

The Wind in the Willows

Don't quote me on that!

KENNETH GRAHAME

By Hilary Pauley

Kenneth Grahame was born on 8 March 1859. When he was five years old his mother died, and his father gave the care of his four children to the children's grandmother, who lived in Cookham Dean in Berkshire. The children lived in a spacious but dilapidated house, "The Mount" which had a large garden by the River Thames, and spent a good deal of time by the riverside playing with boats with their uncle, David Ingles. Such was the life of the growing boy Kenneth.

The Wind in the Willows was first published in 1908 when Kenneth was 49 years old and is about a small group of animals set in an imaginary yet beautiful version of England in the Thames valley.

At this time he had retired from his position as secretary of the Bank of England and spent his time by the river doing much as the animal characters in his book do "simply messing about in boats"

Kenneth had married Elspeth Thomson in 1899; they had only one child, Alastair, whose nickname was "Mouse", who was born blind in one eye and had health problems all his life. When Alastair was about four years old, Kenneth would tell him bedtime stories,

Which became the basis for The Wind in the Willows.

Let me introduce or reintroduce you to these fascinating characters

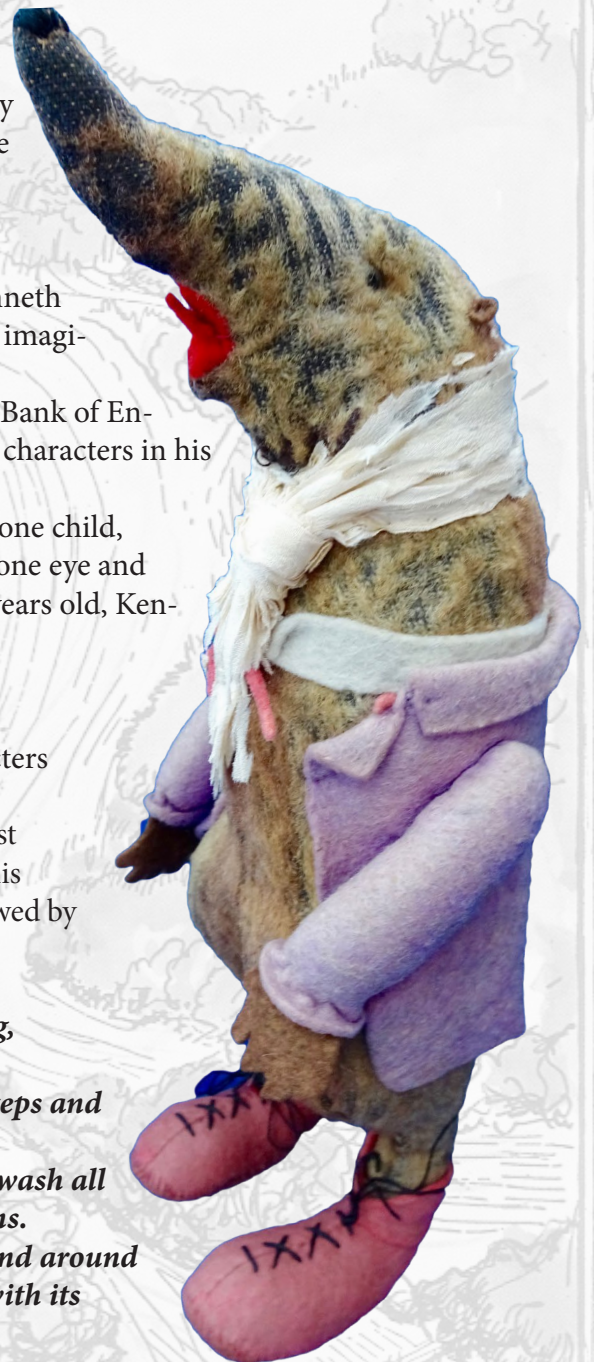
- **Mole:** A mild-mannered, home-loving animal, and the first character introduced in the story. Fed up with spring cleaning in his secluded home, he ventures into the outside world. Initially overawed by the hustle and bustle of the riverbank, he eventually adapts.

*"The Mole had been working very hard all the morning,
spring-cleaning his little home.*

*First with brooms, then with dusters; then on ladders and steps and
chairs, with a brush and a pail of whitewash;*

*till he had dust in his throat and eyes, and splashes of whitewash all
over his black fur, and an aching back and weary arms.*

*Spring was moving in the air above and in the earth below and around
him, penetrating even his dark and lowly little house with its
spirit of divine discontent and longing"*



Rat:

Known as “Ratty” to his friends (though actually a water vole), is cultured, relaxed and friendly, with literary pretensions and a life of leisure. Ratty loves the river and takes Mole under his wing.

“There is nothing - absolutely nothing - half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats.”

*“All along the backwater,
Through the rushes tall,
Ducks are a-dabbling,
Up tails all!”*

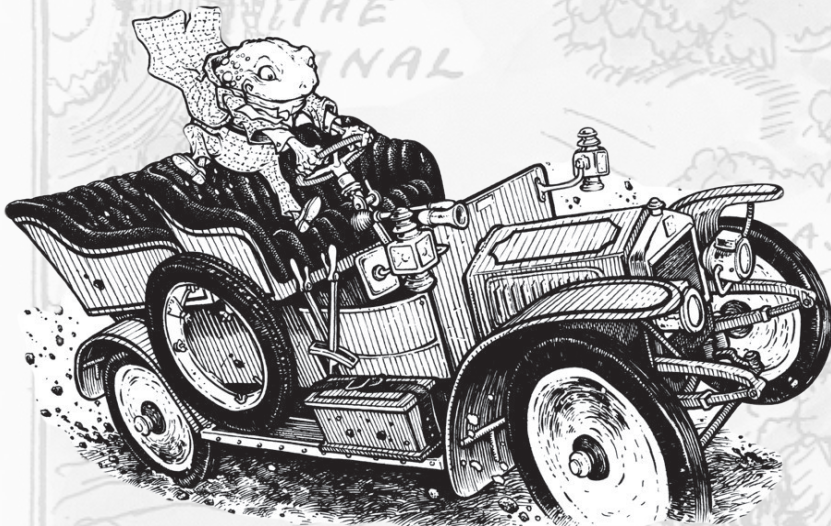
Ducks, Ditty by Rat.



Mr. Toad:

The wealthy scion of Toad Hall who inherited his wealth from his late father. Although good-natured, kind-hearted

*“It’s never the wrong time
to call on Toad.
Early or late he’s always the same fellow.
Always good-tempered,
always glad to see you,
always sorry when you go!”*



*“The world has held great Heroes,
As history books have showed;
But never a name to go down to
fame
Compared with that of Toad!”
“The clever men at Oxford
Know all that there is to be
known.
But they none of them know one
half as much
As intelligent Mr. Toad!”*

So we move on to.....

Mr. Badger:

Badger embodies the “wise hermit” figure. A friend of Toad’s late father, he is uncompromising with the disappointing Toad, yet remains optimistic his good qualities will prevail. He lives in a vast underground sett, part of which incorporates the remains of a buried Roman settlement. A brave and a skilled fighter, Badger helped clear the Wild Wooders from Toad Hall with his large cudgel.

“Badger hates Society, and invitations, and dinner, and all that sort of thing.”

.....simply hates society,

“The Mole had long wanted to make the acquaintance of the Badger. He seemed, by all accounts, to be such an important personage and, though rarely visible, to make his unseen influence felt by everybody about the place.”



Otter and Portly:

A friend of Ratty with a stereotypical “Cockney costermonger” character, the extrovert Otter is tough and self-sufficient. Portly is his young son.

The Weasels: The story’s main antagonists. They plot to take over Toad Hall.

“After all, the best part of a holiday is perhaps not so much to be resting yourself, as to see all the other fellows busy working”.

The animals in the story are mesmerizing and so real. We are privileged to have photos of the Grahame family’s own version of them. The set on the checked cloth was owned for a while by David Pressland of “Art Of The Tin Toy” He writes:

“I have a very interesting letter of provenance. I bought the set in Lawrences of Crewkerne in I believe 1998 and followed up the purchase by asking Lawrences to forward a letter to the vendor requesting any history or provenance for the set, this is the reply”:



“Dear David.....

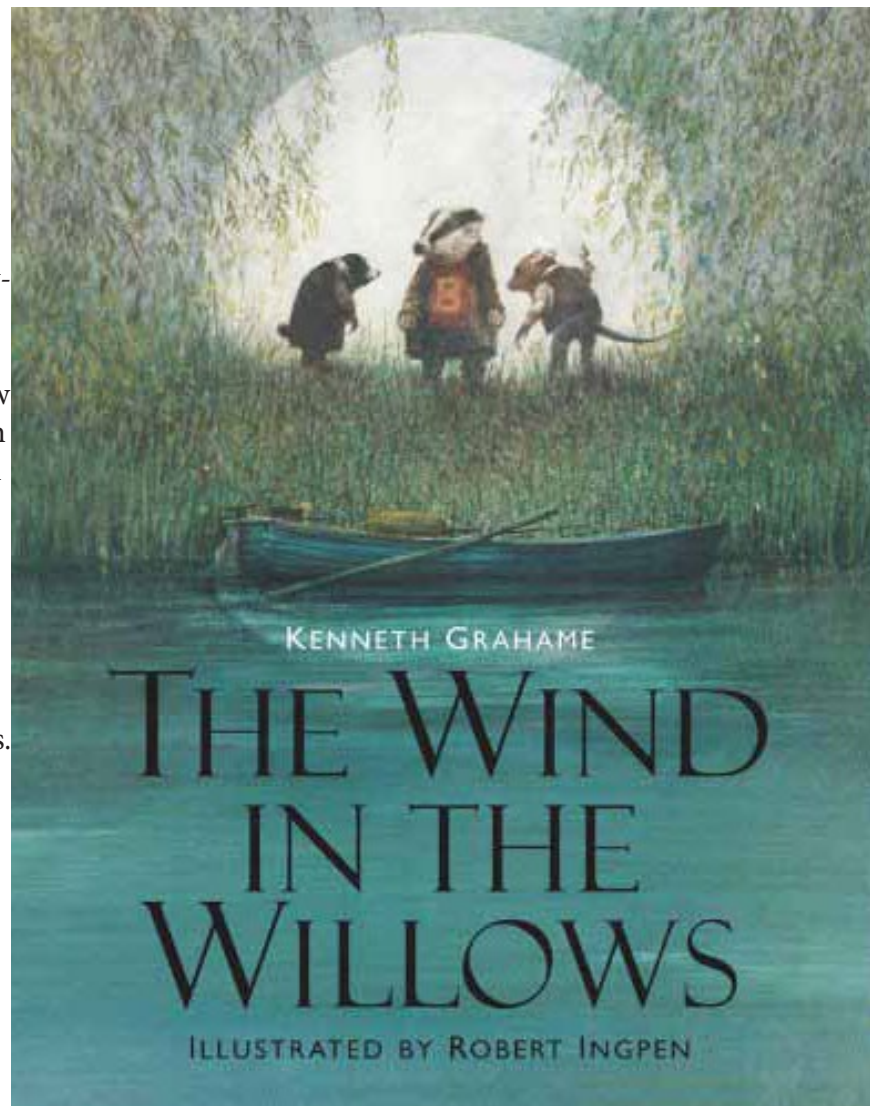
To the best of my knowledge the animals were made for an exhibition of Kenneth’s life times work, not sure why, where or when. As to where the animals have been all these years that is no mystery. They were with Mrs Grahame for a number of years at Pangbourne, Elspeth (Elsie) Thomas (Grahame) was my mothers cousin had the animals for a long time.

I(Iain Howie-Mitchell) used to visit and play with them because Elsie was my mother’s cousin. My mother and Elsie remained close friends until Elsie’s death aged 90. When I was a very small boy we used to visit Elsie at Church Cottage in Pangbourne and I was always allowed to play with the animals. A number of years later on her death I inherited them and they have been in my possession since that time. Sadly over the years some deterioration has taken place. Circumstances very sadly forced me into parting with them and to be truthful I have been broken hearted about parting with a major part of my family’s history.

The characters you have are Mr Toad dressed in his motoring outfit after caravanning became a bore. The rat is in his picnic dress as described when he and mole first met. He only ever wore one outfit Mr Badger in his casual outfit.....The wayside rat who Toad met up with on his escape from prison dressed as a washer woman and toad starving hungry smelled food cooking over a camp fire. These figures were copyright to the author and no other copies have ever been made exactly to E.H. Sheppards illustrations in the book so they are unique....”

Daniel Agnew - These are three fascinating sets of Wind in the Willow animals, when I first saw the set purchased by David Pressland, I’d never seen them before. His examples had orange paper tags attached with patent pending details. I had presumed they had been samples and never made, as I hadn’t even seen one character before. Then I found my set shortly after on eBay, I could believe it when I saw them and left a huge bid, much more than I could afford! Fortunately, I bought them for less, they were still expensive, but I had money in the bank!

Some years later Hilary bought her set and I still haven’t seen others than these three sets. Mine consists of just the five main characters, Hilary’s has an extra Weasel and David’s has three other characters. So who made them? The most obvious company to turn to for this type of character is Dean’s Rag Book Co., as they made many famous toys, but they usually used the same printed materials and clothes, but I don’t recognise any of them as matching a Dean’s toy. I think there would also be more use of velvet and they stylistically just don’t match. Another large firm contender is Farnell, they made Felix for a while, but they tended to create their own characters. I have a theory that they are made by a smaller English firm, perhaps someone like Jungle Toys. There are some 70 odd British firms making soft toys which cropped up around the 1st World War and many carried on into the 1920s-30s, when their toys are likely to have been made! The search goes on!



Two of the sets of animals in the photographs are owned by Daniel Agnew and Hilary Pauley. These magnificent animals are in themselves works of art.



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The rat is in his picnic dress as described when he and mole first met. He only ever wore one outfit

Mr Badger in his casual outfit.....

The wayside rat who Toad met up with on his escape from prison dressed as a washer woman and toad starving hungry smelled food cooking over a camp fire.

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ILLUSTRATED BY ERNEST H. SHEPARD