



Obituary: Fritz Wegner

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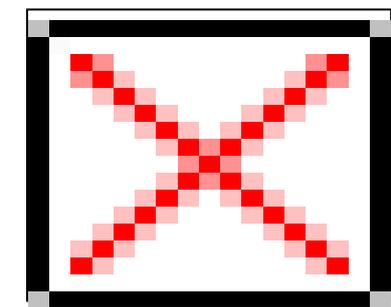
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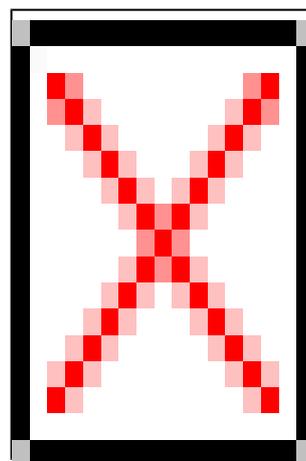
Fritz Wegner remembered by **Ian Beck**



Born Vienna September 15th 1924 ? died London March 15th 2015

Ian Beck writes?

Fritz Wegner was in a class of his own as an illustrator. That is the top class. There was no one to touch him for wit, warmth, and above all fine draughtsmanship. A quality perhaps best appreciated and understood by his fellow illustrators. Few could approach him in this regard. He was a virtuoso practitioner with what Edward Ardizzone described as, 'that most intractable medium, a dip pen and a bottle of indian ink'. His was a very long career. From the original dust jacket for J D Salinger's **The Catcher in The Rye**, through a myriad drawings for **The Radio Times** and other journals to his numerous books. These included the classic **Fattypuffs and Thinifers** by Andre Maurois, up to his later astonishing and lavish novelty book of Astrological lore, **Heaven on Earth** which he made in collaboration with



his close friend and companion Emma Curzon. His pen has delighted the generations. Well delighted generations of readers that is. For his fellow illustrators there can only have been despair at seeing such a fluent ability flourish in their collective faces, like red rags to so many bulls.

Fritz was a modest man and was in fact incapable of flourishing any red rags. He was born into an enlightened Jewish family in Vienna in 1924. After the Anschluss his parents worried for his safety and sent him to England as a refugee. He was taken in to the household of a lettering artist and designer named George Mansell. He, together with his French wife more or less adopted the 13 year old Fritz who remained living with them for several years. Mansell recognised Fritz's precocious drawing ability and enrolled him at St Martin's Art School where he himself taught design. After the

war Fritz started on his long career as a freelance illustrator. On the way he ended up teaching a whole generation of illustrators at his old alma mater St Martins, including the likes of Nicola Bayley, George Hardie, Glynn Boyd Harte, Sara Midda, among many others.

Fritz was a modest and self-effacing man to an almost ridiculous degree. He once tried to back out of a party thrown to celebrate his long membership of the Art Workers Guild. He was clearly horrified that such a thing should have been put on in his honour. Anyone who knew anything about drawing admired and revered Fritz's work. His talent revealed itself in so many ways, especially somehow in the seemingly simple and humble things; a bicycle for instance. Like the one ridden by Master Bun the baker's son in one of the Allan Ahlberg's **Happy Families** series of books. It is freely and fluidly drawn and yet accurate without being slavishly technical. A thing solidly seen and understood and seemingly drawn at speed and with all the necessary effort to get it right hidden from view.

He has left an enormous body of work all characterised by the joyous passage of his hand and pen which have seemed to dance together across all the pages he drew.

Fritz reached the great age of ninety, despite his constant refrain that 'we would never see him again?', which was repeated at every meeting. His beautiful witty work remains for us all to share and delight in.

Ian Beck

Adapted from a recent piece Ian Beck wrote to celebrate Fritz's 90th birthday, published as a Festschrift by the **Double Crown Club** of which Fritz was a member.

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