

HEATH ROBINSON IN HATCH END

While Pinner basks in the glow of hosting the development of the Heath Robinson Museum, opening this October in Pinner Memorial Park, Hatch End too can lay claim to an excellent William Heath Robinson legacy. The renowned artist, illustrator and social historian (1872-1944) chose Hatch End to settle in when he first moved to this area.

Describing this time in his book *My Line of Life* (1938), Heath Robinson writes: “Greatly daring, we emigrated to Hatch End, Pinner, still in rural Middlesex. It was an adventure we never regretted. We rented a house where I could work at home. It was amongst a little group of similar villas, surrounded on nearly every side by open country.”



William Heath Robinson and his son.

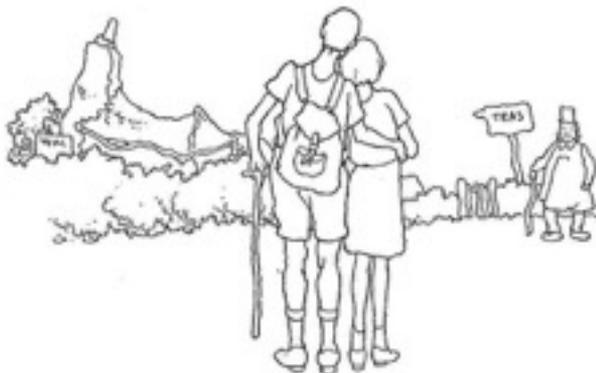
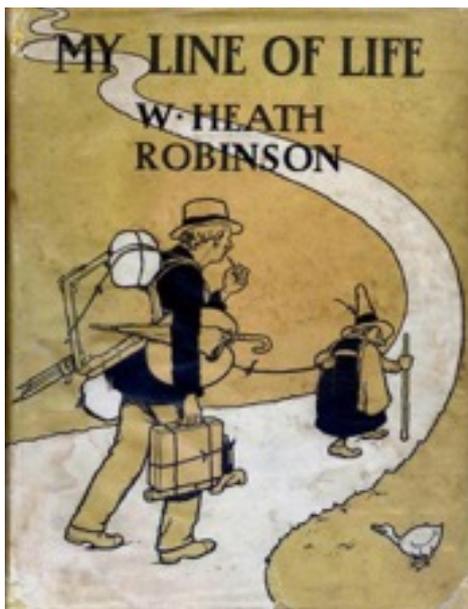
Thanks to research from local historian Patricia Clarke, we know that at the time of the 1911 census Heath Robinson gave his address as “Alfriston, Woodridings, Hatch End” where he lived with his wife Josephine, née Latey, a former student of North London Collegiate School. Patricia explains: “The only street directory to show him at Hatch End is Kelly’s 1912. This gives him at Alfriston, Wellington Road, whereas other directories show Alfriston correctly as being in Wellington Avenue, which runs off the eastern side of

Wellington Road. In 1911 there was an empty house next to Robinson's, and then came William Newman, whom WHR described as his neighbour in *My Line of Life*."

Another next-door neighbour in Hatch End was Ernest Huson, whose great-niece Angela Wright has recently given important memorabilia to the William Heath Robinson Trust (WHRT).

Geoffrey Beare, trustee of the WHRT and the Museum's collections and exhibitions manager, adds: "While in Hatch End, Heath Robinson worked on the illustrations for two Kipling books, *A Song of the English* and *Collected Poems*. He had a large garden for the first time and among his regular contributions to *The Sketch* magazine was a series of nine drawings called *A Garden Guide*. His work at this time was at its most surreal."

Humorous art was only Heath Robinson's third choice of career. On leaving the Royal Academy School in 1895 his original ambition had been to become a landscape painter. Realising this wouldn't pay the bills, he followed his two older brothers into the world of book illustration, rapidly establishing a reputation as a talented and original illustrator. However, in 1904 a publisher, who had commissioned a large quantity of drawings from him, was declared bankrupt and Heath Robinson had to find another source of income. He turned to high-class weekly magazines such as *The Sketch* and *Tatler*, which paid well for highly-



finished humorous drawings, and within a year was being acclaimed as a unique talent in this field.

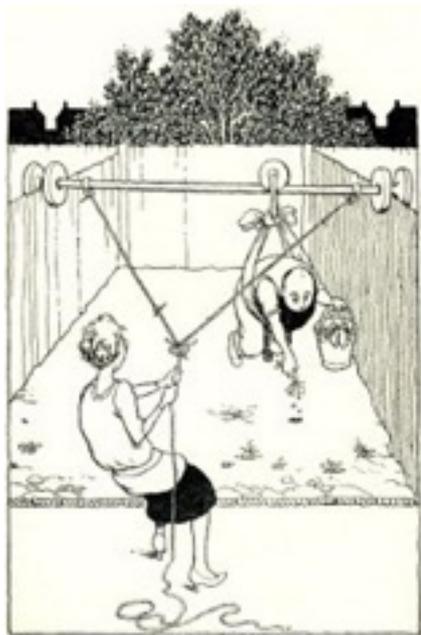
During the years 1906-1916 Heath Robinson successfully combined working as a comic artist and serious illustrator, producing his best work in both fields. This was the age of the gift book with sumptuous binding and coloured plates. As well as working on the Kipling poetry books, Heath Robinson's contributions to the genre include *Bill the Minder*, a children's book he both wrote and illustrated, and illustrations for fairy tales by Hans Anderson and Perrault and editions of Shakespeare's plays. His black-and-white illustrations for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* rank among the finest produced for any book in the last century, which is why this play was chosen for the open-air theatre presentation in Pinner this summer.

By the end of World War I the market for lavishly illustrated gift books had all but disappeared. Heath Robinson's talents as a humorist, however, were in ever-increasing demand, especially for advertising and commissions for fantasy illustrations. He also continued to paint in watercolours, experimenting with the effects of light and colour.

In the 1930s, Heath Robinson was known as The Gadget King and he is still most widely remembered for his wonderful humorous drawings of highly complicated machines performing simple tasks.

From Hatch End, Heath Robinson moved to Pinner village, where his brother Tom also lived. They were often joined by friends from London for walks in the surrounding countryside. They subsequently formed a walking group known as The Frothfinders' Federation of which their brother Charles was also an active member. Heath Robinson's chief memories of their walks were of good ale, beef, vegetables, friendship and song. He would have been spoilt for choice these days with so many restaurant options in Hatch End!

His importance as an innovator in the fields of illustration and advertising is now being recognised formally with the dedicated Heath Robinson Museum. In addition to creating a long-overdue permanent home for his original artwork and other artefacts, this project is delivering the first purpose-built museum in the Greater London region



for more than 40 years and is being recognised as a significant addition to the regional and national arts and cultural landscape.

Find out more about the Museum and its activities programme at www.heathrobinsonmuseum.org.

Was anyone in your family a neighbour or friend of Heath Robinson or his family? If you can shed more light on their time here, we'd love to hear about it! Contact welcome@heathrobinsonmuseum.org.

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Sharon Pink, Heath Robinson Museum