him Piglet



Fig 4.32. Cococub lead figurines manufactured by William Britain Ltd., 1934 – 1939

would have inserted an object more relevant and specifically designed for a drinking chocolate advertisement. The sketches were submitted to Cadbury, although they were evidently provisional designs from a previous project, possibly the cigarette cards Aris had designed for W.A and A.C. Churchman.

The idea of inserting a toy in every tin was probably Aris's rather than Cadbury's scheme. This is based on the fact that Aris's Cococubs are practically a replica of *Frisky I* cigarette cards, which were designed and submitted to Churchman in 1926 and issued by the Imperial Tobacco Company of Great Britain and Ireland Ltd., in 1935, following the launch and success of the Cococubs. There is a reference to *Frisky II* in the Player Notebooks; however, these were not produced and it is not known what happened to the original drawings. They could have been lost with the Churchman archives or used by Aris for another commercial purpose. It is more than likely that Aris submitted to Cadbury the numbered coloured sketch drawings, which he had originally intended for *Frisky II* (fig 4.29).²⁰⁵

Perhaps Aris responded to Cadbury, who were seeking submissions or actively looking to commission an artist in response to the marketing scheme request from the Board. Or, had Aris, the salesman, approached Cadbury, submitting his provisional drawings on speculation to the marketing department who were searching for an idea? There is no documentary evidence to clarify, but I would suggest that the drawings were sent on speculation because they seem dated and chronologically numbered, suggesting they were part of a series and had an alternative use not in keeping with the task they were specifically used for by Cadbury.

Additionally, I would argue that it was Aris, who lived in Hornsey, which was within close proximity of the original William Britain factory, rather than Cadbury, who came up with the initial proposal of inserting a collectable anthropomorphic lead toy animal in every

²⁰⁵ Ernest Aris's provisional drawings of the Cococubs, which he submitted to Cadbury, are chronologically numbered 1-14 and are currently in an anonymous private collection.

Children's Bournville Cocoa tin.²⁰⁶ Certainly, Aris would have been very familiar with Britain's products and their success.

Although Cadbury had previously used animals in their advertising, as in Auriol's promotional literature, nothing resembled this innovative and winning concept; never before had lead figurine collectables been distributed in a food product. (Placing lead figurines into foods in the 1930s would not have been considered an issue under Health & Safety at that time.)

Manufacturers were desperate to find innovative methods of promoting their products to mass markets and developing ways to encourage customers to remain loyal to their brand. Aris's notion reached out to the masses and created a market of dependent customers. It proved to be a phenomenal success and a winning formula for both Cadbury as well as William Britain Ltd., who manufactured the lead figurines. It is not known where the name 'Cococub' given to the group of anthropomorphic figurines derives, but it could have been conceived directly from nature, the petite anthropomorphic figurines closely resembling animal cubs. Alternatively, the name is synonymous with 'chocolate team', which would obviously appeal to the Cadbury philosophy of creating and representing a sense of unity, like the Cub Scouts amongst its loyal customers.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ Aris lived in a house in Hornsey from 1913 until his death in 1963. The business of Britain's Limited was incorporated on 4 December 1907 and originally initiated sixty years earlier by William Britain (1828 - 1906), an ingenious toy maker from the Midlands who moved to 28 Lambton Road, Hornsey Rise, London. The original house was extended to the house next door and an extension built. This proved insufficient and the houses were pulled down and replaced by a factory, warehouse and office complex occupying an area of 36,000 square feet with 300 people employed on the site. A new factory, the North Light Building 20, 000 square feet was designed and erected in Walthamstow in 1931 the entire production of the Home Farm Range was moved to the site. A short history of Britain's Toy Company is available at: <http://www.gibbs.fastfreenet.com/WebPages/BritainsToys/WBritain.htm>. [Website accessed on 3 September, 2009].

²⁰⁷ Cadbury may have chosen Cococubs because the name is synonymous with Cub Scouts, who are member of the section of the worldwide Scouting movement for young boys normally aged 7 to 11 and are often referred to simply as *Cubs*. Cub Scouting provides a positive, encouraging peer group who provide good role models and a group setting, where standards are taught to

Every aspect of Aris's and the in-house marketing group's design was scrutinised in detail at the highest level within Cadbury. At the meeting of the Board of Directors held at Bournville on Monday 16 April 1934, which included William A. Cadbury (Chairman) and Edward and George Cadbury, it was agreed that the Children's Bournville Cocoa would be introduced in October 1934.²⁰⁸ The advertising campaign put the slogan 'A Toy in Every Tin,' at the centre of its communication strategy and the printed outer label submitted to the Board was approved subject to cost (fig 4.28). The design, which depicted some of the gifts included in the tins, had to connect the new Cocoa with the existing Bournville Cocoa labels because customer recognition of the package design was vital. The following year, the label design was revised again to include directions for the making of cocoa (fig 4.39). At the May 1935 meeting of the Board, it was noted:

the revised wording of the directions for making cocoa, which is to be printed on the Bournville Cocoa 7lb. label, is approved subject to confirmation by G.C.

[George Cadbury]. The Board ask that the wording shall be printed in a slightly darker red.²⁰⁹

It is a great tribute to Aris that the Chairman, George Cadbury, took such a personal interest in the visual design work for the product as well as the narrative text. He clearly realised the importance and influence of good product packaging and design from his formative years and experience in the business.

reinforce positive qualities of character and very much the values the brand seeks to portray and associate through their products.

²⁰⁸ H. T. Weeks, 'To the Board, Sales Report No 4, Decentralised Area Sales Report 1934, p.3. *Annual Homes Sales Reports 1930-1945 also Annual Export Sales Reports 1933-1943*, Cadbury Archive, Bournville production site, Cadbury, Birmingham.

²⁰⁹ Minutes of the Bournville Board, 19 June 1935, *Annual Homes Sales Reports 1930-1945 also Annual Export Sales Reports 1933-1943*, p. 127. Cadbury Archive, Bournville production site, Cadbury, Birmingham.

The advertising campaign ran for five years, although after two years Aris was marginalized as the Cococub idea ceased to revolve around the figurines. The Cococubs had been inserted in tins of cocoa from 1934 to mid 1937, and then replaced by coupons, which could still be exchanged for Cococubs. As a consequence, Aris was no longer required to develop innovative ideas or promotional material after 1936.

Production of the Cococubs

William Britain Ltd. had initially been a producer of mechanicals toys with limited success until 1893, when William Britain Senior developed a hollow cast toy soldier. Up to this period, German toy makers were the foremost manufacturers in this industry. Britain's hollow cast process involved pouring boiling molten lead into a mould and out again, leaving a skin around the core of the mould with a hollow centre. Britain's were the first to use this casting process and it was a significant technical improvement in the manufacturing process. Because less lead was required, the process was commercially cheaper, resulting in a lighter weight with reduced manufacturing and retail prices over competitors. Britain's figures quickly became the leaders for style, scale and the industry standard.

William Britain's were appointed by Cadbury and used this finite casting process for manufacturing Aris's Cococubs (fig 4.32). They were the only firm capable of producing this quality product and maintaining production to keep up with the supply and demand. Following completion of the casting of the Cococubs, each figurine was dipped into a primary layer of grey paint and then individually hand painted on production lines in the Britain workshops, with bright colours corresponding to Aris's original designs, before being wrapped and dispatched in tissue paper to Cadbury (fig 4.33). At the end of the packing process the smaller 1.5" figurines were placed on top of the cocoa into quarter-pound tins and the larger 2.25" figures into the

Toys are made



No. 3



Here you see the Piglets getting their nice coats of paint. Nearly a thousand of them are standing on the tables.



One of Freddie Frog's big family has just been finished. Soon he will go on his adventurous journey, wrapped in tissue paper, with hundreds of his brothers to Bournville, and from there, all alone in a tin of Children's Bournville Cocoa, to a grocer's shop. Which one of you who reads this page has got the Freddie Frog whose photograph you see here?



No. 4

87

Fig 4.33. William Britain Ltd. manufacturers of Cococubs
The Cococub News July-August 1936

half-pound tins; alternatively two smaller figurines were inserted into the larger of the Bournville Cocoa tins.²¹⁰

What should be noted is the impact that the marketing and advertising had on William Britain's, the campaign constituting a milestone achievement in their history. During the post-war period of economic hardship, families required value for money products allied with a pleasing experience, both of which Children's Bournville Cocoa and Aris's collectable Cococubs provided. Norman Joplin, considered by Christie's as William Britain's leading authority and expert on civilian and non-military lead toys argues:

In a promotional scheme this ranks not only as the most innovative and successful promotion involving children's toys during the Pre-World War II period, but also as a landmark in Britain's lead figure production.²¹¹

The success of the scheme meant Britain's were unable to provide the quantity that was required, unusual for any firm during a period of hardship. The extraordinarily high demand for these figurines and the volume that was necessary to be manufactured, would have had an impact on Britain's financial sales profits.

Joplin estimates that by 1935 4.5 million figurines had been distributed in Bournville Cocoa, making Aris's marketing concept and designs one of the most popular and successful product launches in the history of advertising. Between 23 March and 8 June 1934, the Smallwood Notebooks, which document and record all of William Britain's casts and model versions, indicate that Britain's produced the moulds for eighteen of Aris's models, including

²¹⁰ 'How the Cococub Toys are made', *Cococubs*, July-August 1934, 86-87, (p. 86).

²¹¹ Norman Joplin, Arnold Rolak, Philip Dean, Joe Kunzelmann, *Britain's Civilian Toy Figures* (Atglen: Schiffer Publishing Ltd, 2002), p. 222.

four different versions of the duckling character Dumpty Doo.²¹² Cadbury continued to commission Aris for further commercial work and additional figures, and by March 1936 there were 33 characters manufactured in the total collection, each having distinct features and a personality of its own, closely resembling those characters Aris had conceived for his literary tales.

This was a milestone in the history of Britain's and Cadbury, who had not predicted the popularity of Aris's figurines and the huge success of the scheme. Both firms were consequently left in the position where they were unable to maintain supply to satisfy the huge demand for the product that had been created by Aris's advertisement launch and sustained promotion.

Advertising

While the production of the Cococubs was in progress, Cadbury was making significant efforts to build its brand as part of a long-term marketing and advertising strategy. They commenced the plan by personalising and branding their product with a unique selling property and using innovative marketing methods, which would appeal to the masses. As Bradley notes:

Cadbury's inter-war marketing strategy of enveloping the consumer with a series of high-quality, close-up-and-personal branded experiences reached out to almost everywhere the public gathered....Young men in company blazers at Britain's seaside resorts would announce the presence of the 'Chocolate Mystery Man'

²¹² A catalogue of William Britain's productions are contained within The Smallwood Notebooks, two lined note books, covered in brown paper and filled in with black ink (one only part filled). From 1 January 1932-13 May 1941, Mr. Smallwood recorded the hours worked by his team on each and every new model and the refurbishment carried out by Britains in the Machine and Tool room of the Engineering department. The Notebooks are a fascinating record of the effort that went into creating and maintaining the vast production of figures that poured from the Britain's factory at the height of its success. Available at: http://www.christies.com/LotFinder/lot_details.aspx?pos=7&intObjectID=1915373&sid [accessed on 21 July 2009]. Joplin, Rolak, Dean, Kunzelmann, *Britain's Civilian Toy Figures*, p. 222.

who would, on the production of a bar of Dairy Milk, hand over a prize. This would prompt armies of bored holidaymakers, each clutching a bar of Dairy Milk, to spend the day approaching any likely-looking suspects.²¹³

Cadbury's various experimental marketing techniques were the stronghold for their marketing between the Wars; they were the only manufacturer to actively engage the consumer in a range of personal and lasting 'touch-points' that were in harmony with their product range.²¹⁴

When Aris was commissioned by Cadbury to design the promotional advertisements, cartoons and associated literature for the campaign, he endeavoured to develop ideas that would continue the personalisation of and emotional attachment to the brand's product by the consumer. Advertisements for branded cocoa, sustained by the unparalleled scale of Aris's promotional campaign literature, appeared in the main daily newspapers and drew attention to the new product. I believe that Aris successfully demonstrated what the power of advertising and intensive promotions, supported by an efficient factory organisation such as Cadbury, can accomplish.

Aris commenced the strategic advertising campaign for Children's Cocoa with a series of advertisements placed in women's magazines directed at mothers, followed by a teaser promotional cartoon strip in the newspapers. The campaign was launched with an initial small advert in the *Daily Express* on 26 September 1934 that read, "As one Cococub to another" said Willie, "do you know anything about those gifts for toys? "S..h..h..h" replied Harriet, "It's still a secret".' Three days later another advertisement carrying a caricature of *Willie Mouse* urges children to "Follow him—keep that Cococub in sight, he's *Willie Mouse*. He's just heard some exciting news about those gifts for your children. After him". The advert is repeated again on 3 October 1934.

²¹³ Bradley, *Cadbury's Purple Reign*, pp. 93-94.

²¹⁴ Bradley, *Cadbury's Purple Reign*, p. 94.

This promotion continues with the commencement of a comic strip cartoon on the children's page of the *Daily Express* newspaper on Saturday 6 October, 'Jonathan receives a mysterious letter,' followed on 10 October with 'The mysterious man' inviting Jonathan and the Cococubs to an old barn. It transpires that the mysterious man who sent the letter inviting the band is an artist, who commences sketching a very dignified Mr Pie Porker. On 13 October the Cococub advertisement proclaims 'The mystery is solved! In every tin of Children's Cocoa is a life-like beautifully coloured toy model of one of the Cococubs.'²¹⁵ The Cococubs realise, 'So that's why we were sketched.' (fig 4.34). The mysterious secret is revealed. We can conclude that the 'Mysterious Man' is Ernest Aris himself, who appears as an artist in his own drawing. Ever the opportunist, Aris has seized the chance to include himself as part of the promotion.

Aris was conscious of the excitement, enthusiasm and interest this initiative would stimulate in young readers. As interest grew surrounding the 'mystery' and the contents of the tin, so would demand for the product when it reached the shelves. The 'mystery' was solved when the secret contents and surprise element of the gift in every tin for a child was unveiled. *The Grocery and the Provision Merchant Journal* (The Grocer) described this as 'One of the cleverest publicity schemes of the year. It is difficult to over estimate the sales value of such a scheme.'²¹⁶

Aris's Cococubs figurines were such a popular promotion that Cadbury and Britain were unprepared for the result of sales vastly exceeding expectations. Stocks of Children's Bournville Cocoa were completely depleted and it was months before supplies were restocked and the tins with toys were back on sale. Britain's had considerable problems in keeping up with the huge demand to supply figurines. In November 1934 the original moulds had been copied to maintain

²¹⁵ *Daily Express*, 13 October 1934.

²¹⁶ *The Grocery and the Provision Merchant Journal*, November 1934, p. 276.

MY WEEKLY

MOTHERS! THIS IS NEW!

A TOY IN EVERY TIN

WHISKERS RABBIT
DUMPTY DOO
WILLIE MOUSE
MR. PIE-PORKER
PETER PUM
MRS. CACKIL COOSE
JONATHAN

Of course you know there's no need to coax the children to drink up their Bournville Cocoa but this scheme is going to give lots more enjoyment to the youngsters. A new gay tin has been specially designed. The jolly adventures of Cadburys Cococubs are appearing in all the newspapers. Miniature models of the fifteen Cococubs — gaily painted moulded metal toys, are given away free with the cocoa. Mother — get a tin of CHILDREN'S BOURNVILLE COCOA from your grocer to-day, ½ lb. 10d. ¼ lb. 5d.

THE Children's Bournville Cocoa

Same price 5½^d full ¼ lb. of cocoa

Have you told your children about the -

COCOCUBS new CLUB?

It's the Club for children — with handsome coloured metal Badge, Secret Sign — Passwords and Secret Code.

HOW THE CHILDREN CAN JOIN THE COCOCUBS.

Every child who wants to join must send a disc from a tin of the Children's Bournville Cocoa and 2d. in stamps, together with a sheet of paper on which full names, surname, address and age have been written. Post in 1½d. stamped envelope to "Jonathan," Cadbury Bros. Ltd., Bournville.

The Children's Bournville Cocoa

Same price 5½^d full ¼ lb. of cocoa

A TOY IN EVERY TIN

GRANNY OWL
LITTLE RABBIT
HENRIETTA FUSSYCAKE
GUSSIE ROBIN

Let the Children collect the COCOCUBS from the Children's Bournville Cocoa

Same price 5½^d full ¼ lb. of cocoa now available everywhere

A NEW gay tin has been specially designed for the Children's Bournville Cocoa. The jolly adventures of Cadburys Cococubs are appearing in all the newspapers. Miniature models of the fifteen Cococubs — gaily painted moulded metal toys, are given away FREE with the cocoa. Mother — get a tin of Children's Bournville Cocoa from your grocer to-day, ½ lb. 10d., ¼ lb. 5d.

The CHILDREN'S BOURNVILLE COCOA

Same price 5½^d full ¼ lb. of cocoa

The CHILDREN'S BOURNVILLE COCOA is on sale at all grocers' shops. In every tin a gaily painted toy model of one of the Cococubs is given away free. All boys and girls love collecting these toys, so be sure to ask your grocer for the CHILDREN'S BOURNVILLE COCOA. ½ lb. tin 10d. ¼ lb. tin 5d.

* Children! Watch for the adventures of the Cococubs every Wednesday and Saturday in the children's pages of the newspapers.

THE MYSTERY IS SOLVED!

WHEN the Cococubs arrived at the old Barn, oh, what a surprise! Well, just look at the picture, it tells its own story. In every tin of Children's Bournville Cocoa is a life-like beautifully coloured toy model of one of the Cococubs. So, children, be sure to ask mother to get the Children's Bournville Cocoa and start to collect these cute little Cococubs.

And children — watch for the adventures of the Cococubs every Wednesday and Saturday in the paper.

Fig 4.34. Children's Bournville cocoa promotional advertisements 1934

supply; production continued at Walthamstow and a new site was opened in 1935 at Colne, Lancashire, to meet the demand, as well as two factories in Liverpool and the Potteries. A leading authority on the subject, John Cupman, notes that two weeks into the campaign on 24 October 1934, Cadbury's regular advertising strip asked children:

not to blame their grocer for being unable to supply the cocoa. Cadbury admitted to having "hundreds of thousands of Cococubs" but still it was not enough to cope with the enormous impact of the cubs. In December the cubs cartoon strip now asked children not to be too disappointed to be without their cocoa and Cococub models but after Christmas there would be "lots of Cococubs again".²¹⁷

The cartoon strip for 27 October showed the cubs working overtime, 'We can't give you the Cocoa without your toy, so don't be too disappointed if you can't get it in the shops.' Even though Cadbury had hundreds of thousands of the models, it was still not enough to cope with the colossal demand for the cubs. The advice is repeated throughout November and replaced on 1 December with, 'So great has been the demand for Children's Bournville Cocoa that although factories are all on overtime there aren't enough Cococub models to go round.' The Children's Cocoa was not sold from November 1934 until it was gradually re-introduced in specific areas of the country from January 1935. In February 1935, *Woman's Weekly* and *My Weekly* carried full-page advertisements telling mothers the good news that the Cococubs were back again. On 16 February 1935 an advertisement appeared 'Good News - Children's Bournville Cocoa is on sale at all grocers shops.' This was followed on 23 February 1935 with 'Good News – Cadburys Bournville Cocoa is now available everywhere.'²¹⁸

²¹⁷ John Cupman, *The Cococubs are back again: The Story of the Cadbury Cococubs* (private publication, n.d.), pp. 12-13.

²¹⁸ *Woman's Weekly* and *My Weekly*, 16 and 23 February 1935.

Aris's initial advertisements and teaser campaign had appeared weekly in the *Daily Express*, *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Sketch* and *Daily Herald* and the *News Chronicle* every Saturday and the *Radio Times* every fortnight. The majority of Aris's Cococub in the comic strip cartoons had features and characteristics that emanated from his literary tales. Jonathan was the whimsical boy of eleven who was the leader of the merry band. Mr Pie Porker was a solemn, pompous pig, with a shiny top hat, immaculate tail-coat, spats and spectacles, who had a great sense of his own self-importance and was always the centre of attention, as the Cococubs enjoyed pulling his leg in many of their exploits. Mrs Pie Porker was a contented wife, ready to console her spouse when he was mocked and to make him delicious cups of hot cocoa as a comfort when his friends played practical jokes. The chief reprobates are Willie Mouse and Dumpty Doo, who constantly scheme and are mischievous, and tease the two chatterers Mrs Henrietta Fussy-Feathers and Mrs. Cackle-Goose. As with the tales that Aris wrote, the Cococubs have familiar characteristics and similar traits: Silas Slink is the wicked fox that prowls around Granny Owl's tuck shop to steal chocolate, watched by Peter Pum the Poodle who coerces him away.

Aris tried to maintain the momentum by providing Strip Story cartoons every Wednesday and Saturday in the children's pages of the newspapers describing a 'deliciously ridiculous incident.'²¹⁹ The Adventures included hiking, a concert party, building a guy for 5 November, a cruise to West Africa where the Cococubs made friends with Black Sambo, a 'nigger-boy', who showed them how Cocoa beans are grown, harvested and despatched to Bournville. Essentially, Aris's comic strips provided entertainment, but they also conveyed a message that was used as a practical method of advertising, linking the Cococubs with Children's Bournville Cocoa or Cadbury's Milk Chocolate.

²¹⁹ H.M.R., 'The Cococubs', *Bournville Works Magazine*, June 1935, 208-209, p. 208.

Associated Ephemera

Aris's technical knowledge of commercial marketing meant he was able to make an additional contribution to the success of the campaign and was probably advising on the supplementary associated merchandise, which complimented the advertisements and continued to attract and retain customers. The ever increasing interest and demand for the Cococubs led Cadbury to form the Cococub Club in 1935, which enabled Aris to create more ephemera and promotional material for Cadbury, with advertisements to mothers highlighting the benefits of the new club to their child. Every child who enrolled had to send to Cadbury a disc collected from the Cocoa tin, with a stamp and his or her full name and address. Members received *The Cococub News*, a membership letter, blue enamel badge and a Rule Book containing the secret sign and code (fig 4.35). Members who reapplied between July and November 1935 also had the opportunity to collect a Leader Bar on the recruitment of five friends, which attached to the club badge, which was a Veteran's Star (fig 4.36). The whole marketing concept revolved around supplying more collectables to an already over subscribed niche market. The membership scheme appealed to 2,750,000 children between 5 and 16 years of age, and it is estimated that possibly 10,000,000 of Aris's Cococubs were distributed with Children's Bournville Cocoa throughout the full duration of the scheme.²²⁰

Overseas, where Cadbury had successfully expanded their business empire, they also had their own Cococub newsletters, distributing *The Cococub News* in Ireland and in New Zealand under a different brand name, *The Junior*. Clearly, Aris's design concept had been so successful that Cadbury decided to spread the campaign internationally, which at that time was a highly unusual practice because of limited communications and the fact that regions tended to have their own local marketing strategies. Generally, advertising was left to the local market, as countries responded differently to popular products and schemes, but this expansion is a

²²⁰ Cupman, *The Cococubs are back again*, p. 23.

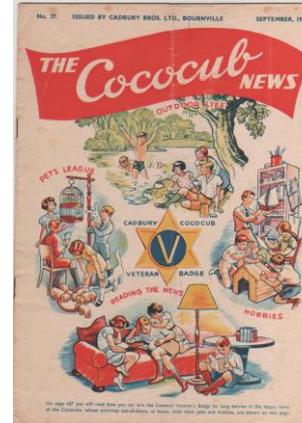
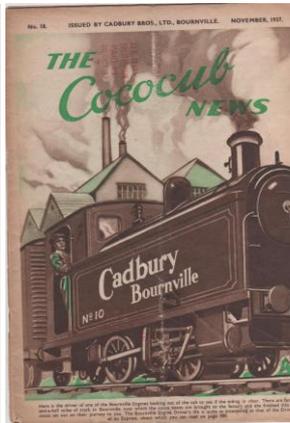
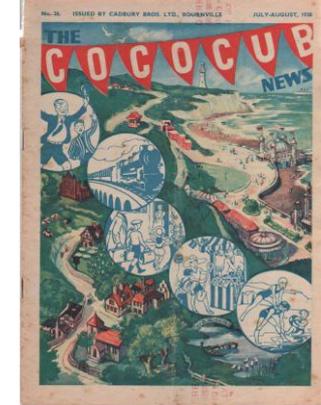
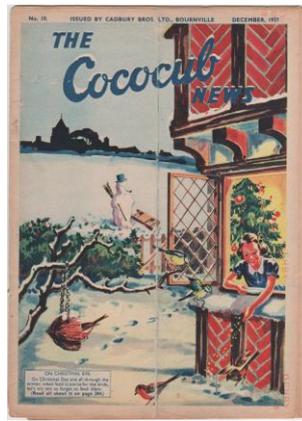
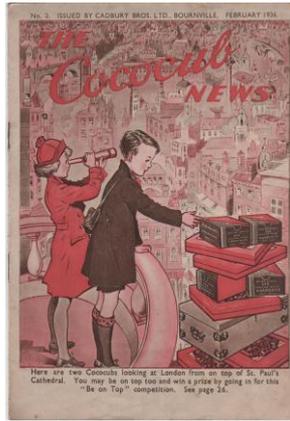


Fig 4.35. The Cococub News

Plate 38



Badge with Veteran talisman



The 1935 Christmas card does not open out. The back and front are separated by a central wheel, which rotates to reveal some of the cubs in a window in the shape of a Christmas tree

Cococubs Christmas card, 1935 by Ernest Aris

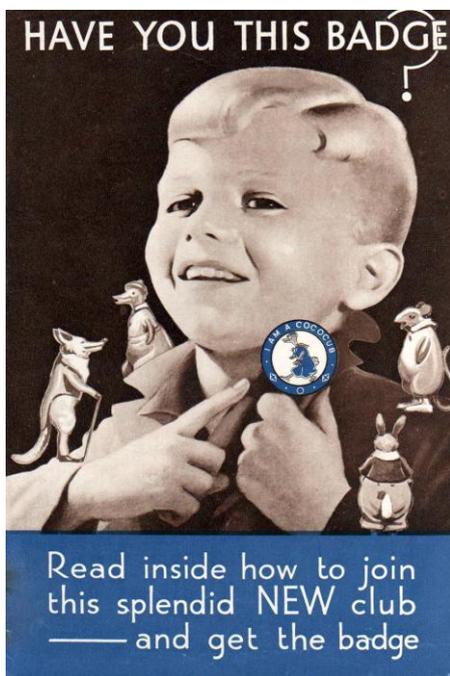


Fig 4.36. Cococub membership ephemera

reflection of Aris's expertise. His inspirational concept, combined with the product, had great popular global appeal and proved to be an international winning formula.

As a supplement to the campaign, *The Cococub News* (No 10) of Christmas of 1936 enclosed an order form for *The Cococub Annual* that Aris illustrated with comic strip cartoons. This is a very rare item as only one edition was produced and it is now highly collectable. It was published by Newnes of London in December 1936 and printed by Butler & Tanner Ltd., priced at 1/6 net (7 1/2p) to the retail trade. The Annual has a beautifully illustrated cover with the cheerful characters depicted climbing a ladder on a bright blue background. The illustrated contents include many of the original comic strips from the various magazines and some of the drawings were used to form cards in one of the board games (fig 4.37).

In response to the popular membership scheme, the Bournville Board met on 26 June 1935 and agreed the designs submitted for a new "penny bar", a wrapped Cococub Milk Bar. It is unknown whether Aris had any actual involvement with the three different moulds, wrapper designs and design flaps, but all were approved subject to cost and introduced in September 1935 to add to the other products.²²¹ The three variations of the wrapper design incorporated the leader of the Cococubs, Jonathan, in the centre, with two brightly coloured characters either side. The chocolate bar, moulded with a relief of the characters on the top, was the only wrapped 'penny bar' Cadbury produced at that time (fig 4.38). John Cupman writes:

On the back of each wrapper was the question 'Are you a Cococub?'. It then went on to explain how to join the new club. Dumpty Doo and Whiskers rabbit

²²¹ 'Minutes of the Bournville Board, 26 June 1935', *Annual Homes Sales Reports 1930-1945 also Annual Export Sales Reports 1933-1943*, p. 132. Cadbury Archive, Bournville production site, Cadbury, Birmingham.

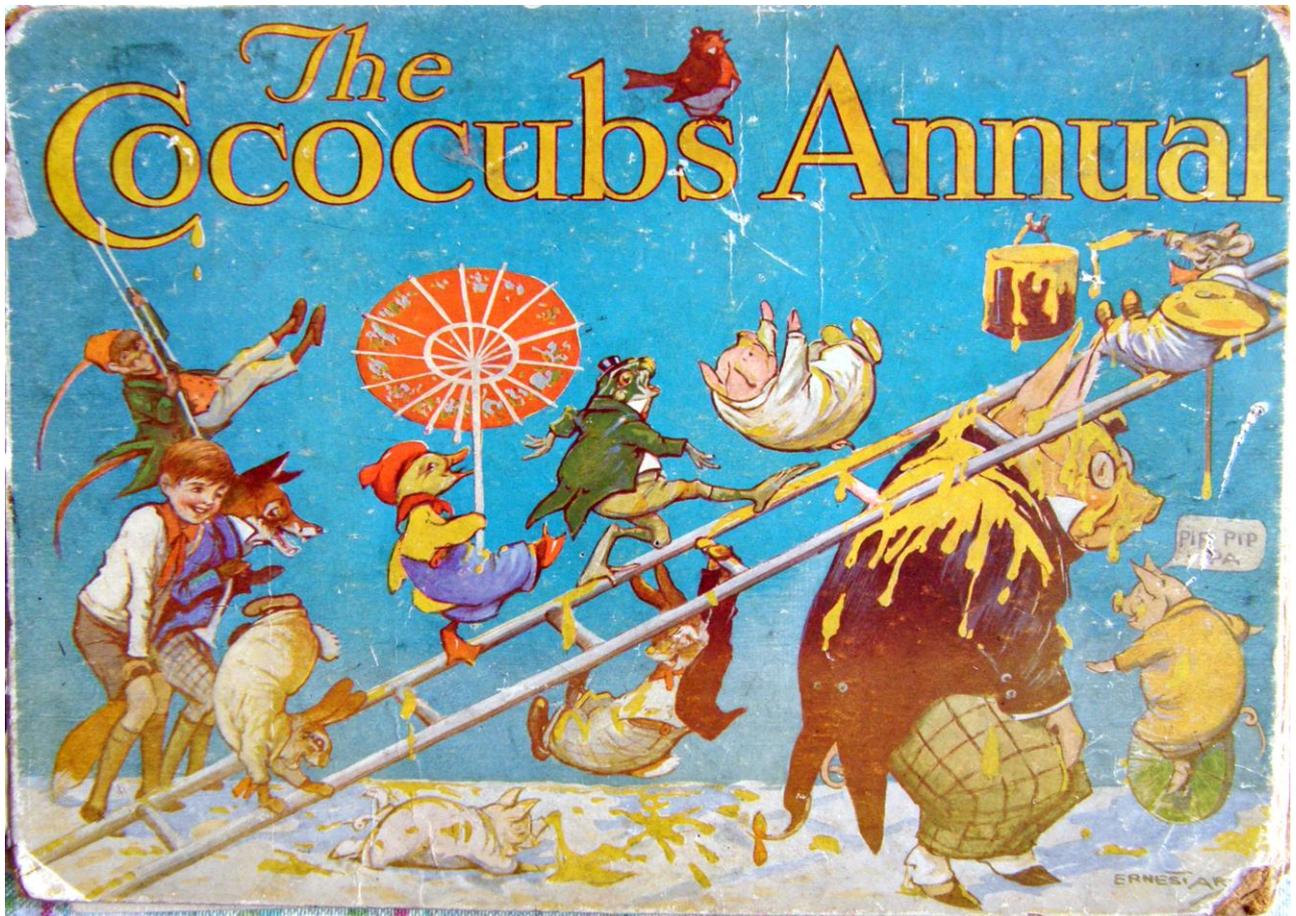


Fig 4.37. Cococubs Annual 1936 It contains cartoon strips from the advertising campaign.
Published by Newnes of London and printed by Butler & Tanner Ltd.
Priced at 1/6 (7 1/2p).

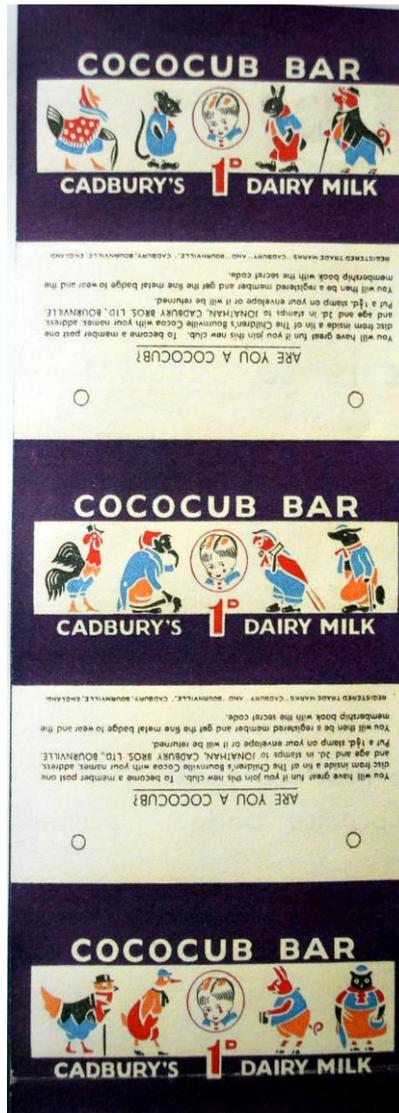


Fig 4.38. The Cococub Milk Chocolate Bar 1936

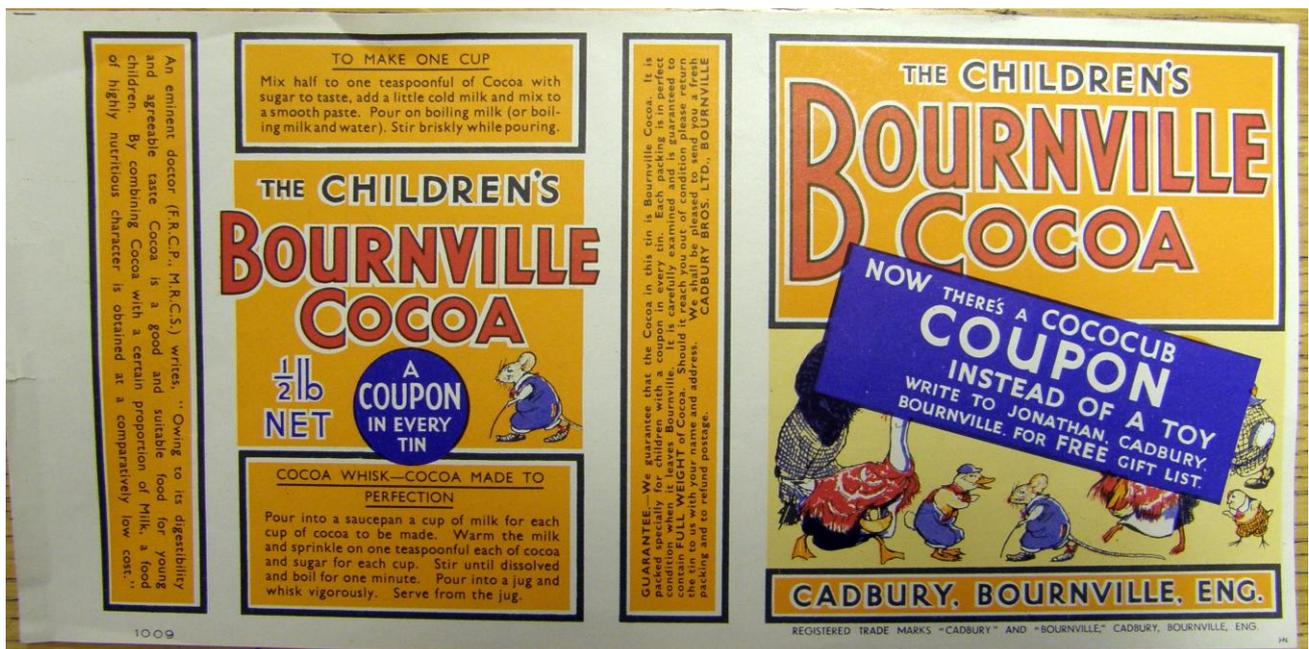


Fig 4.39. Revised label

were shown on the display flap of the trade boxes. Dummy bars to be shown in shop windows were also distributed.²²²

This was an example of Cadbury responding to the success of the characters and again broadening their appeal by marketing the idea successfully into new product lines and using this popular advertising theme to further increase sales.

Aris also created an assortment of other ephemera intended to encourage collecting for the Cococub Club, his influence can be seen in much of the promotional material, cards and correspondence related to Cococub members. All the additional products related to the original product, chocolate bars were designed to incorporate the familiar characters and the continuing promotion ensured that the additional by-products were related to the original Children's Cocoa advertising concept. This would also help to provide continued endorsement and support to the existing commercial advertising campaign of the original Children's Bournville Cocoa product.

As the war approached, lack of resources and Britain's commitments to the war efforts limited production of the figurines. By May and June 1937 many of the Cococub models were being replaced by coupons that could be traded for different toys, an idea that had started in the early 1930s. Cadbury advertised a 10-inch high cloth doll, which could be obtained in exchange for 28 coupons from Bournville cocoa. Other items included skipping ropes, fountain pens and model airplanes; the small version of a BlueBird Speed Racing Car, the Dinky Limousine, were additional products being offered free to members via the *Cococub News* as a gift. To accompany the successful campaign, Aris designed two Cococub Race board games and cut-out houses were also given as premiums through the newsletter, which would accompany the lead figurines.

²²² Cupman, *The Cococubs are back again*, pp. 27-28.

January 1937 saw the last cartoon in the members' magazine known as the *Cococub News*, in which the anthropomorphic animals appeared in the articles. After this edition, it was the members of the club who now became known as the 'Cococubs'. August 1939 saw the final publication of *The Cococub News* before the declaration that the nation was at War on 3 September 1939 and the club was officially closed.

After the end of the War, Cadbury tried to emulate the success of Aris's idea and original promotional strategy, relaunching the Cadbury C-Cubs in 1948, although the artwork was very different and Aris had no involvement. Again drawing on Aris's concept, quarterly magazines were issued, omitting the original characters; C-Cubs annuals were published in 1949 and 1950, which included cardboard cut outs, Cadbury families and a Cadbury card game for C-Cub members. Despite the absence of the original characters, this was yet again an enduring success and membership outstripped available printed literature. It is a testament to the creative ideas and enduring legacy of Aris that Cadbury had succeeded in rebranding a marketing strategy derived from his original concept.

Reasons for the success of the Cococubs

There are a number of social and economic factors that emerge as possible reasons for the success of the Cococubs campaign. The Great Depression in 1929, activated by the collapse of the American stock market, had a global effect on trade, industry and employment and as a result, toys at this time were considered an extra indulgence. With a restricted family budget, social entertainment had to be fun and usually free, such as homemade food, music, organised games, puzzles and cards. Secondly, as the economy was in a period of great hardship, the skills and materials required to manufacture toys were in short supply. This, combined with the fact many of the toy firms had closed or were producing other more profitable products, made the Cadbury promotion unprecedented, a novel idea as well as one extremely popular with mothers who were limited in what they could provide young children for entertainment.

Throughout this period Aris had continuously been writing and illustrating numerous books for young children and it is apparent that he could relate to the fact a child is more likely to be entranced by products and promotional items they can identify with and that are familiar to them. The anthropomorphic creatures Aris designed for Cadbury are easily recognisable and the characters are sourced from the tales he created. The Cococubs lead figurines combined interest and appeal with the additional excitement of a surprise within the tin. They were also small for little hands and painted in attractive bright colours. The figurines encompassed all the essential elements Aris considered necessary to attract attention: humour, excitement, and interest, qualities that he always endeavoured to produce in his visual images and tales.

Collecting was a popular social and cultural phenomenon at this time and children were anxious to accumulate the set of attractive characters. This pastime combined with the continuity of the advertisements and the longevity of the marketing campaign kept momentum and interest alive in the product. Cadbury were acutely aware of their brand's moral responsibilities, fostering the habit and the social trend of collecting and exchanging toys. By inserting a free toy in every tin, the brand could be perceived as rewarding their loyal customers as well as exploiting it as an incitement to buy their product. By encouraging exchange and collecting, this only served to develop and nurture interest in their products and helped to increase sales dramatically.

Another reason for the success of the Cococubs was the product with which it was combined. Hot drinking chocolate was a drink that had become widely available to the majority of the population. As explained in the *Bournville Works Magazine*, (March 1934) prosperity depended on selling chocolate to the majority of the population and it should not be considered a luxury product for the privileged. Chocolate was now consumed by 90% of the entire British population, and as the Head of Cadbury's London based advertising agency commented in 1934, '*Chocolate had been taken above the battle for luxury goods and become a candidate for basic*

expenditure'.²²³ The winning combination of cocoa chocolate with a toy had popular appeal amongst both the adolescent and the mature. As the *Bournville Works Magazine* humorously remarked:

Some of us have caught a most sober and respectable member of Staff 'A' playing with a number of them [Cococubs] in the seclusion of his office. In one household we learnt that the consumption of cocoa had gone up by leaps and bounds, since the arrival of the Cococubs. This seemed most satisfactory until we heard that the son of the house had been discovered emptying cocoa into the dustbin because, as he weepingly protested, 'He wanted another Pie Porker'.²²⁴

Economic conditions also helped the success: cocoa had become cost-effective to import. The effective advertising approach of Aris was supported by a reliable distribution system combined with recent technical efficiencies and this enabled enormous volumes to be produced. Sales representatives were calling monthly to over 120,000 individual shops and another 150,000 through wholesalers. Significant volume increases compensated for the lower cash margins that were brought about as a result of the price reductions. Cadbury products were more available to consumers than their competitors and it is estimated Bournville were producing a million tins of Bournville Cocoa a week.²²⁵

Between 1934 and 1936, when Aris was making his contribution, sales were increasing and Cadbury were unable to maintain supply to meet the demand. The volume tonnage increased by 33% and top line sales by a still healthy 20%, which meant overall profits increased

²²³ Bradley, *Cadbury's Purple Reign*, pp. 83-84.

²²⁴ H.M.R., 'The Cococubs', *Bournville Works Magazine*, June 1935, 208-209, p. 209.

²²⁵ Bradley, *Cadbury's Purple Reign*, p. 84. It should be noted that the exact proportion of profits that can be apportioned to Children's Bournville Cocoa from the *Annual Home Sales 1930-1945 also Export Sales 1933-1945* is not indicated.

during the period of price cuts from £709,061 in 1930 to £979,995 in 1935. Without a doubt, Aris's creative contribution, allied with the economic environment, had a direct impact on the annual financial accounts, which was reflected in increased profits from sales.²²⁶

Collectability

There are a variety of reasons why Aris's Cococubs were and are so collectable. As with any form of fine art, lead figurines have aroused the interest of those who have a collectors' instinct, whether it is a child or adult. Many adult Cococub collectors are simply motivated by nostalgic memories of their lost childhood or wish to pass something familiar on to their family.

Personal research amongst collectors and sellers suggests the Cococubs are collected for a variety of reasons today by an assortment of diverse individuals. There are those collectors who are keen to obtain any memorabilia or items with a direct connection to the Cadbury brand or particularly Bournville Cocoa products. There are the avid collectors focusing their attention on specific areas of Cadbury, such as the Cococub ephemera, figurines and collectables, while others focus on specific periods of time or ephemera associated with the golden era of production and advertising. Others are simply motivated by an historical interest of the brand. There are also those who collect William Britain's lead figurines, as they are items sought after in their own right. From the sale of legendary Arnold Rolak's Britain's Collection of Cococubs, which sold at Christies in December 2000, I conclude William Britain's lead figurines are today considered a good investment because they are continually increasing in value due to their scarcity.²²⁷ The reasons for this popularity are based on the quality and high standard of draughtsmanship (a pre-requisite for modelling) combined with hand-coloured painting. William Britain's figurines made between 1893-1940 are referred to as the Pre-War period. Those hollow cast figurines produced during this period, including Aris's Cococubs

²²⁶ Bradley, *Cadbury's Purple Reign*, p. 84.

²²⁷ Arnold Rolak's Reference Collection of Britain's Toys sold at Christies, South Kensington 1 December 2000.

manufactured from 1934-1939, are the most collectable of all Britain's models and continue to set record-breaking prices at auction sales. The Cococubs, in particular, achieved record prices when sold at Christie's Britain Archive Auction in 1994, which only serves to highlight the interest and value that Aris has created with his Cococubs.

The other group of collectors, both past and present, are those who are the genuine compulsive Cococub aficionados, interested in building a complete Cococub collection of figurines and any associated ephemera. There are many international collectors who frequently search to find the unique or elusive design or colour variant figurine to complete the entire collection of 33 Cococubs in 132 colour variations. The "jolly little band" of anthropomorphic animals, led by Jonathan, the only human, came in two sizes. Of the original 15 figures, 5 were cast larger than the others for the larger tins; these were Jonathan, Mr and Mrs Pie Porker, Peter Pum and Whiskers Rabbit. The smaller figures were in the 1/4lb tins, costing 5 1/2d (2p), and larger figures which were only available in the 1/2lb tins, costing 10d (4p), although periodically, maybe due to shortages, two smaller animals were sometimes inserted in the larger tin. The higher cost of the larger tins meant that the larger figurines were in shorter supply, hence their relative scarcity makes them more collectable.

Finally, there are collectors like myself who have a genuine interest and fascination in any item associated with Ernest Aris. Aris has produced a vast body of work and has left a wonderful lasting legacy of illustrated tales, creative advertising posters, cigarette cards, enjoyable board games, game cards and many educational books. The Cococub figurines are only a part of the vast array of commercial work that he undertook. The three dimensional miniature figurines are a tangible item and, as a complete set with the different variations in colour, an outstandingly unique collection.

As I suggested previously, the success of Aris's and Cadbury's scheme was exceptional and left Britain's in the embarrassing position of not being able to supply the mandatory amount needed to meet demand, requiring another local firm in the Potteries to supplement the manufacturing of the figurines. These Cococubs have an abbreviation mark 'Copyright Cadbury, Britain's Proprietors.' However, there are some solid cast versions of the animals, which were created using a different casting process, the bases of which are marked 'Copyright Cadbury.' As these were made over a short period, few of these Cococubs have survived, making these particular cast figures highly desirable. Limited editions and the degree of rarity is another obsession for collectors, the latter being a combination of the scarcity of an item and its desirability. However, those that may have been highly desirable at the time of their production, for instance, *Monty Monkey*, are less sought after now as they are more common. Other characters like Jonathan and Tiny Tusks, the larger figurines produced for a shorter time, are less available and are highly desirable due to their scarcity and achieve an inflated value in today's market. Scarcity and limited editions of individual figures make Aris's Cococubs compulsive collecting; seeking the elusive figure at a reasonable price has become progressively more difficult in recent times as more collectors enter the market.

The Cococub characters that Aris used for Cadbury were familiar anthropomorphic animals from his preceding books, with the exception of the Cococub talisman leader, Jonathan. Jonathan is considered particularly rare today and commands a high price at auction, demanding as much as £200 in fine condition because of his scarcity. The early Jonathan, (Fat Boy or Boy Eating Chocolate) has been the subject of much speculation. His appearance was considered out-dated and not modern enough for Cadbury and was rejected shortly after the initial launch, leaving very few of this model in existence and making this the most sought after Cococub. Production for Jonathan (Boy Eating Chocolate) commenced in March 1934 and when supply of the Cococubs was ceased in November 1934, it is possible that the original Jonathan was

replaced with the thin boy eating chocolate as the second mould was made in December 1934. The original was possibly changed after being issued to Sales Representatives and never issued to children, which might explain why the original is so rare. Perhaps it was changed because Cadbury believed the early Jonathan did not accurately represent a healthy image of their product. Additionally, the dated sailor's outfit is very much a perception of the Edwardian period, whereas the modern healthy walking Jonathan is much more in keeping with the brand's social awareness (fig 4.40).

Another observation to be made is that not only do limited edition characters have a rarity value, but also subtle variation in colour can command a premium and make some figurines more collectable than others. Whether this was an accident by Britain's or Aris's idea is unknown. Because Britain's were producing large quantities of figurines at different sites, the colour variations in the manufacturing process were probably a result of reducing wastage. Britain's may simply have had left over paint from one model and used it on another, or perhaps they used up remnants of paint at the end of the week. These variations have only increased the value and made collecting the rare colour versions more compulsive. For instance, Dan Crow has a red, yellow and a blue scarf, Captain Kangaroo has green or yellow trousers with blue or red scarves. When production ceased in November 1934 until February 1935, the new launch of the Cococubs referred to as "The Cococubs Spring Clothing," had deliberate single figure colour variations.

There are also the character disparities, which were once considered to be the result of the casting process, but are clearly subtle variations in design. There are four different versions of Dumpty Doo, wearing a skullcap, a peak cap, a tam o'shanter and a bowler hat. Whether it was Aris's original idea to make the figurines more desirable and collectable thus increasing sales is unknown. Certainly, Aris had an acute sense of commercial awareness and a good understanding of child psychology and would probably have foreseen the success that could

Plate 41



Fig 4.40. Jonathan

Early version
March 1934

Later walking boy version
December 1934

have emanated in designing this type of product. Again it is not actually known how the characters' variants came about. It has been suggested that they be the result of damage during the casting process, which then led to Britain's remodelling the original cast with small adaptations, although the factory records read 'Dumpty Doo (3 heads/hat),' which I interpret as three models plus the original.²²⁸ This assumption is confirmed in the original line drawings submitted by Aris, which specify Dumpty Doo as having 'four heads', which would suggest that such variations were intended by Aris.

These figures and associated nostalgic memorabilia from early childhood are for many people synonymous with a bygone era and have transcended generations as they are handed down. The small, cute cuddlesome figures can be purchased for as little as £5, making them accessible to most collectors. This combined with size for storage and portability, as well as low maintenance, has added to their desirability. It is not surprising that these well constructed high quality toys made by William Britain Ltd. were not only collectable at that time, as all Britain's figurines were, but have become hugely popular in their own right today.

Legacy

There are several reasons why we should appreciate the creative skill of Aris's timeless and enduring treasury of work. His inspirational design and creative ideas provided a long and innovative marketing concept for a leading brand during the pre-war period and proved hugely popular with millions of customers, something today's commercial brands often fail to achieve. However, despite his achievement for the brand, the nature and success of the work he produced and collectability of the ephemera and memorabilia, Aris's name remains invisible both then and more symbolically now. This, I believe, is unwarranted.

²²⁸ Joplin, Rolak, Dean, Kunzelmann, *Britain's Civilian Toy Figures*, p. 222-223. Chignall, Dudley, *The Cococubs* (Witham: Private publication 2009).

There appears to be no official recognition of Aris by Cadbury for masterminding a hugely original design concept, although at that time obscurity was normal within this industry. Was this anonymity intentional or just the nature of the role the commissioned artist played, being a small part of a large idea? Even in today's successful advertising campaigns, the creative genius behind the idea is largely unknown. A good example would be the masterful Guinness advertisements, very memorable for the brand, but the creator of the visuals is anonymous.

From an historical perspective, there is a very strong argument in Aris's favour to support the fact that he rightly deserves more recognition and a prominent position alongside his peers, although it has to be acknowledged that many of the Cococub characters and names do display a close resemblance to other authors' and illustrators' popular work before or during this period (fig 4.41). In fact, evidence would suggest many of the names Aris selected for the Cococubs were plagiarised from other artists' work, or that he was simply responding to market demand by reincarnating his own popular anthropomorphic creatures.

It should be noted that at the time the country's leading consumer brand was quick to realise Aris's outstanding talent. Cadbury maintained their strategy of commissioning those artists recognised as being the very best and Aris's technical style provided a solution to their inter-war marketing strategy. Aris had broad experience of working on visual designs for magazines, posters and broad sheets, and a good commercial understanding of what would be acceptable and immediately visually stimulating for the consumer.

It is a significant that Aris accomplished something for Cadbury, whereas the eminent artists Rackham and Auriol failed to provide a long-term creative innovation or invent a successful formula for the brand, which would capture the consumers' attention or leave a

lasting legacy. Their designs made no impact on the financial profits in the manner that the designs of the relatively unknown Aris did. Aris had successfully delivered the concept and

Plate 42

Aris Cococub	Resembles	Author	Date
Jonathan	<i>Johnnie</i> (The Ovaltiney's)	Ovaltine	1920s
Tom Kitten	<i>The Tale of Tom Kitten</i>	Beatrix Potter	1907
Nutty Squirrel	<i>The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin</i>	Beatrix Potter	1903
Freddy Frog	<i>The Tale of Mr Jeremy Fisher</i>	Beatrix Potter	1906
Mrs Cackle-Goose	The character is similar to <i>Jemima Puddle-Duck</i>	Beatrix Potter	1908
Dumpty Doo	The character is similar to <i>Jemima Puddle-Duck</i>	Beatrix Potter	1908
Silas Slink Fox	The gentleman fox in <i>Jemima Puddle-Duck</i> or <i>The Tale of Mr Tod</i> .	Beatrix Potter	1908
Willie Mouse	<i>The Tale of Johnny Town-Mouse</i> , although it should be noted Aris published <i>Willie Mouse</i> in 1912.	Beatrix Potter	1918
Dan Crow	Ernest Aris's adopted pseudonym	-	
Tiny Tusks	<i>Tiny Tusks</i> and the <i>Frisky</i> Series	Madeleine Collier	1926
Jacko Monk	Ernest' Aris's book <i>A Bad Little Bear</i> , he was to become Monty Monkey.		
Brother Rabbit	Similar to Brer Rabbit and an <i>Uncle Remus Tale</i> entitled <i>Brother Rabbit frightens Brother Tiger</i> (Ernest Aris had illustrated Uncle Remus tales).	Joel Chandler Harris	1881
Squire Rooster Cockerel	Recycled Captain Cockerel from <i>Betty O'the Barn</i>	Ernest Aris	1921
Mrs Fussy Feathers	Recycled Betty from <i>Betty O'the Barn</i>	Ernest Aris	1921

Fig 4.41. A compiled list of the Cococub names compared to other popular authors' characters.

managed to create the crucial and popular advertising campaign, which would have a direct influence on the annual home sales and export sales figures for Cadbury.

Cadbury had made a surprising decision in using a relatively unknown artist in comparison to the previous renowned artists they had used, although perhaps they were aware of Aris's success and the enormous output of published books, which revolved around anthropomorphic creatures and perhaps already had an initial concept in mind. They realised that Aris's style and this type of artistic genre, comical and humorous rather than modern or fine art, is what was required to enhance the success and popular appeal of their product and acknowledged that Aris's creative genius and technical approach would appeal to the masses. His unique blend of humour, excitement and colour were all technical attributes evident in the visual designs that Cadbury wanted to be synonymous to the brand.

I have concluded that today competitors use all sorts of methods to entice the consumer and create unique selling properties to differentiate their product from competitors. Cereal brands have tried to replicate the idea of inserting a prize such as collectable cards, puzzles and plastic figures in packaging as incentive schemes, trying to capture permanent consumer loyalty to their brand. It is difficult to repeat the originality of Aris's idea that captured the child's imagination and the quality of design of the Cococubs, or to achieve the success and recognition that the Cococubs advertising campaign holds in advertising history.

Putting the Cococubs into an historical context, clearly a close comparison can be drawn between Aris's Cococubs for Cadbury's, Ovaltine's The Ovaltineys and Robertson's jams 'Golly' marketing strategies. Although the Cococub Club ephemera and collectables attracted huge members and retained consumer loyalty, evidently Cadbury were not the only brand to adopt this strategy and other leading drinks companies invented their own schemes to retain customers. Ovaltine was introduced to Britain in 1909 with promotional advertisements in the 1920s featuring three children, Johnnie, Elsie and Winnie, who proclaimed the high nutritional

value of the product. Interestingly, Elsie was the name adopted to promote chocolate by George Auriol for Cadbury (1905) and Jonathan was the popular name used by Aris for leading the Cococubs.

Between the two World Wars, children needed more than just sustenance to maintain their morale and what better way than with the diversion and excitement of a secret society called the League of Ovaltineys (1935), which distributed ephemera not dissimilar to the Cococub Club: membership letters, badges and rules for membership. Enthusiastic children wrote for membership badges, the Seven Golden Rules of the Secret book, secret signs, signals and the brand launched 'The Ovaltineys', a family radio show airing on Radio Luxembourg on Sunday evening.²²⁹ Thus, although the technical quality of Aris's work for Cadbury is unique and appreciated, the associated ephemera promotion was not. Perhaps, with so many other similar membership schemes during the same period, that is the reason why for Aris's legacy has been lost in history.

As with many of these schemes, the popularity and collectability of advertising literature, associated ephemera and memorabilia, have endured over the years. James Robertson & Sons, a British manufacturer of jams and preserves, used the Golliwog as its trademark in the early 1900s in promotional literature, the idea emanating from the United States before World War I. John Robertson, the owner's son, saw rural children playing with little black rag dolls with white eyes, which had been made from discarded black skirts and blouses. Robertson claimed the children called the dolls 'Golly' as a mispronunciation of 'Dolly'. By 1910 the Golly name and image appeared on Robertson's product labels, price lists, and advertising material. An article on the Robertson's products website notes that:

²²⁹ 'Ovaltineys'. Available online at: <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ovaltineys>> [Website accessed on 31 November 2011]. 'The Ovaltine Collection. Available online at: <<http://www.dacorumeritage.org.uk/ovaltine.htm>> [Website accessed 1 November 2008].

The Golly appeal led to an enormously popular mail-away campaign: in return for 'Golly' tokens from their marmalade, Robertson's sent brooches (also called pins or badges) of Gollies playing various sports. The first brooch was the Golly Golfer in 1928. In 1932 a series of fruit badges (with Golly heads superimposed onto the berries) were distributed. In 1939 the popular brooch series was discontinued because the metal was needed for the war effort, but by 1946 the Golly returned.²³⁰

Despite public criticism and racial issues during the 1960s and 1970s, Robertson's changed their logo's name to 'Golly', and retained their trusty mascot. Since 1928 the Golly brooch collector scheme by Robertson's has sent out more than 20 million badges over a lengthy period and it has sustained loyalty and interest in their product. By comparison, it is estimated that probably nearly 10,000,000 of Aris's Cococubs were distributed over a shorter five-year period. However, they have not maintained the same continued longevity of interest as Robertson's, which became the longest running collector scheme in history and continued until 2001 when Golly was replaced by Roald Dahl characters.

Even in today's modern consumer market, chocolate manufacturers resurrect the nostalgic appeal of Aris's popular figures and try to replicate the success of the Cadbury marketing strategy. Paynes Poppets, first launched in 1937, have relaunched their much-loved bite size treats with funky retro styling of nostalgic icons on the front of each pack and a new "Racket in a Packet" strap line. The Payne's advertising concept may be popular but it is not original. One cannot dismiss the similarities or even suggestion of plagiarism as it very closely resembles Aris's Cococub design of Mr Pie Porker that was manufactured by Britain's for Cadbury in 1934 (fig 4.42-4.43).

²³⁰ 'Golliwogs & Robertson's Jam'. Available online at: <http://www.golliwogg.co.uk/robertson's.htm>. [Website accessed 14 November 2008].

Plate 43



Fig 4.42. Mr Pie Porker, Cadbury's Cococub 1934
Childrens Bournville Cocoa by Aris.

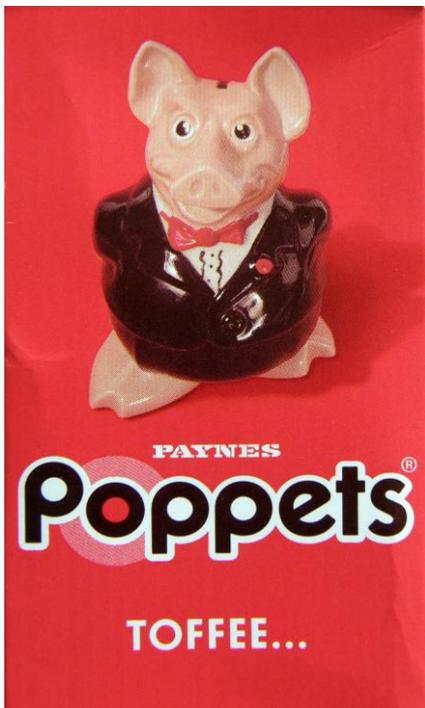


Fig 4.43. Paynes Poppets 2008
Relaunch from 1937



Fig 4.44. National Westminster Bank
Piggy Bank Savings Scheme
Nathaniel.

I have observed firms not associated with the confectionary industry have also borrowed Aris's characters and used them as a marketing tool to reward the consumer for investing in their services. For instance, the National Westminster Bank Savings Scheme (1985-88) gave a promotional gift piggy bank, which included a family of five characters, to children opening an account with the bank. Depending on the balance achieved throughout a period, the child would receive additional pigs to collect. Sir Nathaniel Westminster the father, Lady Hillary the mother, Maxwell the boy and Woody the baby are not far removed from Aris's drawings of Mr and Mrs Pie Porker and Piglet (fig 4.44). Sunshine Ceramics manufactured the first batch of pigs for the NatWest Bank and, like William Britain's, the company was unable to cope with the unexpected demand for the piggy banks and production of the pigs was eventually taken over by Wade Ceramics Ltd. Like the Cococubs, both collectables have unique modifications and colour variants, such as the unusual look-alike for Sir Nathaniel without his usual red bow tie. A limited edition of 100 was manufactured by Wade for the Lombard NatWest Bank as a gift to visitors at the Institute of Chartered Accountants of England and Wales Annual Conference in London in 1995. Limited editions, colour variations and models command high prices and attract collectors. However, the interest in the NatWest Scheme has not been sustained, unlike the Cococubs who have retained their value and collectability. Like his book illustrations that which were plagiarised alongside Beatrix Potter's tales by the Americans, it would appear that others have also copied Aris's commercial ideas. The plagiarist has himself been plagiarised.

The concept of inserting a quality collectable similar to Aris's into a product cannot be replicated in today's consumer market which relies upon plastic and paper and generally makes current items in packaging unexciting, short lived and without the same commercial success or value. The Health and Safety Act protects consumers from contamination by preventing wholesalers from inserting toxic materials into packaging. The lead content of Britain's

Cococubs would make it impossible to insert this kind of item into foods and therefore limits the scope for providing the consumer with durable and quality collectables.

Aris should also be recognised for the contribution that he made to Cadbury's financial profits as a direct result of his creative ideas. There is an argument to suggest that Cadbury's increased profits could have been brought about by the significant reduction in the price of Dairy Milk by 70% between 1920-1934. Certainly, product consumption had increased from 3% at the beginning of the century to 90% of the population, becoming part of the family's staple diet. The introduction of the Cococub Milk Chocolate Bar, the only wrapped "penny bar" produced at the time, proved popular, with Aris's recognisable characters appearing on the outside wrapper design. Cadbury's strategy of increasing the volume of sales and cross marketing their product ranges compensated for the lower cash margins brought about as a direct result of their price reductions, building a loyal brand of customers and increasing overall profits.

In email correspondence, John Bradley has suggested that the Cococubs were a loyalty strategy that essentially prevented a sales decline. He writes that:

Their commitment to decreasing prices could have backfired if they had not simultaneously worked hard to maintain if not increase consumer perceptions of quality, which I feel Aris's work clearly achieved. So they were complimentary strategies where the combination was greater than the sum of the parts. However, Cococubs was basically a loyalty strategy that encouraged consumers to keep on buying the Bournville cocoa brand and not switch to other products that were challenging Bournville at the time, such as cheaper cocoas from Fry and newer products such as Ovaltine and Cadbury's own Bournvita. As such, the company would not have expected Cococubs to be driving sales forward to any great extent, but preventing a sales decline is just as valuable a cause... I would caution

against giving him too much credit for the company's total success that was largely driven by some quite stupendous sales increases in their leading brand, Dairy Milk.²³¹

Neither Cadbury nor Britain's had predicted the success brought about by Aris's marketing and advertising promotions and this supports Bradley's contention that perhaps initially Cadbury introduced the product to prevent any sales decline. However, although Aris may not have substantially influenced Cadbury's total profits, his role was evidently more than supporting the product and preventing a sales decline as Bradley suggests. This argument is strongly supported by *The Grocery and the Provision Merchant Journal*'s description of the scheme, 'It is difficult to over-estimate the sales value of such a scheme'. Furthermore, it comments that, 'So great has been the demand for Children's Bournville Cocoa that although factories are all on overtime there aren't enough Cococub models to go round.'²³² It is interesting that influential retail journalists at the time recognised the importance and added value of the promotion, which is evidence that the scheme was perceived by a wider audience as playing more than just a supportive role to other lines.

Furthermore, long-term sales forecasts could have been much higher had Cadbury predicted the success of the scheme, but they were unable to provide the constant supply of cocoa. As the minutes record:

Cocoa sales for the whole year show a slight increase both in tonnage and value, which would clearly have been greater if we had had adequate supplies of

²³¹ John Bradley to Sian Dawson, email dated 16 June 2009.

²³² *The Grocery and the Provision Merchant Journal*, November 1934, p. 276.

Children's Cocoa. It is almost impossible, however, to assess the actual amount which we lost during the quarter by the deficiency.²³³

Evidently, if Cadbury had met consumer demand by continuously supplying cocoa, sales of this product would have been substantially higher and better results would have been reflected in the Annual Home Sales Reports. However, the intermission period in production meant lower increased sales figures. Also, close examination reveals that of Cadbury's index of sales per head (1934) submitted to the Board, reveals that:

the percentage changes for each area in each section, only Birmingham and London failed to make an increase in Cocoa sales. The increase in Leeds (+9.2%) is almost entirely due to the introduction of Children's Cocoa. The line was reintroduced before the end of the year.²³⁴

The profit and loss graph substantiates this argument and indicates the product's importance (fig 4.45). The tonnage sales figures visibly indicate two critical times: firstly, in October 1934 when the Cococubs were inserted into tins a dramatic increase can be seen in sales; later, at the demise of a free toy in every tin in mid-1937, there is a decline in sales, even though the price remained static. I suggest this was a direct result of the end of the scheme; Aris's Cococubs were popular with the customers who bought the product for the collectable and became less interested in the product when the scheme ceased. Interestingly, towards the end of 1937, when members were asked to re-enrol by sending a disc from the cocoa, with their name and address to Jonathan to receive the Cococub News for 1938, the sales again increased. As a loyalty strategy, it obviously worked. At this time, Cadbury had a range of product lines, which is evident from the *Annual*

²³³ Minutes of the Bournville Board, 19 June 1935, *Annual Homes Sales Reports 1930-1945 also Annual Export Sales Reports 1933-1943*, p. 3. Cadbury Archive, Bournville production site, Birmingham.

²³⁴ Minutes of the Bournville Board, Sales Report 1934, *Annual Homes Sales Reports 1930-1945 also Annual Export Sales Reports 1933-1943*, p. 3. Cadbury Archive, Bournville production site, Birmingham.

Plate 44

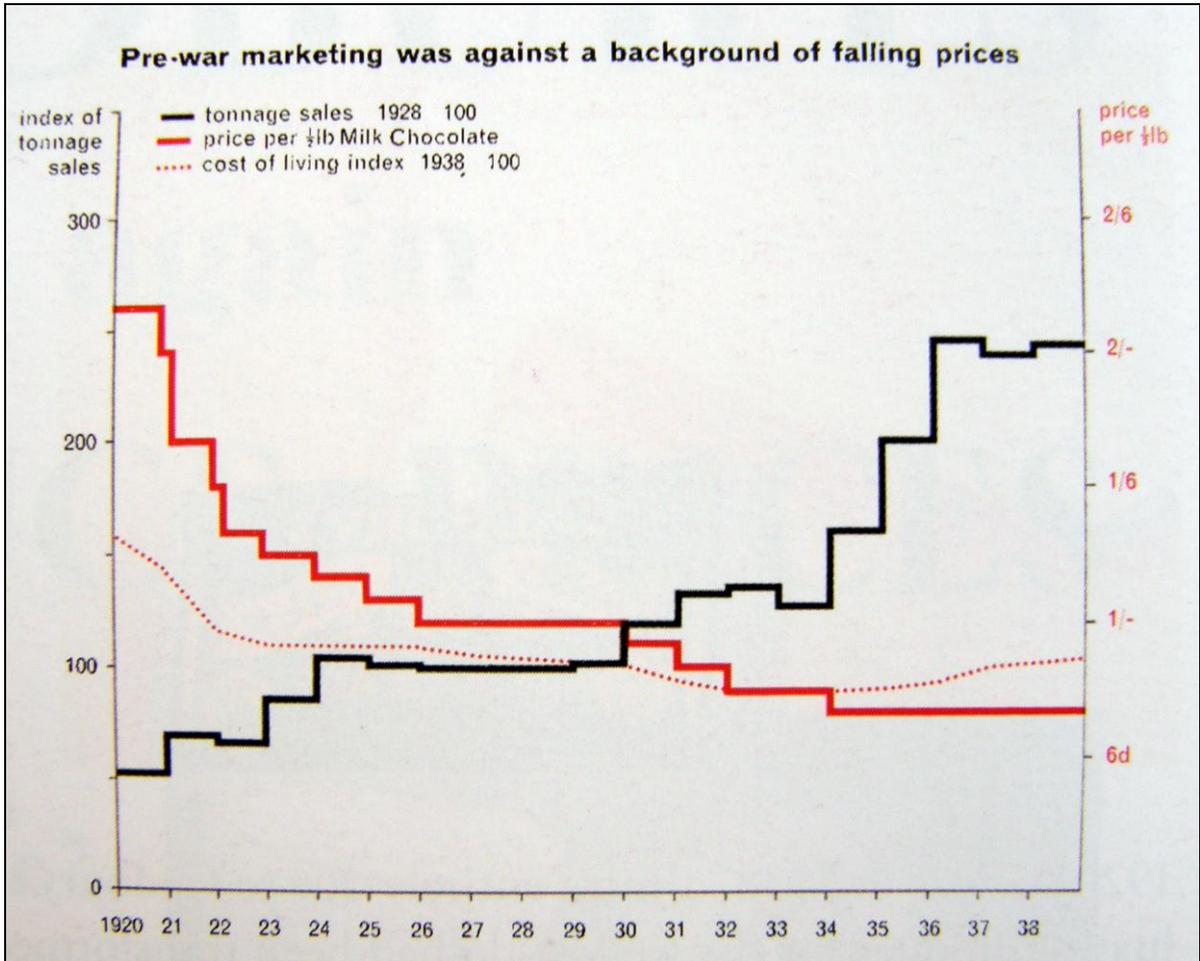
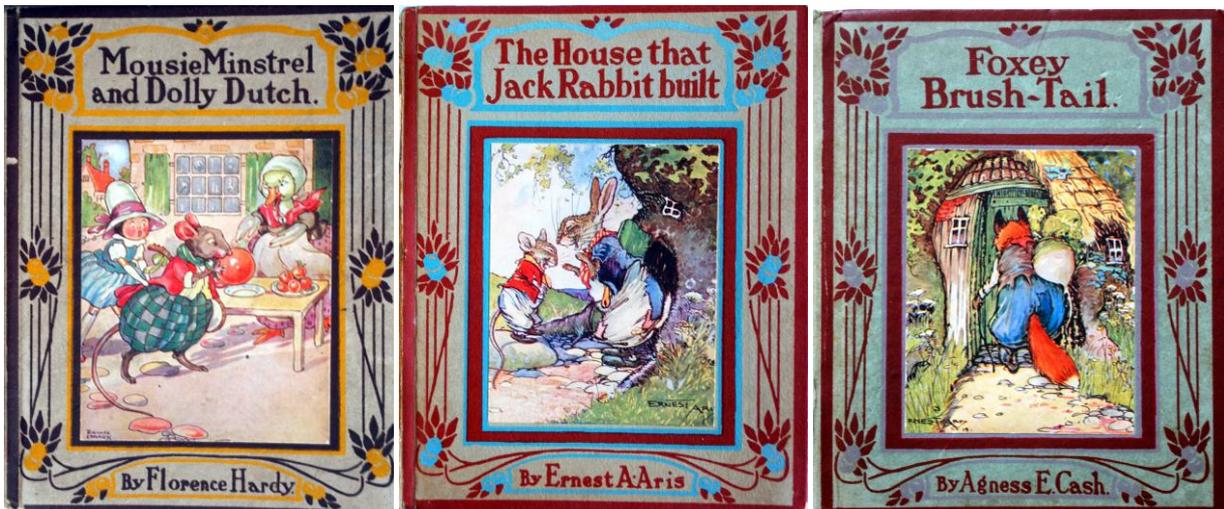


Fig 4.45. Children's Bournville Cocoa - Cococub period 1934 – 1939



Florence Hardy, 1917

Ernest A. Aris, 1917

Agness E. Cash, 1917

Fig 4.46.

Home Sales 1930-1945 also Export Sales 1933-1945. Tonnage sales of cocoa and volume increases of the Children's Cocoa at specific periods can be identified when the product was introduced in particular geographical locations such as Leeds. This undeniably suggests that Aris did have a positive impact on Cadbury's total profit margins, although it must be recognised that this was a single product across a broad range of lines in a substantial company

Aris's illustrations for Children's Bournville Cocoa and the production of his Cococubs by the renowned William Britain Ltd., have over time only increased the popularity and value of the associated ephemera, as well as reinforcing his reputation as an outstanding commercial artist. Aris's idea has proved immensely popular and played a vital part in one of most successful advertising campaigns in history. Today the Cococubs are highly collectable for their rarity and scarce figures command high prices. Ernest Aris, the anonymous creator behind the iconic brand's success, deserves further recognition for his accomplishment.

Conclusion

An appraisal of the work and legacy of Ernest Aris must take account of how illustration was perceived at that time and the cultural circumstances that may have provided the opportunity for Aris to enter this occupation. During the Victorian period, there was a growth in the number of books published with illustrations. The mid-nineteenth century saw the illustration of religious pamphlets, literary and humorous family magazines and books, which resulted in a subsequent requirement for graphic work and provided burgeoning artists with repeated commissions, employment, as well as greater recognition.²³⁵ At the turn of the twentieth century, other trends such as the increasing demand for pictorial postcards as a cheap and effective method of communication, the emergence of illustrated posters on hoardings as a new form of visual advertising, and the collection of original and creative cigarette cards provided opportunities for burgeoning artists like Aris and many great painters, to be drawn into the lucrative sphere of illustrative work.

There were also various developments in the representation of anthropomorphism that may have been a stimulus to Aris. These included the images created by the grand masters Doré and Grandville, and other influential artists including the fashionable images of Randolph Caldecott, Walter Crane and Sir John Tenniel, who were Aris's immediate predecessors. Without doubt, a comparison can be drawn between many of the anthropomorphic personalities and storylines that Aris created and those of his predecessors and contemporaries, Beatrix Potter, Harry Rountree and G. H. Thompson (1853-1953), whose greatest success was *The Animals*, a

²³⁵ Books dealing with children's book illustration include Marcus Crouch, *Treasure Seekers and Borrowers, Children's Books in Britain 1900-1960* (London: Library Association, 1962), Richard Dalby, *The Golden Age of Children's Book Illustration* (London: O'Mara, 1991), Debora Denenholz Morse and Martin A. Danahay, *Victorian Animal Dreams: Representations of Animals in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), Peter Hunt, *Children's Literature: An Illustrated History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), Joyce Irene Whalley and Tessa Rose Chester, *A History of Children's Book Illustration* (London: John Murray with the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1988), Colin White, *The World of the Nursery*, (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1984).

series of books published by Ernest Nister. It would appear there were many artists during Aris's era who specialised in this genre and were influenced by their forebears in this field, all illustrating similar themes and reacting to popular commercial needs at that time. Like these other illustrators, Aris's work should be acknowledged.

Aris's legacy is also suggested by the personal notes and correspondence of his lifelong friends who wrote forewords for his books, such as Charles Bayne and Robert Reeve whom he worked alongside.²³⁶ Bayne, the editor of *Little Folks*, who worked with Aris for twenty-five years, summed up his opinion of Aris in the foreword he wrote for Aris's classic *Famous Animal Tales*, his adaption of Aesop's fables:

he is a born naturalist with a deep and sympathetic understanding of animals. Consequently, though he may dress up his characters and give them human expressions, he never distorts them but always represents them in their true forms.... In this book he has realized one of his ambitions. For many years it has been his desire to illustrate in one volume and in a manner worthy of their greatness, the world's most famous animal stories. He has spared neither time nor labour in the production of the drawings, and has wrought in them not only his love and understanding of children and of animals, but also all his wonderful mastery of technique. As a result he has achieved a book which will be enjoyed and cherished by children for its delightful pictures of their favourite story-book animals, and will be prized by every lover of artistic quality and worth.²³⁷

²³⁶ The editor of *Little Folks*, Charles S. Bayne, met Aris circa 1910 and they worked closely as students of natural history, writing and illustrating together the Charlecote Series and the foreword for Aris's classic *Famous Animal Tales* (1935). Russell Reeve was a teacher at Hornsey Art College, Crouch End, where Aris lived and wrote the foreword for *The Art of the Pen* (1948).

²³⁷ Charles Bayne, 'Foreword', Ernest Aris, *Famous Animal Tales* (Philadelphia: David McKay Company, 1935), p. 6.

Unfortunately, other than Potter's comments in her correspondence, there are only a couple of direct assessments of Aris's work from peers, who commissioned him to illustrate books. In 1943 Aris illustrated *The Smiley Rabbit* for Lorna Wood who wrote, 'I love your illustrations. I always had an ambition to write a book that somebody would illustrate but I never thought it would look so good!'²³⁸ The ideas Aris conceived for Jane Thornicroft's *Dawn the Fawn* (1948) were, according to Thornicroft:

enchanting – you have made it a lovely book. Thank you for making my brain children visible in such attractive shapes....your grand idea to include small illustrations for insertion in the text, and for the delightful illustration to *Kiki the Squirrel*.²³⁹

Such remarks evidently suggest Aris's clients were pleased with the results, but the private notes do not convey that his work was exceptional or out of the ordinary.

It was the Potter affiliation that could have been momentous and transformed Aris's historical reputation and legacy both then and now. Interestingly, there is much circumstantial evidence to suggest there was more to the relationship with Potter than initially meets the eye and is currently known, and possibly there is further correspondence to be uncovered in Potter's letters, which are currently privately archived. Aris's correspondence with Potter has certainly unveiled another dimension in Potter's life, as well as revealing new information about her work. For instance, she wrote to Mr Warne:

You had better engage Mr E A 'Aris to illustrate the "Sly Old Cat". His plagiarisms are [sic] unblushing, and his drawing excellent. If you showed him

²³⁸ Lorna Wood to Ernest Aris, 14 July 1943. This letter is inserted into a copy of *The Smiley Rabbit* in Aris's archive collection.

²³⁹ Jane Thornicroft to Ernest Aris, 1948. Aris inserted the original letter into a copy of *Dawn the Fawn* is in the private collection of Siân Dawson.

Nellie's little booklet I would have little doubt that he would be sufficiently modest to copy the designs exactly, and do them really well.²⁴⁰

Clearly, then, Potter had considered using Aris for another book, in addition to *The Oakmen*. She also wrote directly to Aris, forwarding her provisional sketches and commissioning him. Previously, Warne's had sent Potter a parcel of cribs, but where did she obtain Aris's private address to correspond directly with him? It seems that she must have been in contact with him on a previous occasion. This is also supported by Leslie Linder, who writes of 'The Artist Mr Ernest A. Aris, with whom she had been in touch on several previous occasions to try out the quality and scope of his work'.²⁴¹ This confirms there was a prior correspondence or association.²⁴² Additionally, Potter wrote, 'He lived in Holloway, but had at one time been employed in Windermere. I am sure he had no suspicion [of Potter's identity] to the end of our acquaintance'.²⁴³ Evidently, Potter had known Aris previously and wrote to him using her married name Heelis, believing that he would not realise who she actually was. Aris's mischievous response using her maiden name indicated that he had not been deceived as to who the author of the correspondence really was. I discussed the issue with an expert at the V&A and the Beatrix Potter Society about whether Potter was seriously considering using Aris as a 'second string'; however, it seems quite evident from her letters that Aris was someone whom Potter believed she could rely upon to produce illustrations to order, although she undoubtedly wished to retain control over her stories and ideas and thought Aris to be a good enough

²⁴⁰ Beatrix Potter to Mr Warne, 12 August 1916, Judy Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter's Letters* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 227.

²⁴¹ Leslie Linder, *A History of the Writings of Beatrix Potter* (London: Frederick Warne, 1971), p. 240.

²⁴² Beatrix Potter to Fruing Warne, 10 November 1917, Judy Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter's Letters* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 239.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

illustrator to provide designs on a fee basis.²⁴⁴ Four years later in 1921, Potter wrote to Fruing Warne, possibly regretting her handling and treatment of Aris: ‘It is useless trying to have drawings of mine patched up by the worthy Mr Stokoe because he hasn’t got it in him. The scamp Arris (sic) had!’²⁴⁵

The significance of this connection is important to both parties. Aris is probably the only artist who Potter commissioned and seriously considered as a professional partner to illustrate her work on a commercial basis. This gives Aris a unique place in history. Potter was a renowned and accomplished professional illustrator and author of twenty-two books, with an established reputation to consider. Therefore it is important to take account of the factors that may have influenced her decision and her reasons not to formalise the partnership or collaborate with Aris. Although Potter was a distinguished author of tales in her own right, it is for the quality of her illustrations and popular characters that she will be best remembered. However, there is a disparity between the technical styles and techniques of Potter and Aris. Potter may possibly have been concerned about preserving her long-term status and how best her interests would be served and remembered in the long term. She even went to great lengths to secure the secrecy of her burial site, which is only known by one person today.²⁴⁶ Potter may have realised that if Aris had illustrated her books in a totally different technical style, her status as an illustrator could be compromised or questioned and their combined efforts might not have had the enduring popular appeal of her previous books.

Aris’s plagiarism of Potter may have affected his reputation. In Aris’s defence, many of his characters, stories and names are similar to other contemporaries including Harry Rountree

²⁴⁴ Emma Laws at the V&A and the Beatrix Potter Society thought a professional relationship between Potter and Aris unlikely. However, I do not believe that either party had examined in detail all correspondence with an understanding and background knowledge of Ernest Aris.

²⁴⁵ Beatrix Potter to Fruing Warne, 12 January 1921, Judy Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter’s Letters* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 267.

²⁴⁶ This information was confirmed by the House Steward Catherine Pritchard at Beatrix Potter’s Hill Top Farm, Sawrey.

who specialised in this genre. These artists were responding to popular themes and cultural trends and the commercial needs of the publishers. Anthropomorphism, for example, was commonly used by artists and was therefore encouraged by publishers, eager to provide imaginary tales that fulfilled the ever increasing demand for this type of literature. Both Aris's and Potter's work was influenced by and resembled subject matter that was prevalent in that of prominent artists from the golden era of book illustration such as Caldecott. I have also concluded that, although Aris plagiarised her characters, he was not directly influenced by Potter's technical skill. This difference has been noted by the critic Margaret Blount, who wrote that Aris's 'Drawing of wild flowers, moths, leaves, insects and other animals is impeccable and beautiful and the stories have a slightly romantic element quite lacking in Beatrix Potter.'²⁴⁷ Blount clearly acknowledges Aris's drawing for his books have imaginative flair and creative talent by comparison to Potter, whose storylines are very factual and the illustrations tend to be more realistic and true to life.

Aris was an accomplished artist in his own right and there is no evidence, indication or reference to any legal proceedings of plagiarism that may have arisen from the accusations between the parties concerned. Significantly, it is interesting to note that Potter admired Aris's work and it was she who actively sought to commission him to produce the drawings for *The Oakmen*. Even though Potter deviously shielded her maiden name in any correspondence, she defended Aris to her publishers, Warne's, and suggested that it was Aris's publishers who needed reproaching. Potter probably recognised Aris was producing large quantities of work to fulfil his professional obligations to the various interests he had in newspapers, magazines and his own books. She may also have recognised that, although some of Aris's ideas are comparable to hers, this could well be coincidence. Potter wrote to Fruing Warne in November 1917:

²⁴⁷ Blount, *Animal Land*, p. 157.

It is a fact that he sent me a booklet, which was rather like a story of mine, which had never been published.... The copying is very dishonest on the part of the publishers & in a less degree of the part of Arris [sic].²⁴⁸

Potter, then, recognised that Aris was not entirely responsible and that partly his publisher's were.

There is a strong case to suggest that, had Aris's and Potter's work been published, the partnership would probably have proved to be successful and would have had a profoundly different outcome and influence on Aris's career and long term reputation. The association of Potter's writing skills and Aris's creative and humorous illustrative ideas would have made Aris a recognised household name and his reputation would have been rather different. Few artists in children's literature are comparable to Potter and her influence has continued throughout the twentieth century, increasing in recent years both at home and abroad. Aris ought to be recognised for the fact that such an eminent author commissioned him because of his technical skill and understanding. This alone could be considered justification for the argument that Aris deserves greater respect. It is also interesting to note that, if a comparison were made between the two artists today, it is evident that Aris was more successful across a broader field of design. I have concluded that Aris's association with Potter was also the reason why Aris was forced to change publishing house and use the pseudonyms of Robin A. Hood (1916) and Dan Crow (1917). It can be argued, therefore, that Aris's affiliation with Potter did have had a detrimental effect on his career.

The chief criticism of Aris is the lack of originality in his characters and the similarities between his technical styles of design and that of other illustrators, most notably Harry Rountree. Aris moved in a circle that included many famous illustrators, including John Hassell, Harry Rountree, Cecil Aldin and E. H. Shepard (1879-1976). "Unlike many of his contemporaries,

²⁴⁸ Potter to Warne, 10 November 1917, Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter's Letters*, p. 239.

Aris does not appear to have been a member of any of the artists' clubs or societies such as The London Sketch Club or the Savage Club, where his life-long pal Charles S. Bayne was a member".²⁴⁹ Why was it that Aris did not actively participate in the movement that included all the eminent illustrators from that period? I believe that Aris was probably excluded because his work was regarded as too commercial and unoriginal. Although similarities between Aris's tales and those of many authors and illustrators may have contributed to his lack of respect, there is an argument to suggest that the prolific amount of work Aris produced in a relatively short period (170 books) may have perhaps led him to be considered overly productive by his contemporaries and he was perhaps shunned for his opportunism and regarded by his contemporaries as a 'hack'. It is disappointing that eminent illustrators and Aris's peers failed to recognise his potential talent at that time and appear to have distanced themselves, possibly as a result of Potter's issues with him.

I believe that Aris's narrative verse and stories were also inferior by comparison to his peers: none of the stories are particularly original, or could be classified as a memorable classic and were possibly written hastily to meet a commercial deadline. The American author Thornton Burgess (1874-1965), similarly to Aris, loved the beauty of nature and wrote about his outdoor observations of creatures, using them as the central plot and theme in his stories. Burgess wrote a similar number of books to Aris in the same period, and Enid Blyton for whom Aris illustrated, produced 750. Both of these authors, like Aris, had their works translated and published into other languages including, Spanish, Italian and French. Yet Burgess and Blyton are held in high regard and continue to retain their remarkable reputations, even though Blyton attracted extensive criticism at the time.

²⁴⁹ 'Ernest Aris', Steve Holland of Bear Alley Books, available online at: <<http://www.londonsketchclub.com/archives/1800history/index.html>> [Website accessed on July 2009]. Available online at: <http://www.londonsketchclub.com/archives/1800history/index.html> [Website accessed on 31 November 2011].

Despite Aris's very naive line drawing illustrations and the coloured images for his earlier works that are technically very weak, he went on to develop a style of illustration that has proved to be a winning formula and can be regarded as timeless. Many of Aris's books have been republished and rewritten, but his illustrations have remained unchanged. There were two editions of the *Uncle Toby Tales* (1921 and 1947), the *Tasseltip Tales* (Ladybird Series 474 in 1947 and Series 497 in 1975) and *The Brambledown Tales* (1947 and 1989), which proves there is still a demand in the current market for Aris's work.²⁵⁰

It is extremely likely that the early illustrators, editors and publishers would have collaborated on ideas and critical comments as a means of stimulating written and illustrative creativity and it was evident that many of Aris's peers were either working along similar themes or influenced by him, for example, Lilian Amy Govey (1886–1974) who was an illustrator who specialised in fairies and children. There are many technical features in her work and titles that are comparable to Aris. Both illustrators worked extensively for Henry Frowde Hodder & Staughton (HFHS) and Humphrey Milford and both illustrated the small books contained in a cardboard sleeve (1910) and the sticks books. Aris's titles included *Hollow Tree House* and *The Wooden Soldier*, whilst Govey illustrated *The Acorn Elf* and *Little Pink Petticoat* (all c. 1910). Govey illustrated *Bunny the Bold* (1913) and *The House that Jack Built* (1915), whilst Aris wrote and illustrated *A Bold Bad Bunny* (1920) and *The House That Jack Rabbit Built* (1920), all published by S. W. Partridge.

Aris did not create a new genre of anthropomorphism in illustration. Nevertheless, he was influential and made a major contribution to promoting this type of art using a modern approach that other artists could identify with and replicate. Ernest Noble illustrated during the

²⁵⁰ *Uncle Toby Tales* 1921 Series had two titles and was extended to four in 1947. The *Tasseltip Tales* remained 6 volumes and was reissued and rewritten by Sarah Strong with Aris's original illustrations in 1975 with different titles. *The Brambledown Tales* by Ward Lock & Co. Limited was extended from four titles in 1947 to eight titles in 1989.

same period as Aris (1910-1920) and is another artist who produced comic humour picture postcards and illustrated Agness E. Cash's *Foxye Brush-Tail* (1917) for the publisher S. W. Partridge, who were Aris's publishers from 1916-1920. Both were associated with the same publisher and it is conceivable there was a demand for this specific type of illustration; the resemblance in the style of execution of the anthropomorphic characters is very similar, although undoubtedly Aris is more proficient. Interestingly, if a comparison were made of both artists signature; Noble's is identical to Aris and initially this led me to believe that perhaps Aris had illustrated under another pseudonym. Florence Hardy wrote and illustrated *Mousie Minstrel and Dolly Dutch* (1917), published by S. W. Partridge and is another illustrator who had plainly reproduced Aris's characteristics. Hardy published a series of postcards between 1913-1918 for the German publishing house Dondorf, which were part of a series of pictures featuring little Dutch girls and a boy in different scenes. The style of her postcard illustrations were visibly different to the illustrations in the book and plainly she had imitated Aris's trademark features of the elongated feet, ragamuffin style of dress and the chequered pattern on the balloon trousers for this book cover (fig 4.46).

As discussed, many of Aris's books were translated into several languages within Europe, where purchase rights existed under European Law. Others were illegally published or plagiarised by the Americans, who issued sequels or pirated versions, such as *Peter Rabbit and his Ma* (1917) using Aris's illustrations from *Billie Rabbit*, without any acknowledgement to him. It was quite common to use an illustrator's image and insert them alongside another author's tales and accompany an illustrator's pictures like Virginia Albert's drawings in *Peter Rabbit and His Ma*. Grace Lodge clearly based her style of illustration on Aris's original illustrations of *Brer Rabbit* (1942) for Enid Blytons's new version (1963). In addition, if we compare the simple stories of Alison Utley (1874-1976), a prolific British writer of over 100 books that focused on rural topics. She was best known for her children's series about the tales

of anthropomorphic animals that included *Little Grey Rabbit*, *Sam Pig*, *The Little Red Fox* and *Hare*. The innocence of the characters and stories were not dissimilar to those of Aris, although her technical style of illustration was more akin to Potter's. Utley's technical style is different to Aris, although her tales may have been influenced by him or Potter, alternatively was she simply responding to trends in demand for this type of illustrative work. The illustrations of Norman Meredith more closely resemble the technical aspects of Aris's work. It is not known if he was influenced by Aris; however Meredith's use of bright colours and the trademark features, particularly the spectacles appear a close imitation of Aris's work. There are close similarities and one could speculate that he drew his inspiration from the humour and characteristics of Aris's work. Another well-known British author and illustrator is Jill Barklem (1951-), who wrote the about the mice of Brambly Hedge, a series of eight books published in 1980. These chronicles of hedgerow life, based around Barklem's interest in natural history, creatures and traditional rural customs and crafts, have become popular classics and are often compared with Potter, although evidently the source of her series title was probably drawn from Aris's *Brambledown Tales* (1947). Therefore, we can conclude that Aris had an effect and to some extent an influence on subsequent generations in the literary as well as the commercial field.

I believe that Aris was also a master at understanding the influence of his work for children. His work responded to children's psychological needs, his illustrations of anthropomorphic creatures fascinating the child's sense of imagination. As his lifelong friend Bayne commented, 'the secret of his success is largely that he has the exceptional gift of being able to enter into the child's mind and to look out on the world from that delightful point of view'.²⁵¹ With the exception of the posters and postcards, Aris's commercial designs were concentrated on the young market. Aris's technical and emotional approach to the subject was always governed by a set of commandments:

²⁵¹ Aris, *Famous Animal Tales*, p. 5.

be human, be humorous, be interesting and be unexpected. By ‘human’ I mean, depict the things the child itself would do. What is the secret of the Mickey Mouse? What is it that makes children love him? It is his cuddlesomeness, his loveliness and his naughtiness – words from the child’s realm which it understands.²⁵²

Aris was consciously aware of the sensitivity of his audience and depicted images that a child would relate to or identify with, understanding that they would be enthusiastic about recognising a familiar character. Aris never depicted anything in the nature of cruelty in his images, even if this was portrayed in the body of the narrative text. Rather, his work accentuates the humorous and pleasing incidents in the story, giving the reader a feel good factor. Aris never underestimated the importance of satisfying the interest and desires of the audience through his exaggerated movement and excitement, the elements vital to securing a child’s attention. The viewer wants and needs images of fun combined with the element of surprise and Aris recognised that he had to get down to the level of the child if the reader was to understand the message conveyed through his vignettes, advertising and illustrations,.

In addition to the exceptional amount of literature that Aris produced, he should be recognised for his success within the commercial arena across a broad number of artistic disciplines. Aris continued to reuse his trademark characteristics far beyond the traditional areas of a literary illustrator, rebranding his characters in different forms of advertising, broadening their interest and appeal, whilst building an appreciation of his own work amongst the public. Aris was able to identify and establish himself in the commercial art field by visualising and understanding the core values of corporate marketing strategies. Aris’s experience from the success of his books meant he knew from a commercial perspective which

²⁵² Ernest Aris, ‘Illustrating Children’s Books’, *The Artist*, September 1938, 22-24, (p. 24).

personalities had appeal and he was able to transform his popular characters into other commercial art forms and advertising.

Aris was quick to recognise that following the Great War there was a change in social and cultural needs, which meant artists and manufacturers had to respond. William Britain's had withdrawn war-like figures and started to provide alternative themes in their products that were commercial and had popular appeal and Aris's anthropomorphic animals proved to be a welcome change following this period of depression and hardship. The spin-off products Aris created for the Cocolub Club, *The Cocolub News*, annuals and games, which were exchanged for coupons, evidently attracted customers who would purchase Cadbury's product and grow into loyal long term customers. Aris's innovative advertising and ephemera was remarkable; it provided interest and longevity and has recently become very collectable and highly sought after. It is evident that Aris was an integral part of Cadbury's advertising strategy which resulted in the growth of business and profits and he should be recognised for providing a leading brand with one of the most successful advertising campaigns in history. However, the irony is that Aris's name is still relatively unknown, even though he was the artistic creator of this hugely successful campaign. There is a risk that much of Aris's contribution to Cadbury could be lost after the subsequent takeover by Kraft, who may not be supportive or appreciative of the historical archive records stored. Two former Cadbury chairmen Sir Dominic Cadbury and Roger Carr pointed out:

The value of a company reflects its reputation built up over generation, and consumers' trust that the company and its brands are one. 'Cut the tie and submerge the brands in a larger entity,' they wrote, 'and both present and future value will be lost.'²⁵³

²⁵³ Cadbury, *Chocolate Wars*, p. 299.

The enormous debt incurred by Kraft to raise £7billion to fund the takeover increased its total debt to £18 billion and the only means of generating income would be to strip Cadbury of its assets to service the debt. It will be interesting to gauge the impact of the closure of the significant sites of manufacturing such as Keynsham and the repercussions to the global brand if products are gradually withdrawn and whether public appreciation and nostalgia for Cadbury will intensify. The historic collection in Cadbury's Archive Department, specifically Aris's material, ought to be considered an integral part of our national heritage and must be retained for future generations as a whole. For the time being, Sarah Foden the archivist at Bournville has advised the Cadbury historical archives under Kraft ownership are ‘

perfectly safe and will be preserved at Bournville. Kraft have an extensive Global Archives team of which we are now part, and it has already invested in the Archives area here at Bournville. None of the Archive collection will be sold.²⁵⁴

The early part of Aris's working career has not been discussed in detail in this thesis. The reason for this is that the work he undertook for newspapers and magazines after the turn of the twentieth century has proved difficult to locate because of the volume of resource material that is required to be researched, allied with the availability and limited access to original documentation. However, recent improvements in technology have enabled the British Library to announce plans to digitise and release online 40 million pages of national newspapers and illustrated publications from their exceptional and unique collection archived at Colindale, which I used extensively in tracing many of Aris's original advertisements for Cadbury.²⁵⁵ The online

²⁵⁴ Sarah Foden to Sian Dawson, email dated 29 November 2011.

²⁵⁵ Neil Midgley, 'British Library to digitise 40 million pages of archived newspapers', *The Telegraph*, 19 May, 2010. Available online at: <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/7736936/British-Library-to-digitise-40-million-pages-of-archived-newspapers.html>> [website accessed on 19 May 2010]. Photographs from Dudley Chignall's private collection.

archive is to include 52,000 local and national titles, as well as illustrated publications including *The Graphic* weekly newspaper, to which Aris contributed.²⁵⁶ Such resources may reveal other influences on Aris's work, as well as other publications that he may have contributed to that are currently unknown, as well as possibly disclosing new information from a period of his life that is currently incomplete. The online facility currently extends from 1800-1900; therefore, the only way of currently identifying Aris's work in illustrated publications is from references he specifically mentions in his books or articles, and recognising his signature on the illustrations in each hard copy. This is a time-consuming exercise because of the volume of material and publications that are required to be researched. However, in due course, more material will inevitably become available online from the early part of the twentieth century, as a result of demands to preserve these important social documents and this will hopefully allow easier access to Aris's early original documentation.²⁵⁷

I believe the only way to really reevaluate and recognise Aris's legacy and contribution in the modern age would be to display all the different components of his work collectively. It would be a unique collection and give the public the opportunity to gain a true appreciation of his inheritance. Aris's assortment of creative ideas and the range of book cover designs would present a captivating and exceptionally interesting visual display, as well as bestowing an appreciation to future generations of the quantity of literary tales that Aris wrote and authored.

²⁵⁶ Aris contributed to a number of newspapers, periodical, magazines and journals that included *The Jackdaw* (1904-1905), *The Graphic* (1910,11,12), *Printer's Pie* (1912), *The Bookman* (1915), *The Strand* (1913), *Pearson's Magazine* (1929), *My Magazine*, *The Infant's Magazine* (1920), *Daily Express* (1934), Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children, first edition of their *Peter Pan Magazine* (1936). Publishing dates unknown for *The Angler*, *The Fishing Gazette*, *Angler's News*, *Game and Gun* and *South African Fishing Gazette*. Titles were obtained from sources that included *Who's Who in Art*, the British Library and inside the covers of Aris's book such as *Fishing*.

²⁵⁷ The volume of national and daily newspapers publications that Aris may have contributed to makes a manual task physically time consuming and impracticable.

This would also highlight Aris's technical expertise, especially if displayed alongside *The Oakmen* letter, which brought a whole new dimension to Aris's work and reputation.

The commercial aspect of Aris's career was diverse, ranging from the Cadbury Cococubs, postcard series and the cigarette cards, which all provided a colourful range of humorous designs and an insight into social and cultural needs, along with a representation of national heritage from a bygone era now lost. Aris's unique collection of posters for London Transport reveals an unknown aspect about his artistic merit and technical skill in another creative discipline. The success of having had his work selected by Frank Pick for the National Collection of Posters alongside other distinguished artists in this field, is again a real acknowledgement of his expertise. I believe that the future of Aris's legacy is very much dependent on a new public awareness and perception of his talent. An exhibition of his original watercolours and designs from historical collections, personal archival material, supported by a published biography, and the first comprehensive catalogue, which I have researched and assembled of Aris's complete works, books and all his commercial work would be a fitting tribute to this artist. If Aris's catalogue of work was exhibited at the V&A, where much of the significant archival material remains, it would serve to truly enhance Aris's reputation and would give the public the opportunity to gain an understanding of the diverse range of work that Aris undertook in different fields of creative and commercial design. Aris's innovative and eye catching book covers, the posters, his humorous postcards and very fine nature drawings for cigarette cards ought to confirm his reputation as an all round fine artist with exceptional skills across many disciplines and a gift for understanding child psychology and the audience that his work was specifically directed and appealed to.

As a commercial artist from the early part of the twentieth century, Aris overcame many challenges and adapted to new technological innovations using them to his advantage, which many great artists were unable to do. An exhibition would allow future generations an

appreciation of Aris's historical works of art, as well as providing an outstanding visual and creative display. I believe that an exhibition of all the facets of his work would provide a fitting tribute to Aris's forgotten and lost legacy and as his lifelong friend Bayne wrote, would be 'prized by every lover of artistic quality and worth'.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁸ Charles Bayne, 'Foreword', Ernest Aris, *Famous Animal Tales* (Philadelphia: David McKay Company, 1935), p. 6.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Bibliographical Timeline.

Appendix 2 - Ernest Aris's archival correspondence with Beatrix Potter and Fredrick Warne.

Appendix 3 - Suggested Stiffeners and Well Known Sayings and their origins taken from Ernest Aris's personal diary.

Appendix 1

DATE	BIOGRAPHICAL TIMELINE OF ERNEST ARIS
	Birth name: Alfred Ernest Walter George Aris.
1882	Birthplace - Alfred Ernest Walter George Aris born in Islington, London on 22nd April 1882 to parents Alfred Henry Aris, a lithographic artist, and Emily Juliet Aris nee Wright.
1883	At the aged of 18 Albert was working as a Drysalter Clerk (a dealer in chemical products, such as dyestuffs and gums, dried, tinned, or salted foods and edible oils) and became a commercial traveller living in Wivenhoe, Essex. In 1917, aged 28 (as noted on his marriage certificate, although he was actually 33), he married a bank manager's daughter Ethel Winifred Weston, who fifteen months earlier had bore him an illegitimate son, Frank Norman, on 25 October 1915 in Victoria, London. Frank date and place of death is recorded as Nottingham 1953.
1891	At the 1891 census, the whole family resided at Number 276 Arkwright Street, Bridge, Nottingham in the Parish Ward of St Mary .
1900 - 1903/4	Education - Ernest attended as a student the Bradford Technical College and earned his diploma (1900) under the tutorship of Charles Stephenson.
1901	The 1901 census we know his parents resided in Bradford where his father continued to work as a Lithographic artist.
1903/4	Later at the Royal College of Art in London he studied under Graham Moira. He started as a portrait painter working in charcoal and wash as well as watercolour. He offered his work to numerous galleries and exhibitions, hoping to build up a reputation as an established artist whose work would be collected by connoisseurs and collectors.
	Aris exhibited at the Royal Academy, Royal Society of British Artists, Royal Society of Painters in Watercolours and the Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolours and in the provinces. He was frustrated by the time that it took to establish himself and was forced to look to other outlets for his talent and so turned to commercial art and book illustrations. Aris specialised in all aspects of natural history, animals, birds, writing and illustrating story books and nature articles, illustrating publications throughout the world.
	Aris interests included the opera, particularly the popular numbers where he would join with the audience in singing along. His other interests included, travel, gardening, entomology, swimming, collection old furniture. He was an inveterate collector hoarding matchbox labels and stamps as well as cigarette cards.
	Began his career as a portrait artist and an art teacher, subsequently writing and illustrating children's books.

1904	First published - in a weekly satirical and arts magazine, the <i>Jackdaw</i> , published in Bradford for a year from April 1904, where he contributed both cartoons and portraits of music hall and theatre artists.
1909	One of his first collaborations - was to contribute to the <i>Something to do</i> Series published by Henry Frowde, Hodder & Stoughton in 1909. This included contributions from such famous names as John Hassall, E.H Shepard & Harry Rountree.
	Aris's illustrated and wrote his first book <i>My Very First Little Book of Animals</i> published in 1909.
1909 - 1912	Ernest recorded in <i>Who's Who</i> (1947) that he had been an Art Director in Windermere. He was not above 'gilding the lily' and it was more likely that he was an art teacher at one of the schools in Windermere, either the Grammar School or The Old College which was a prep school for Eton, Harrow and other public schools. Aris worked as an Art Master for the ICS School from 1909 to 1912.
1910	In 1910 and again in 1912 he entered drawings for the Christmas supplement of a national weekly illustrated newspaper, <i>The Graphic</i> , where he was in the company of such illustrious names as Tom Browne, Lawson Wood and Heath Robinson.
	Amongst his early titles was <i>The Tale of Dilly Duckling</i> in 1910. While the line drawings that accompany the text have all the Aris hallmarks the colour plates give no hint of the mischievous wide-eyed bunny that became one of his stock-in-trade adventurers.
1910	The three stick books published by Henry Frowde, Hodder and Stoughton circa 1910 <i>Hollow Tree House</i> , <i>The Wood Brownies</i> and <i>The Wooden Soldier</i> .
1912	Aris illustrated a Mabel Mackintosh story entitled <i>Dilly Duckling</i> and a companion volume <i>Mrs Bunny on Tour</i> published by John F Shaw in 1912. It was this collaboration on these two books that established him as an illustrator providing him with the stimulus to write and illustrate more of his own stories.
	The originality and presentation of <i>Tales in the Wood</i> (1912) published by J F Shaw and Co is magnificent. Quote the publishers: "The Log Books for <i>Tales in the Wood</i> , By Ernest Aris, the latest novelty priced at 1/-. Each book is contained in an imitation log and contains 16 coloured illustration and 16 black and white, tied with green ribbon." The textured logs open lengthways to reveal a book measuring apron 4 x 1.25. There are three books title <i>Baby Bunny</i> , <i>Dicky Duckling</i> and <i>Billy Mouse</i> .
	<i>Heads and Tails</i> (HF & HS 1912) contains 3 stories by different authors/artists <i>Bunnikin Brown</i> by Aris, <i>Squirrel Hall</i> by W Foster and <i>Madame Mouse</i> by Alan Wright. This was the first outing for a simplistic Bunnikin Brown who was to be developed into a character who would feature strongly in Aris commercial success. When published by OUP in 1929 the third tale was replaced by Aris's <i>The Hole in the Curtain</i> (1922). The story of Bunnikin Brown was also published separately as <i>Bunnikin Brown and his Home in the Burrow</i> by Humphrey Milford.
1912	Lawrence and Jellicoe published the <i>Playtime Picture Book Series</i> .

1913	Aris purchased at the age of 30 his first and only home, 9 Oak Avenue, Hornsey, North London, N8 where he resided for the rest of his life for fifty years until his death in 1963.
	Ernest married Winifred Archer Ould, cousin of Hermon Ould. He was later to illustrate Oulds' books under the pseudonym Dan Crow in London.
	<i>Ten Little Bunny Boys</i> was published by Ernest Nister in 1913.
1915	Designed posters for London Transport 01/01/1915 - 31/12/1915 for London United Tramways, which are now held in the archives at Victoria & Albert Museum, London. The set of 6 in black and white is in a photograph album of archive posters at the London Transport Museum.
	Cassell published the Twinkletoe Series, four books by May Byron and illustrated by Aris
	Aris recorded that his first series of books were published by Lawrence & Jellicoe Ltd , priced at 1/- in 1912. These were <i>Wee Peter Pug</i> , <i>Wee Jenny Mouse</i> , <i>Wee Bits o' Things</i> , <i>Willie Rabbit</i> , <i>Willie Mouse & Little Miss Duck</i> . Some were published in the USA by David McKay publishing Co., Philadelphia, PA and the series was republished by Gale & Polden. The Lawrence & Jellicoe version of <i>Willie Mouse</i> has ten colour plates whilst the Gale & Polden edition has only six plates. The text has been substantially rewritten and whilst longer it is inferior to the original. Perversely the version that Gale & Polden chose to use in <i>Playtime Stories of the Woodfolk for the Week Folk – Playtime Tales an Pictures of Wee Things</i> issued September 1916, priced at 3/6d is the original as published by Lawrence & Jellicoe.
	The compendium of the previously published six stories is attractively laid out with whole pages being devoted to simple line drawings. The four tales published by Gale & Polden in 1912 were further extended with the addition of five more titles in 1915, <i>Bunkum Brown Rabbit</i> , <i>Little Robin Hood</i> , <i>Sir Francis Duck Adventurer</i> , <i>Wee Bit O' Things</i> and <i>Wee Jenny Mouse</i> in September 1915, and a further 3 in 1916 <i>Bunniken Brighteyes the Indian and Dapple the Wooden Donkey</i> , <i>Sir Timothy Tapertail</i> and <i>Woodfolk Market</i> all 1916. All 12 were issued in a larger format as ' The Toy Book Series ' with soft cover in August 1916, although the stories can vary as can the number of coloured plates. For their pirated version of the Lawrence and Jellicoe tale of <i>Willie Mouse</i> the American publishers, Saalfield came up with the name of the author as Alta Tabor . This is sometimes quoted as a pseudonym for Aris but I suspect that he was oblivious to their act of piracy.
1916	Henry Frowde, Hodder and Stoughton published the ribbon book series of five books
	Partridge published The Bold Bad Mouse Series (3 books)
	August 1916 Harold Warne writes to Beatrix Potter with enclosures of Aris's booklets
1916	August Aris commissioned by Beatrix Potter for a set of six designs for <i>The Oakmen Story</i> .

1916	14th September, Aris returns completed drawings for <i>The Oakmen Story</i> to Beatrix Potter with amendments.
	In November, 1916 Aris was conscripted to Royal Army Medical Corps reluctantly. Published records from the Pensions Office, show that he was sent to the Bacteriological Laboratory, Military Hospital, Colchester because of his supposed health problems on manoeuvres. Regimental Number 98794. 'In another fortnight I shall be in the army: This is not at all to my taste: I am asking the local Tribunal for another months extension, but I am afraid it is hopeless: It is regrettable, at least from a business point of view as I shall have to relinquish at least a half dozen books that I have in hand.' Despite Aris's protests he was conscripted into the RAMC (Royal Army Medical Corp) as Private 98794. Army life obviously did not suit him, he was only 5ft. 6inches in height and at 35 years of age weighed just 9 stone. He avoided Overseas Service due to a hearing disability and, according to Army records, his rheumatism. He was billeted in Essex and worked as a Laboratory Attendant at the Bacteriological Hospital, Colchester. Judging by the many books and illustrations dating from this period he made good use of his spare time. Discharged in March 1919 he applied for a disability pension as he claimed that his partial deafness had been aggravated by 'exposure'. He found little sympathy with the authorities whose medical experts said "Not the faintest evidence of attributable nor aggravation of a trivial disability".
1916 - 1920	Partridge published The Tufty Series.
1917	Beatrix Potter letter 10 November 1917 noted that Aris 'is (or was) a photographer's assistant'.
1917	Aris is often quoted as having provided the illustrations for <i>Peter Rabbit and his Ma</i> and <i>Peter Rabbit Runs Away</i> published in the USA by Saalfield and Co (1917). The storylines were plagiarised from the Beatrix Potter tales and the drawings were pirated from Aris's book <i>Billie Rabbit</i> , published by Gales and Polden in 1912. Whether he had a part to play or whether he too was a victim of American free enterprise is consigned to history.
	Ernest Aris's only child a son Kenneth Ernest Aris born 18th Jan 1917 in Hornsey, County of Middlesex.
	10th November Beatrix Potter writes to Fruing Warne regarding plagiarism issue of her books by Aris.
	Aris's brother Albert joined the Royal Engineers in 1917.
	21st November, Aris writes to Beatrix Potter responding to her accusations.
1918	Aris publishes the Robin Hood series, 7 books under pseudonym of Robin A Hood.
	Although Humphrey Milford did publish a couple of previously published tales <i>Betsy O'The Barn</i> (1921) and <i>Bunny O'The Bracken</i> (1918) as the Bunnikin Stories (1935). Aris's association with Humphrey Milord came to an end.
1919	Discharged from the Royal Army Medical Corp.

1919 - 1922	Humphrey Milford published The Dainty Series (6 books). Aris found that the cover design was sufficient to sell a book. The bold vertical striped cover for <i>Little Toddler Tail</i> (1921) was submitted without either a story or illustrations, The striking and distinct design meant it was so different from anything else on the bookstall that it was accepted for publication without knowing the content. It was so successful that a new series of books know to the Milford's printer as the ' Jazz Series ', was created. These striking designs obviously found commercial success and later books issued in the same format have front papers titles 'The Dainty Series'. The other 5 titles are <i>Little White Tail</i> (1919), <i>Little Jill O'The Hill</i> (1919), <i>Little Hope O'The Green</i> (1921), <i>Little Tiny Tot</i> (1921) and <i>Little Mousey Muffet</i> (1922).
1919	Winifred Wright was the cousin of the author Hermon Ould for whom Aris illustrated under the pseudonym Dan Crow, <i>The Pirates</i> (1919) and <i>The Ballad of Captain Timber Toe</i> (1919).
1920	Aris publishes 6 stapled cover books under pseudonym Dan Crow .
	Aris contributed to the publications as <i>Blackish Girls Annual</i> , <i>Blackish Children's Annual</i> , <i>Cassell's Children's Annual</i> , <i>Little Folks Partridge's Children's Annual</i> , <i>Playbox Annual</i> , <i>Oojah Annual</i> , <i>The All Story Wonderbook</i> , <i>My Magazine</i> and <i>The Infant's Magazine</i> 1920. <i>The Fishing Gazette</i> , <i>Angler's News</i> , <i>The Jackdaw</i> , <i>Game and Gun</i> , <i>South African Fishing Gazette</i> , <i>The Strand</i> and <i>Pearson's Magazine</i> , <i>Printer's Pie</i> , <i>The Graphic</i> .
1921	The Uncle Toby Series originally consisted of two books published by Humphrey Milford , <i>The Story of Ebenezer Bristles</i> (1921) and <i>The Story of Ginger Hare</i> (1921) and were reprinted by Ward Lock in October 1947. Two other books, previously issued as <i>Duckling O'Casey Corner</i> (1921) and <i>Bunny O'Casey Corner</i> (1922) were added to the Uncle Toby series and re-titled <i>The Story of Yellow Duckling</i> (1947) and <i>The Story of Black Bunny</i> (1947). The original story of the hedgehog Ebenezer Bristles (Uncle Toby Series 1921) is told in the vernacular. The character Old Rabbit Brown having a distinct country accent, "Marnin', Mas'r Bristles ee do be about again, then?" Whilst it was as well that it was revised the later version does not have the same feel for the character. The original owes something to the Brer Rabbit (Uncle Remus) stories, which were similarly told in dialect.
1922	Humphrey Milford publish The Silhouette Series (3 books) similar to the ribbon series in format.
1923	Humphrey Milford publish Duck a Dandy Series (6 books)
	Librairie Hachette de Cie publish four of Aris's books translated by Yvonne Ostroga
1924	In August 1924, Geographia (1923) Ltd publish The Betsy Trot Series which consisted of four titles; <i>The Tale of Dodger Fox</i> , <i>The Tale of Betsy Trot</i> , <i>The Tale of Gobbler Goose</i> , <i>The Tale of Twinkle Whiskers</i> . All were re-issued in September 1930.

1926	He worked with Madeleine Collier in 1926 to produce a series of booklets; <i>Barney Brown, Nanny Goat, The Tale of Little Fluff, The Tale of Pipkin Piggles, The Tale of Tony Lambkin, and The Tale of Tiny Tusks.</i>
	Aris started work on <i>The Book of Brownies</i> (1926) for Enid Blyton considered to be one of her greatest works. Later volumes included <i>Hop Skip and Jump, The Further Adventures of Brer Rabbit</i> (1935 and 1942), <i>Boys and Girls Story Book Nos. 3/4/5</i> , (1935/37), <i>Birds of Our Gardens</i> , (1940).
1927 - 1955	Fellow of the Royal Zoological Society (RZS)
	In 1927 referring to an American piracy of <i>Peter Rabbit</i> Beatrix observes that its illustrations follow the American portrait of Brer Rabbit rather than of hers of Peter. Both Potter and Aris drew Brer Rabbit, her illustrations being from Uncle Remus stories whilst his appeared weekly for over four years in a magazine titled <i>Sunny Stories for Little Folks</i> (1926/30).
	Charlecote series published by Charles and Sons. Aris undertook commissions for Charles S. Bayne whom he first met around 1910 and became good friends as well as partners in an artist's publishing agency. Bayne was the Editor of <i>Little Folks</i> from 1908 to 1915 and originated a variety of children's annuals for Cassell & Co. He loved walking and natural history and published numerous books. He and Aris had many common interest and together they authored four books in the Charlecote Series all published in July 1927 ; <i>Life in the Cabbage Patch, Peeps into the Hedgerow, All Around a Stinging Nettle</i> and <i>The Nest in the Ivy</i> . These nature books detailed the life cycle of the flora and fauna surrounding the habitat featured in the title. There is an indication in Aris's private notes of a fifth book and an illustration in private collection of <i>Secrets of the Stream</i> , however there is no reference or evidence it was published. The colour plates range in date from 1917 to 1927, indicating that the authors had collaborated on the book over a number of years. The reason for the title to the series could simply be that the Charlecote Press printed the books but maybe there is more to it.
1929	Illustrated cigarette cards for John Player and Sons titled ' <i>Curious Beaks.</i> '
1934	Commissioned by Cadbury's to design a range of animal characters. In September, 1934 called the Cococubs that would be manufactured by the toy firm of William Britain, manufacturers of hollow cast toy lead military soldiers and military miniatures. The Cococubs were distributed free with a new line of Cadburys Cocoa advertised as 'The Children's Cocoa'. Each of the animals had their own personalities and the press release advised that they " <i>were exclusively designed by an expert in child psychology</i> ". The lead figures of domestic and zoo animals were given away with tins of Children's Bournville Cocoa. The range was gradually extended from an initial release of 15 models to a total of 32, and today, as in the years from 1934 to 1939, are highly collectable. These brightly clad, hand-made and hand painted characters soon captured the imagination of children young and old and as a sales promotion exercise it was a huge success for Cadbury Ltd. It was just as successful for the toy manufacturers William Britain Ltd whose production lines were maintained at full capacity.

1934	As part of the sales promotion, cartoon characters featuring the Cococubs adventures appeared in numerous national newspapers, as well as children's and family magazines. The Cococubs were launched quietly onto the unsuspecting world on 26 September 1934 in a small advertisement.
	The Cococub animals appeared in Aris's illustrations of <i>The Cococub News</i> .
	It was a huge success with some 300,000 children collecting these toy figures. There can be no doubt that Ernest and the family of animals and followers that he had built up over the previous 20 years were instrumental in the success of the Cococubs, which was hailed as one of the greatest advertising schemes of the time.
1935	George Harrap published <i>Famous Animal Tales (1935)</i> , a collection of stories such as <i>Puss in Boots, The Ugly Duckling etc.</i> The Times Literary Supplement said “Besides being a naturalist Mr Aris knows just the drawings that will appeal to young children and although he may dress up his animal characters and give them human expressions he never distorts their true forms. The result is a most attractive volume.
	Charles Bayne wrote, “Found that he had an endless store of humorous ideas, each one better than the last and that his pictures and stories were immensely popular with children. Some of his best results of these first hand observations are to be seen in his drawings of Brer Rabbit. Besides depicting a real rabbit in human clothes, however, he had been able to get inside the skin of that famous character, and as a consequence had give a perfect interpretation of his impish proclivities.
1936	He contributed some cartoon figures to the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children which appear in the first edition of their <i>Peter Pan</i> magazine issued in April 1936.
1939	Lorna Wood, when inviting him to lunch added, “I love your illustrations, I never thought the book the smiling rabbit (1939) would look so good.”
1940's	Tasseltip Tales published by Ladybird books are very popular with collectors. Originally written by Dorothy Richards with illustrations by Aris, the stories featuring the rabbit Tasseltip were first published by Wills and Hepworth in 1947. He clearly worked closely with Dorothy Richards, as it is obvious that Aris had supplied his familiar stock of characters, some of whom had experienced a previous existence as lead figures known as 'Cococub'.
1942	Aris was hard of hearing and by the age of nearly 60 he was profoundly deaf and returned to employment with the International Correspondence School distance-learning.
1942	Aris drew on his experience in commercial art and produced a book for the International Correspondence School on <i>Poster Work</i> (c1942). International Correspondence School distance-learning.
1943	Elected to the membership of the Society of Graphic Artists.

1947	Ward Lock published the Brambledown Series in 1947 second edition. <i>The Browns of Brambledown, The Tale of Little Brown Mouse, The Tale of Chickaboo Chick and The Tale of Piggy the Pig.</i> These four books were re-written and re-titled by an unknown author and published again in 1989. This later series of the Brambledown Tales was extended to 8 books by the addition of 4 recycled stories from the Uncle Toby Series. The fact that a publisher decided that drawings almost 70 years old were worthy of reproduction is sound commercial recognition of Aris's enduring talent.
1948	The Fountain Press published an educational nature book series for schools written and illustrated by Aris. He takes the reader on a day's ramble through different areas of the English countryside, <i>Down the Lane, Over the Downs, By the River and In the Woods.</i> The inspiration behind this series could well have been generated by his work on The Charlecote Series 1927, as there is a similarity in content if not in style and presentation. This series of nature book is written in a conversational style less fashionable today. However Aris's knowledge and love for the countryside flora and fauna is evident. Other non-fiction works include <i>Fishing – A Comprehensive Guide to Freshwater Angling</i> (1947) and <i>The Art of the Pen</i> (1948). He also illustrated numerous school textbooks.
1947 - 53	Ladybird Wills & Hepworth Ltd published Dorothy Richards series of the <i>Tasseltip Tales</i> (6 books) under the Ladybird Series 474, illustrated by Aris.
1948	Jane Thornicroft thought that his illustrations for <i>Dawn the Fawn</i> (1948) were enchanting – you have made it a lovely book. Thank you for making my brain children visible in such attractive shapes". She also thanked him for "your grand idea of yours to include small ones for insertion in the text" and for the delightful illustrations to <i>Kiki the Squirrel</i> (1938).
1948	Aris published his last book, a drawing manual ' <i>The Art of the Pen</i> '.
1960's	Ernest recorded in ' <i>Who's Who</i> ' that he was an Art Master at the International Correspondence School.
	Published <i>The Art of the Poster</i> (1948), a book possibly used to support a correspondence class. Aris always been hard of hearing, by the age of 60 he was profoundly deaf and distance-learning work such as this would have suited him admirably.
1963	Deceased aged 80 at his home 9 Oak Avenue, Hornsey, North London, N8 on 14 th April 1963 where he had resided since 1913.
1989	Gallery Books, New York publish <i>The Brambledown Tales</i> 3rd edition illustrated by Aris.

It should be noted that the source of the above personal information is taken from various sources which include: Ernest Aris's books, The British Museum, The British Museum Archive at Colindale, Dudley Chignall, London Transport Museum, *The Artist* 1938-39, Victoria and Albert Museum, *Who's Who*, *Who's Who in Art* as well as many online resources including The National Archives, Wikipedia and *Who Was Who*.

Appendix 2

Leslie Linder, *A History of the Writings of Beatrix Potter* (London: Frederick Warne, 1971), p. 184. Linder notes the letter as addressed to Fruing Warne. Beatrix Potter to Harold Warne, 12 August 1916, Judy Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter's Letters* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 227. Taylor notes the letter as addressed to Harold Warne. The original is addressed to Mr Warne.

Harold Warne sent Beatrix a number of recently published illustrated booklets by Ernest A. Aris which seemed to him to be too close to Beatrix's own books for comfort.

[To Warne]

Sawrey,
Ambleside
Aug 12. 16

Dear Mr Warne,

After a week's reflection I see daylight. You had better engage Mr E. A 'Aris to illustrate the "Sly Old Cat". His plagiarism are unblushing, and his drawing excellent. If you showed him Nellie's little booklet I have little doubt that he would be sufficiently modest to copy the designs exactly, and do them really well. His mice have too large ears, he should be advised that rats have still smaller ears. He can draw cats much better than I can, and he would do the rats' clothing excellently. I wonder any self respecting publisher would publish such a crib of the *shape & idea*. The style of drawing is rather more cribbed from E. Dulac's than from mine. But I do not think it is actionable, and frankly it does not annoy me because it is good. But the stories are not so well written as might be, - poor grammar & rather slip shod, but nothing vulgar like "Harriet Hare".

I should be glad to hear what you think about it. I should think he would accept a sum down for a set of designs, certainly I would do the same & a moderate one rather than the cumbersome royalty, for the use of my name & the letter press. I have wished for a long time that you could find some second string - this man to my thinking is just what we want *if* he would draw to order & take suggestions - you will have to get used to the idea that my eyes are giving way, whether you like it or not - and if I managed to do yet another book it would not be that cat story - (though I think it really amusing) but I do not draw cats well, & I am away from that sort of background.

I am registering letter, as the original is enclosed.

Let me know what you do as I shall write to him about a dog [design] I should like done & which I never could have drawn myself if you don't.

Yrs sincerely

Beatrix Heelis

Parcel of cribs posted separately.

The last paragraph of her letter is believed to refer to the story of *The Oakmen*. Nothing more came of this proposal, however, and the manuscript of *The Sly Old Cat* was eventually returned to Nellie Warne.

Ernest Aris to Beatrix Potter, 18 September 1916, (Victoria & Albert Museum, London: The Linder Bequest LB 1469).

9 Oak Avenue,
Priory Rd,
Hornsey, N

Sept 18. 1916

Dear Mrs Heelis:

I am now forwarding you, the finished drawing to your charming little ideas:

The size is just a trifle larger than the figures you gave me. This, in the event of yours having them reproduced will be beneficial: They are in proportion: I have had to work somewhat in the dark, not knowing the story:

However, I have followed your sketches as near as possible occasionally, I have altered the composition a little – although, in most cases, your composition is very good.

I have not quite adapted your colours schemes as. there was a tendency to be a little on the sombre side - I hope you don't mind my saying so. I think you will find the pictures nice [and] bright – this is most essential to children.

In another fortnight I shall be in the army: This is not at all to my taste: I am asking the local Tribunal for another month's extension, but I am afraid it is hopeless:

It is regrettable, at least from a business point of view as I shall have to relinquish at least a half dozen books that I have in hand.

Perhaps, when peace is with us again, we might collorate [collaborate] with a book.

Perhaps by then, Nancy may have thought of some more charming little ideas.

Yours sincerely

Ernest Aris.

Beatrix Potter to Fruing Warne, 10 November 1917, Judy Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter's Letters* (London: Penguin, 2001), pp. 239-240.

Ernest A. Aris had now published an illustrated booklet called THE TREASURE SEEKERS in which there featured a rabbit called Peter. Warne asked Beatrix to allow them to protest.

[To Fruing Warne]

Sawrey,
Ambleside
Nov 10. 17

Dear Mr Warne,

I most certainly object to entrusting "Peter Rabbit" to that objectionable (but amusing) little bounder. But I do blame his publishers more than himself; & if you are communicating with them, please keep my married name out of it. He is (or was) a photographer's assistant, last I hear of him he was called up much against his will & Mrs 'Arris [sic] was "expecting" their first.

He doesn't write a bad letter poor man, so artlessly conceited.

He is not truthful, at least when "Mrs Heelis" asked him what he would charge for illustrating a booklet in the style of "Jemima Puddleduck" by "Beatrix Potter" – he had the effrontery to inform the offended author that he had never seen that classic! If he has not – it is a strange case of two (dis similar I hope) minds running in one groove. It is a fact that he sent me a booklet which was rather like a story of mine, which had never been published. I don't know whether he will return from the wars; but his publishers will find some one else to do dirty work if he doesn't. He lived in Holloway, but had at one time been employed in Windermere. I am sure he had no suspicion to the end of our acquaintance. He seemed pleased with my humble scribbles & even suggested that possibly we might 'colobrate' after the war.

He is the sort of person who will do anything for a few pounds; I was expecting an outbreak of his booklet this winter as he conceitedly said he was overwhelmed with orders. I got 6 useful illustrations from him for a story [*The Oakmen* never published] which I had made for a little niece [Nancy Nicholson]. Mr Heelis has said several times I ought to hurry up with it for fear Arris [sic] gets a story with these drawings out before me. He never saw any Mss; at all events I can fight him on that having got his letter selling originals & copyright. It would want redrawing as the animals are not good.

I await your parcel with anxious amusement, I'm afraid I don't take Mr Arris [sic] very seriously. But his publishers are rogues.

yrs sincerely

H B Heelis

P.S. I advised your brother to go for the publishers, but to buy Arris [sic] out. For some reason Harold chose to be much offended. But I think I was right – I took the man's measure correctly

at all events, he works altogether for money, he was quite willing to redraw & colour the outlines of an unknown amateur. He is not quite a good enough artist. My feeling was that my eyes were failing & my hands getting stiff but I had still brains & ideas which I might get carried out by an assistant.

Also – do not be vexed with this – I was getting so annoyed & puzzled by H' prevarications – that I really think if the crisis had not come you might have seen a new book by a new author HBH & Arris [sic] – but it most certainly would have steered quite clear of FW.&Cos "Peter Rabbits". The copying is very dishonest on the part of the publishers, & in a less degree of the part of Arris [sic]. I think he is a bounder who doesn't quite understand.

I am sorry for Mrs Arris [sic].

Beatrix Potter to Fruing Warne, 13 November 1917, Judy Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter's Letters* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 240.

[To Fruing Warne]

Sawrey
Nov 13. 17

Dear Mr Warne,

I am puzzled what to say about the book; it is not vulgar; or objectionable apart from "Peter" – I suppose the defence would be that all rabbits *are* called Peter now, which is pretty much the case – either Peter or Brer Rabbit.

It is not so clearly harmful as the books last year which were the size of mine.

I should advise remonstrating with the publisher & ask what else is coming out? perhaps worse.

In haste to catch post.

yrs sincerely
H B Heelis

Judy Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter's Letters* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 241.

After receiving Warne's letter of protest Ernest Aris wrote directly to Beatrix from the Bacteriological Laboratory in the Military Hospital, Colchester, where he had been sent to work by the army. He hoped that Mrs Heelis's earlier knowledge of his work would exonerate him from any thoughts of plagiarism and he commented, 'I might add that I had never heard of your book PETER RABBIT till now. It is probably one of your early ones... Perhaps you would be kind enough to give me a signed copy... It would be interesting to compare "the two Peters".'

Ernest Aris to Beatrix Potter, 21 November 1917 (Victoria & Albert Museum, London: The Linder Bequest LB 1470).

The Laboratory
Military Hospital
Colchester
21.11.17

Dear Mrs Heelis,
(Beatrix Potter)

I regret that I am writing you under somewhat different circumstances to that of my last letter by you:

I will explain the business part of my letter first:

My publishers have just put on the market a book of mine entitled "The Treasure Seekers"[.] That I should have used a character "Peter Rabbit" in my book has caused some correspondence between my Publishers & yours: They claim infringement of copyright with regard to your book "Peter Rabbit". That I should have used the somewhat common name of "Peter" in connection with a Rabbit is pure[st] coincidence.

I think you know my work sufficiently to see the absurdness of their suggestion.

I might add that I had never heard of your book "Peter Rabbit" till now. It is probably one of your early ones.

It is an unpleasant business & my object in writing you is to repudiate the mischievous statement of your publishers.

I hope your knowledge of my work will be sufficient to exonerate me, in your mind, from any thoughts of plagiarism.

—

Well I am still a soldier to all outward appearances. I am now in the Bacteriological Laboratory, Colchester.

The work is interesting & at the same time very useful.

It is quite a new experience for me. I must say that the acts of war, do not appeal to me like the acts of peace, although it seems there is 'war' even in the acts peace.

Whilst staying in camp at Broxbourne, I came across some friends of yours from Windermere. Unfortunately, I have forgotten their name.

I have managed to get a fair amount of work done during my period of army life. I am longing for the time when the acts of peace will be the order of the day.

Kind regards.

Yrs sincerely,

Ernest Aris

Ps Perhaps you would be kind enough to give me a signed copy of your book Peter Rabbit. It would be interesting to compare "the two Peters".

Judy Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter's Letters* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 241.

[Draft letter to Ernest A. Aris]

Nov 23 [1917]

Dear Sir,

In reply to your letter, I must say that I intirely [sic] agree with my publishers and leave the matter in their hands. You refer to my knowledge of your work. My opinion is this. Your work has considerable technical facility and no originality. After having had several of your booklets brought to my notice last year, I started a correspondence, in my own married name, with two objects – to see what you would say – and to obtain certain figure drawings, which I believed I could make use of.

You have written several statements in letters, which I have kept, and I have obtained some useful drawings, for the copyright of which I have paid.

It is quite possible I may some day wish to buy some more. But without a good deal of explanation, I regret that I am unable to believe that your statements are truthful. Coincidence has a long arm but there are limits to coincidences.

I have often wondered whether you had gone to the front – I am glad that your wife has been spared that anxiety, I hope she got safely through her troubles.

I remain yrs truly

Beatrix Potter to Fruing Warne, 12 January 1921, Judy Taylor (ed.), *Beatrix Potter's Letters* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 266.

[To Fruing Warne]

Sawrey
Ambleside
Jan 12. 21

Dear Mr Warne,

No thanks! The last thing you forwarded was a request for my photograph for the Sketch. I hope the performance will help a worthy object; but it ain't in my line to attend such functions.

We had a very jolly part last Saturday, commencing with infants at 2.30 and advancing through the relays of uproar & refreshments to farm servants and dancing till 11; followed by the sweep! followed by influenza & headaches. It is much about, but only a mild type.

I had an idea the other day suggested by those beautiful illustrations of Mr Thorburn's [*British Birds* by Archibald Thorburn, published 1915-16]. Suppose I pulled the "Doves" [*The Faithful Dove*] together into workable shape - *not* Peter Rabbit shape - believe me it is *too much pigeon*, over & over, to make 28 illustrations. Suppose you could commission him to make & sell to you with copyright - above 4 pictures of doves in appropriate positions - I might screw out a half dozen more. If his name appeared with mine on the title page I should be proud to see it there.

You have got to understand sooner or later that my eyes are nothing like they used to be, and that persistent worrying me to strain them is not very kind. You cannot have forgotten your dear old Mother's pathetic "Can't see? can't see? It is useless trying to have drawings of mine patched up by the worthy Mr Stokoe because he hasn't got it in him. The scamp Arris [sic] had! One thing about doves; no birds look well in clothes.

With best wishes for 1921.

yrs sincerely

Beatrix Heelis

Portrait of the authoress not for publication in the "Sketch.

Appendix 3

Suggested Stiffeners and Well Known Sayings taken from Ernest Aris's personal diary

Bee in your bonnet	Strawing at a gnat??
Cats may look at Kings	Green?? in my eye
Burning the candle at both ends	Its A1 & OK
Hook or by crook	Top Hole
The fats in the fire	A fly in the ointment
Feather in his Cap	Cooked his goose
Hobson's Choice	Money talks
Buying a pig in a poke	Carrying the paint
Pay the piper	Carry's weight
Clutching at straws	Crocodile tears
Looking for a needle in a Haystack	Cut a dash
Riding the high horse	All cut and dried
A fishy story	?? the devil
A miss is as good as a mile	Devil take the hindmost
Looking the gift horse in the mouth	Devil; topay
A white elephant	Horns of a dilemma
Sour grapes	Top o the tree
Crying wolf	Whistle for it
A bird in the hand	Hiding one's light under a bushel
New Brooms	Acting the goat
As dead as Don Nails mutton	Playing the fool
Making hay whilst the sun shines	Talking ?? rat
Taking time by the forelock	Oiling the palm
Small loaf is better than none at all	Pot luck
Putting the cart before the horse	In clover
In & Outs	Put all your eggs in one basket
Castles in the air	Double dutch
Hearth in boots	A Mare's nest
Feathering your nest	Hood winking
Take time by the forelock	French leave
Smell a rat	Pouring water on a ducks back
Shipshape	Butting in
A swollen head	Dancing to the tune
Splitting hairs	Killing the goose
	Minding your own business

Ardath – Figures of Speech

3 Cock & Bull Story	28 Make your hair stand on end
4 Adding insult to injury	29 Nine days wonder
5 All my eye and Betty Martin	30 Not room to swing a cat
6 A nod & a wink	31 Not worth his salt
7 All sixes and sevens	32 On tenter-hooks
8 Between the devil & the sea	34 Sail close to the wind
9 Between two stools	35 Save one's bacon
10 Born with a silver spoon in his mouth	36 Sent to Coventry
11 Burn one's boats	37 Sleep like a top
13 Bury the hatchet	38 Spick and Span
15 Down in the dumps	39 Bull by the horns
16 Eat humble pie	40 Tell that to the marines
19 Get out of bed the wrong side	41 That's a chestnut
20 Get the sack	42 The end of his tether
21 Give the cold shoulder	43 There's many a slip 'twixt cup & lip
22 Hauled over the coals	44 Three sheets to the wind
23 He'll never set the Thames on fire	45 To leave in the lurch

25 In queer street 26 In the nick of time 27 In the swim	46 Turn the tables 47 Up the spout 48 When in Rome do as Rome does 50 You can't make bricks with straw
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Unnatural History

The wayward hussy The Night Mare The road hog The missing lynx The Pet Theory The terrible 'to do' Back bites Crying shame Howling tempest Pathetic sigh Clothes horse The last opportunity <i>The mares nest ?</i> The soft zephyr White Elephant Tuppeny Rabbit Moaning Tide Toad in the hole Greedy pig Vague answer Giddy goat The gift horse <i>Horns of a dilemma</i> The fire dogs The flying visit The black outlook Pet abomination The walking stick Running water Bubbling brook Biting wind The ferocious gale Flapping blind Stumbling block	Welsh Rabbit Persistant Cough Roving eye Raging Strom Vanishing ?? Ghastly predicament Paltry excuse Heated argument Wasted effort Narrow squeak Great endeavour Dead cert Valiant effort Prevailing thought Alluring prospect Naked truth Common sense ? Mute appeal Vane ? regret Knotty problem Monster of ?? Short cut Lesser evil Superior air (Hare) Itching palm Forlorn hope Doleful dirge Other extreme Lurking danger The bird of ill omen oof bird? Mock Turtle
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Other ideas for Stiffeners:-

Robes
Cricket terms
Football terms
Flags – under the British Flag
London's Past
Birthplaces of famous men
Famous sayings of famous men
Birds Crests
The open road – where to go and what to see
Scott's hero's
Notable villages
Romantic figures in History
Jugs
Candlesticks

Posters

The magic of the underground (sketch)

LMS Poster - a steel bridge with the supporting girders made up of "L M S" – (sketch) 'The holiday span' (slogan)

Bovril Advert

Man having escaped from a bull turns around & shakes his fist – slogan = "Wait till you're Bovril"

Wills Tobacco

Girl and youth smoking *Wills* cigarettes; Youth, blowing a ring of smoke over girl's 3rd finger.

Slogan =

Where there are *Wills* there is a way

Wills speak for themselves

Engaging men smoke *Wills*

Players Tobacco & Cigarettes

A house composed of Players goods suitable for cut-out. Slogan = "The House of Players"

Humorous Calendar

Country boys playing cricket, a goat butts in and knocks wicket down "Not cricket"

Tobacco

Little girl knocking on Daddy's bedroom door – she has a pipe and pouch & a packet of tobacco.
Slogan = "Daddy's Darling"

The list was compiled by Dudley Chignall who retains Ernest Aris's private diary.

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