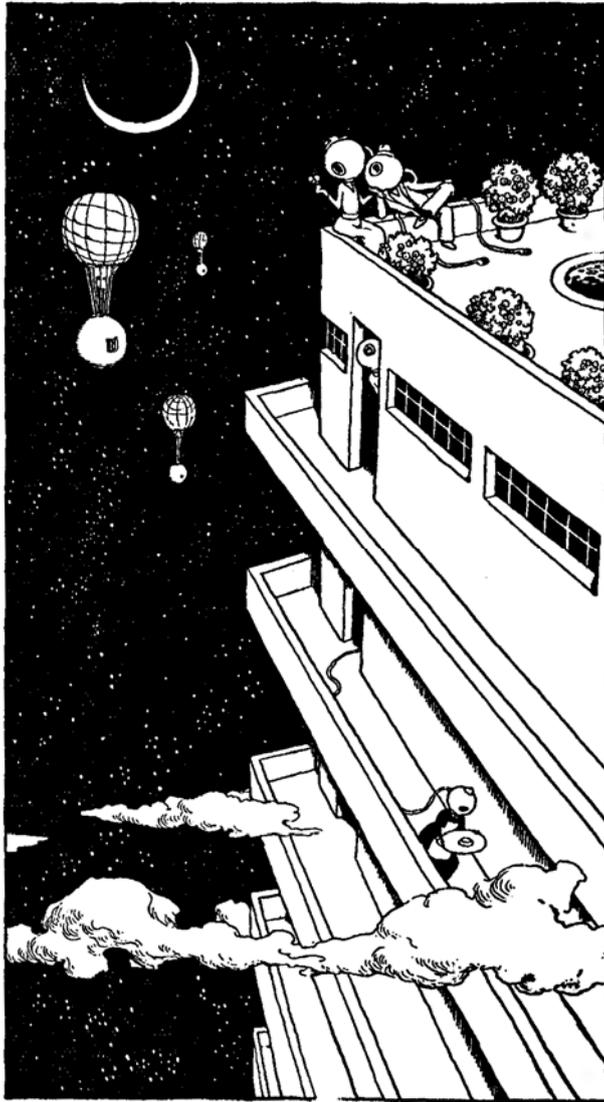


HOW  
TO  
LIVE  
IN  
A  
FLAT





A VISION OF THINGS TO COME —  
A ROOF IDYLL ON STRATOSPHERE MANSIONS

VINTAGE WORDS OF WISDOM

# HOW TO LIVE IN A FLAT

By

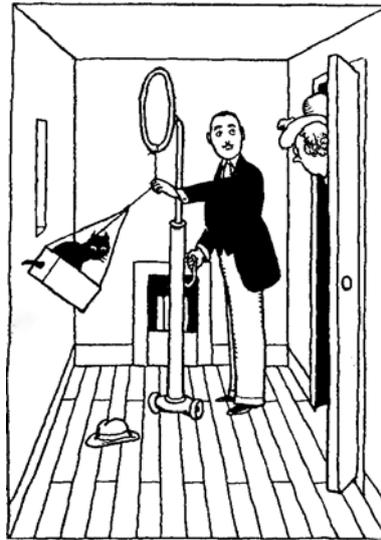
HEATH ROBINSON

AND

K. R. G. BROWNE



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**PROVING THAT THERE IS  
ROOM TO SWING A CAT**

## DEDICATION

TO ANY HOUSE AND/OR ESTATE AGENT, AUCTIONEER, SURVEYOR AND VALUER

DEAR SIR:

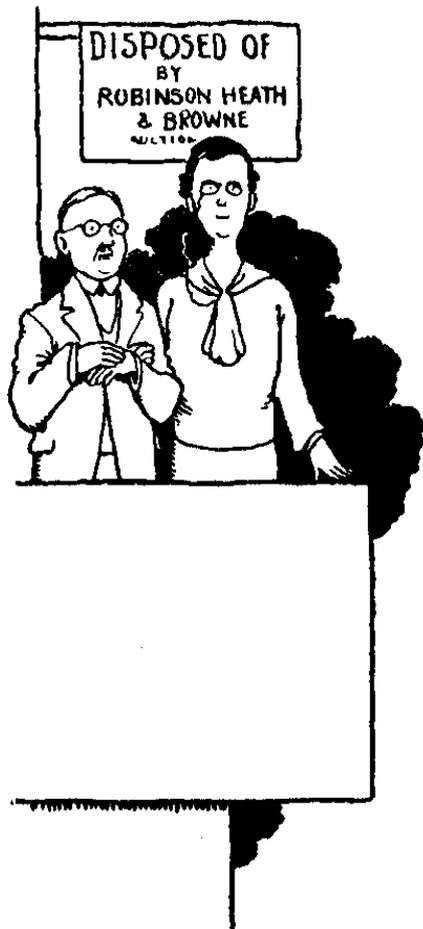
But for you, this book might never have seen the light. Of what avail to prate of flats, if *you* are not at hand to negotiate the let? We want the best homes; you have them. It is your grim task to reconcile those two irreconcilables – the landlord (to whom all tenants are destructive carpers) and the tenant (to whom all landlords are rapacious skinflints). That landlords are so seldom torn apart by maddened tenants, and tenants so seldom hamstrung by infuriated landlords, is largely due to the skill with which you contrive that hardly ever the twain shall meet.

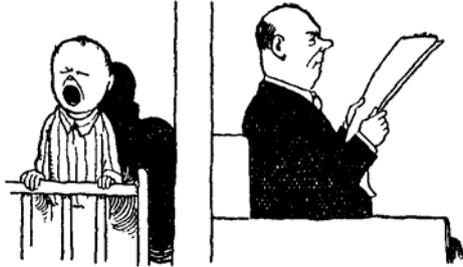
Scarcely less admirable than your gift for diplomacy is your unquenchable optimism. Viewing the world through your rose-tinted glasses, you see every house as a desirable res., every flat as a unique opp., every seaside villa as but a stone's-throw from the beach. This lends to your conversation a buoyancy and charm which – though captious house-hunters have been known occasionally to differ from you – is most refreshing in this gloom-ridden age.

Your versatility, too, commands our deep respect. Now agenting a house, now dittoing an estate, now auctioneering this, surveying that or valuing the other, you must be as fully occupied as a cat in an aviary. As Wordsworth might have said of you, if Longfellow had not more or less forestalled him:

“Letting, surveying, valuing, onward through life he goes. Each morning sees some lease drawn up, each evening sees one close...”

It is in sincere admiration, therefore, of your many qualities, and in appreciation of the vital part you play in the daily – or rather quarterly – life of the nation, that this book is dedicated to you. No hard feelings, we hope?

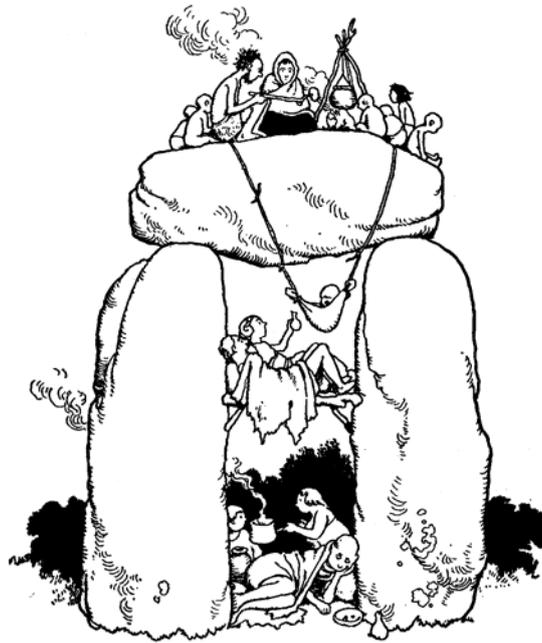




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EARLY FLATS

## FOREWORD BY GEOFFREY BEARE (TRUSTEE OF THE WILLIAM HEATH ROBINSON TRUST)

In the 1930s Heath Robinson was known as ‘The Gadget King’ and he is still most widely remembered for his wonderful humorous drawings. But humorous art was only his third choice of career, and one that he turned to almost by accident. On leaving the Royal Academy Schools in 1895 his ambition was to become a landscape painter. He soon realised that such painting would not pay the bills and so he followed his two older brothers into book illustration. He rapidly established himself as a talented and original practitioner in his chosen field, and in 1903 felt sufficiently secure to marry. However, the following year a publisher who had commissioned a large quantity of drawings was declared bankrupt. The young Heath Robinson, who had just become the father of a baby girl, had quickly to find a new source of income. He turned to the high class weekly magazines such as *The Sketch* and *The Tatler* who paid well for large, highly finished humorous drawings, and within a short time was being acclaimed as a unique talent in the field of humorous art.

For a number of years, he combined his careers as illustrator and humorist with equal and growing success. One day he might be illustrating Kipling’s *A Song of the English* or a Shakespeare play and the next would find him at work explaining the gentle art of catching things. He said of this time ‘It was always a mental effort to adapt myself to these changes, but with the elasticity of my early days, it was not too difficult’. During the First World War the market for luxurious illustrated books diminished, but demand for his humorous work increased, his gentle satires of the enemy proving popular both with the public at home and especially with the forces in the various theatres of war. This situation persisted after the war with very few commissions for illustration, but regular demands for his humorous drawings from popular magazines and for advertising.

In 1935 the *Strand Magazine* published an article titled ‘At Home with Heath Robinson’. This had

a text by Kenneth R. G. Browne and ten pen and wash illustrations by Heath Robinson. The illustrations, which showed novel uses for unwanted items, were drawn under the working title 'Rejuvenated Junk'. K. R. G. Browne, a fellow member of the Savage Club, was an ideal collaborator for Heath Robinson. He was the son of Gordon Browne who is still well known as an illustrator of books and magazines, and was the grandson of Hablot Knight Browne, who under his pen name of 'Phiz' gained lasting fame as the illustrator of many Victorian novelists, including Charles Dickens, Charles Lever and Harrison Ainsworth. The article in *The Strand Magazine* marked the start of a partnership that was only brought to an untimely end by the death of Browne in 1940. During 1932 and 1933 Heath Robinson had drawn a series of cartoons for *The Sketch* entitled 'Flat Life', which depicted various gadgets designed to make the most of the limited space available in the contemporary flat. It was this series of drawings that provided K. R. G. Browne and W. Heath Robinson with the inspiration for their first full-length book together. It was called *How to Live in a Flat*, and as well as greatly extending the original ideas showing many ingenious ways of overcoming the problems caused by lack of space in flats and bungalows, also provided much fun at the expense of the more extreme designs in thirties furniture and architecture. The book was published by Hutchinson for Christmas 1936 and was well received.

Over the next three years K. R. G. Browne and Heath Robinson successfully repeated the formula in a further three titles. Heath Robinson received much teasing from his family about the choice of subject for the second book, *How to be a Perfect Husband*, but looking back over his cartoons one finds that romance and courtship had been among his most frequently chosen subjects, from early 'Cupid' cartoons to such pictures as 'The Coquette' and 'Stolen Kisses' which were reproduced in *Absurdities* in 1934. The next book in the series received a valuable preview when *The Strand Magazine* published an article called 'A Highly Complicated Science'. The science referred to was that of gardening and the article by K. R. G. Browne was accompanied by nine of Heath Robinson's drawings all of which were subsequently used in *How to Make a Garden Grow*. Again, much of the subject matter for this book and the next, *How to be a Motorist*, was drawn from Heath Robinson's earlier cartoons. Among his earliest work for *The Sketch* was a series of drawings on the practicalities of gardening. This included a picture of 'root pruning' showing the gardener tunnelling down to the roots of a plant to prune them. Although the earlier drawing is much more elaborate, the idea is the same as is presented on page 27 of *How to Make a Garden Grow*. Similarly the theme of motoring recurs frequently in his earlier cartoons.

But there is an important difference between the full-page cartoon for a newspaper or magazine, and the humorous book. The cartoon must be capable of making the reader laugh whatever his mood as he turns the page and so must achieve an instant impact with a strong idea and sound execution. The reader of a humorous book, on the other hand, will have picked it up in the expectation of being amused, and so here the author or artist's problem is one of how to sustain the humour in an extended form, rather than to create a sudden effect with a single idea. In the *How to...* books Heath Robinson found the opportunity to present the reader with a set of variations on a theme, allowing him to look at his subject from every angle and to explore each idea that presented itself. Thus the books allow us to see a different aspect of his humorous art; to see its depth, rather than just selected high points.

Heath Robinson died at home on 13 Sep 1944. His immediate appeal and general popularity during his lifetime resulted mainly from his humorous work and in this field he was both brilliant and unique. He was an unusually prolific and versatile artist with a seemingly inexhaustible stock of good ideas. But like artists such as Hogarth and Rowlandson before him, the secret of his appeal lay in his great abilities as a serious artist.

## Geoffrey Beare



Geoffrey worked as an operations research scientist in the Ministry of Defence until 2009, when he took early retirement. He is the leading expert on Heath Robinson and has researched and written about all aspects of the artist's work. He curated the exhibition of Heath Robinson's work at the Dulwich Picture Gallery in 2003, which has been touring the UK ever since, and wrote the book that accompanied the exhibition. He is a Trustee of the William Heath Robinson Trust which is working to build a Heath Robinson museum in North London. He pursues his more general interest in the history of illustration through the Imaginative Book Illustration Society, of which he is chairman.

## VINTAGE WORDS OF WISDOM

The **Vintage Words of Wisdom** titles are not simply facsimiles of old books. They have been carefully selected and professionally produced as high quality ebooks. Our aim is to make the best vintage books on popular topics of interest more widely available again. The books range from practical titles that include wisdom from times past to unashamedly nostalgic works that will appeal to those who may remember these or similar titles from their childhood. Often amusing and quaint, these vintage volumes also contain wise words and advice that may have been forgotten in the intervening years. So often it is worth revisiting the past to remind ourselves that the best ideas stand the test of time. Above all, the **Vintage Words of Wisdom** titles are highly entertaining and provide a fascinating snapshot of life in days gone by. We have chosen books with wonderful illustrations, exciting stories of daring and adventure, practical advice and charming nostalgic descriptions of a simpler life.

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*Nothing new under the sun*

## INTRODUCTION

### THE EVOLUTION OF THE FLAT

HISTORY does not, so far as I know, record the name of the person who invented the Home – probably because he was devoured by a wry-necked megatherium before he could be interviewed by the daily Press, which was not then in existence. It seems certain, however, that the first and original Home was merely a hole in a cliff, wholly lacking in modern conveniences and furnished chiefly with the skins of such animals as could be persuaded to part with them.

That, of course, was a long time ago – away back in the days when men did their wooing with a bludgeon and the bat-eared pleiosaurus nested undisturbed in the boskage of St. John’s Wood. It was not until considerably later that the art of dwelling was revolutionized by the discovery that pieces of wood could be nailed together in the shape of a large box and inhabited by several persons. From that moment caves began to decline in popularity among the intelligentsia; and when some unknown genius, fooling about in a clay-pit one mild spring afternoon, found that he had inadvertently invented bricks, the cave’s little hour was definitely over. Its place in public favour was taken by the House; and people have been living in houses ever since, apart from an annual fortnight at Southend or Deauville and an occasional spell in gaol.

Of recent years, however, it has become increasingly apparent that the House, too, has had its day, and that the dwelling-place of the future is the Flat – so called because it usually is, and to distinguish it from the maisonette, which isn’t. For this there are several reasons, mainly financial. What with rent, rates, stair-carpets, the depredations of mice, and the tendency of gardeners to bare their fangs if denied their lawful wage, a house of any kind costs a good deal to keep up. (That is especially true of those large country houses – colloquially known as “the stately homes of England” – where butlers are employed by the half-dozen and guests are provided with bicycles to enable them to reach the bath-room. But as the majority of these have now been converted into country clubs or dog-racing centres, they need not concern us at the moment.)