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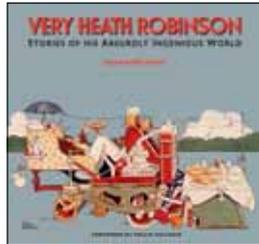
Television personality **Juliette Foster** looks at some of the latest books to come out of Surrey

HAVING trouble waking up in the mornings? Maybe an alarm clock attached to the brass section of an orchestra could be right up your street. Or for the man who struggles with his braces, why not try a pair that work on electricity? It takes a sideways sense of humour to spot the funniness in objects as banal as alarm clocks and braces, yet the artist and illustrator, William Heath Robinson (1872-1944), had it in droves.

His gravity-defying contraptions operated by strings, pulleys and anything else that came to hand, have entertained the public, while inspiring artists and film makers like Nick Park of *Wallace & Gromit* fame. Robinson's name is also a word in its own right: the Oxford English dictionary defines a Heath Robinson as "any absurdly ingenious and impracticable device". Although he lived most of his life in London, Robinson did spend 11 productive years in Cranleigh, which means that Surrey can legitimately claim him as one of its own!

So what would he make of today's technology-obsessed world in which a mobile phone app can arrange a date or pay for a cappuccino? It's a question that TV presenter Adam Hart-Davis, author of *Very Heath Robinson*, leaves the reader to work out for themselves. Part-biography and part-tribute, Hart-Davis places Robinson's work in the context of the times in which he lived: a Britain of industrialisation, box house suburbs and a burgeoning market for household gadgets. Mechanisation was making life easier, while giving Robinson the

## THE REVIEW



VERY HEATH ROBINSON: STORIES OF HIS ABSURDLY INGENUOUS WORLD

Author: Adam Hart-Davis  
Publisher: Shelldrake Press  
Price: £40

**'His gravity-defying contraptions operated by strings, pulleys and anything else that came to hand, have entertained the public while inspiring artists and film makers...'**

means to mischievously explore the logic of the so-called labour-saving device. Imagine an armchair fitted to a lawnmower with a drinks cabinet, a radio and a table of food thrown in? Or how about adapting the same lawnmower to play records? Unlike PG Wodehouse, for whom upper class toff Bertie Wooster was the joke, the middle classes were Robinson's comedy vehicle. He watched them on holiday, at home or socialising with their friends before converting his sharp-eyed observations into deliciously humorous images.

Hart-Davis has assembled more than 300 of Robinson's colour illustrations, line drawings and advertising commissions, some of which have never been published in book form. It adds up to a delightful visual feast complemented by the author's enthusiasm for a man who brought warmth to his subjects while giving a discreet two-fingered salute to officialdom. Chapters are arranged into themes, revealing that there was more to Robinson than quirky gadgets and watching Brits chilling out. Sports were a particular favourite for his style of micky-taking. A Robinson game of cricket is played with a single wicket, on a circular pitch and two batsmen fending off bouncers from dozens of bowlers.

This funny book will appeal to both William Heath Robinson fans and those who have yet to experience the fullness of his genius. Surely author Philip Pullman, who wrote the forward, hit the nail on the head when he described Robinson as "The Grand High Celestial Mechanic of Absurdity"?

## THREE MORE FROM SURREY

### THE WITCH'S KISS

Author: Katherine & Elizabeth Corr  
Publisher: HarperCollins. Price: £7.99  
Haunted by the recurring dream of a handsome blond-haired boy with eyes that are "cold and full of cruelty", 16-year-old Meredith Cooper must use her extraordinary heritage to destroy the sorcerer and his curse. That means re-learning the witchcraft inherited from her mother and grandmother. Set in the fictitious town of Tillingham (loosely based on Farnham), *The Witch's Kiss* is the first book in a trilogy by sisters Katherine and Elizabeth Corr. Fusing Anglo Saxon myth with elements of the *Sleeping Beauty* fairy tale, the Corrs have produced an imaginative fantasy novel appealing to young adults.



### THE SWARM

Author: Derek E Pearson  
Publisher: GB Publishing. Price: £8.99  
Wallington's Derek E Pearson blasted his way onto Britain's science fiction circuit with the brilliantly edgy *Body Holiday* trilogy, chronicling the fight between feisty heroine Milla Carter and the creepy Body Holiday Foundation. With the battle now over, Pearson has transported Milla into even deadlier territory in *The Swarm*. In this latest adventure, which is underpinned by black humour, new age philosophy and addictive brain-stretching science, she faces a lethal gas cloud that is destroying Earth. This classy novel once again reaffirms Pearson's position as a major literary talent.



### CAN HER GLORY EVER FADE? A LIFE OF MARY SEACOLE

Author: Jay Margrave  
Publisher: Goldenford. Price: £9.99  
Her face has appeared on postage stamps, a statue can be found of her at London's Saint Thomas' Hospital and in 2016 Google used her image on its login page. And 136 years after her death Mary Seacole, a mixed-race Jamaican herbalist and contemporary of Florence Nightingale, continues to fascinate the public. *Can her Glory Ever Fade?* by Guildford's Jay Margrave, is an engaging account of a remarkable Victorian life. Told by her servant Horatia, it traces Seacole's journey from the Caribbean basin to England and then Crimea.

