



## Anthorgraph No.3 ? Malcolm Saville

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**Malcolm Saville** interviewed by **Pat Triggs**.

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Malcolm Saville was born in Hastings in 1901 and went to boarding school at nine; something I've never regretted. His first job was with Oxford University Press looking out books for booksellers' orders; the start of a lifetime in publishing. Publicity, editing, writing: he's done it all. The writing started with football reports. I got £1 a match. It was wonderful training. You had to write at terrific speed.

Writing for children began in 1942. His family were in Shropshire at a farm (Coombe Head not far from Witchend) discovered in the uneasy pre-war period. In Hertfordshire as Deputy Night Controller for the ARP two nights a week, he began a story set in Shropshire. I suppose I owe a great debt to Arthur Ransome; he used genuine backgrounds and my daughters liked reading him. He sent **Mystery at Witchend** to his daughters who loved it. Was it written specially for them? Oh, no. I was in the business. It was definitely for publication.

Newnes took it. Then I had the luck that every author wants. It got on **Children's Hour** (beautifully dramatised by Barbara Sleight) and was a great success.

There are now twenty Lone Pine books, plus The Buckingham, Michael and Mary, Susan and Bill for younger readers, the Nettlefold books, the Jillies, lots of non-fiction and (his particular favourite) seven Marston Baines stories. Written for 14- to 15-year-olds, these secret service thrillers with an all-adult cast, foreign settings and a dash of (very pure) romance are now being avidly read by fans of eleven and up who complain that they are not in paperback. The fight is against (in turn) drug trafficking, smuggling, racism, Satanism anything which threatens individual liberty and freedom of speech. While some children may see the issues, most seem simply to enjoy the general mix. **Dagger and the Flame** was the best suspense you ever kept me in. While I was reading **Dark Danger** my legs went like jelly. I was so excited and frightened my tummy felt quite peculiar. I feel I want to read it again and again.

Accused of being middle-class and old-fashioned (the stories have been cut and modernised he thinks badly for paperback), he says of his Lone Piners, What they are and how they behave is very much more important than the way they speak. I don't think they live in an idealized world There are happy endings and unambiguous morality but I think children need that kind of certainty. The world is an ugly enough place.

His readers (2 million Lone Pine books sold) seem to agree. The stories apparently are compulsive. My brother doesn't read very much. I think you may have changed that. He borrowed my **Mystery at Witchend** yesterday and now he's nearly finishing **Seven White Gates**.

Recent work includes some countryside books (**Wild Flowers through the Year**, Transworld, is due in August) and an

anthology, **Words for All Seasons**, Lutterworth. ?I've wanted to do it for years. I've put in all the things that have meant a great deal to me.? But all his readers want to know, ?will there be another Lone Pine book?? ?I think I'm going to write one. The problem is do I go back in time? You see I've really tied everything up in **Home to Witchend**. I think I will have to go back and give as much space as I can to the twins.?

Chelsea Cottage, Winchelsea, Sussex (Malcolm Saville's well-known address) is one of two white-painted nineteenth-century cottages built, so the story goes, by a sea captain with the money from a salvage operation. Chelsea Cottage is named after his ship; next door after the ship he salvaged.

The sitting-room bookshelves hold several spy stories. ?I'm an addict, especially for John Le Carre.? Upstairs, past a ?gallery? of photographs of his four children and twelve grandchildren, in a tiny room with a dormer window, a wall of bookshelves holds copies of the 85 books (many of them in different editions) he has written for children. Here Malcolm Saville works at his books and at keeping in touch with the thousands of children who write to him (every day brings a batch of letters). Twice a year he writes and prints a newsletter about himself and his books which goes to every child who sends a second-class stamp. The back of his door is covered with photographs sent by readers.

### **Malcolm Saville has a way with places**

?They seem to come alive on the page and even though I have visited some of the places before, I want to see them again when I've read a story set there.? ? So says a reader.

A Saville tour takes in Shropshire, especially the Long Mynd, Sussex, especially Rye, Suffolk (Southwold), Yorkshire (Whitby), London, Dartmoor, Cornwall (Marazion), Dorset (Lyme Regis), and abroad with Marston Baines to Provence, Luxembourg, Amsterdam, Italy (Venice and Rome), Mallorca, Brittany and the Dolomites.

Here's a glimpse of the real background to some of the Lone Pine stories.

Clun ? ?one of the quietest places under the sun?. But not in **The Secret of Grey Walls** where the Lone Piners set up camp in the ruined castle and help to foil a gang of sheep-stealers.

The altar of Mithras at Stone-in-Oxney Church, Sussex, from **Treasure at Amorys**.

Hatch Holt is really New Pool Hollow in Shropshire.

From **The Elusive Grasshopper**, Watchbell Street (Traders Street) and Hope Anchor Hotel (The Gay Dolphin) in Rye.

Leintwardine, alias Bringewood Chase in **The Secret of the Gorge** ? the old stone bridge over the River Teme.

Marshbrook alias ?Onnybrook? ? the level crossing and signal box ?where Dickie longed to pull the levers?.

?There was the larch wood clinging to the side of the steep valley. There was the house itself with its two gabled windows under the roof, leaning against the hillside. There was the white gate between the low stone walls just where the lane stopped, and there was the same stream... singing down the side of the lane towards Ingles.? ? **Lone Pine Five**. Prior's Holt ? the model for Witchend and Hamperley ? the original of Ingles Farm.

### **What kind of a person is Malcolm Saville?**

Lively, energetic, friendly, a compulsive and enthusiastic talker. He holds firmly to ?traditional values?. ?I'm a very strong believer in family life? and, like the Lone Piners, thinks friendship and loyalty are important. Although officially retired, there's still ?lots to do?. Apart from writing, lecturing and keeping in touch with readers, he shares many interests with his wife. They love ?travelling, walking, the theatre and being together?. They dislike ?people who drop litter?. There are ?two children and their families within reach?, ?plenty of friends? and a ?fierce social life in Winchelsea?. Above all he is a professional. If every publisher promoted books as energetically as Malcolm Saville there would be a lot more children reading. Like every writer he wants to be read and to make sure that children can get

hold of his books when they want them. (He's a supporter of school bookshops.) ?I don't think a professional writer can ever really stop.?

### **How are the books written?**

?I'm first influenced by a place. I read it up and find out all I can about it. I study maps. Sometimes it's a newspaper item that arouses my interest. I went to Southwold because I'd read about the east coast floods and thought It might make a story,? (It did ? **Sea Witch Comes Home.**) The windmill which appears in **The Gay Dolphin Adventure** is in Winchelsea. For the Marston Baines stories he visited every location. The settings are as real as he can make them and when he takes liberties with reality the readers are told in an introduction.

?I don't write any fiction unless it is very carefully plotted. I do a synopsis, chapter by chapter, with dialogue, character notes, what I want the reader to know. This goes to my editor.? When the synopsis is clear, the writing starts. ?I write in pencil, ballpoint or pen, as the mood suits me, on the back of old typescripts. I'm not awfully fond of typewriters. The next morning I correct in another colour.? It then goes chapter by chapter to a typist he's met once in 35 years. ?She can read my writing.? In all a book usually takes four to five months.

There's only one golden rule. ?Have a curtain to every chapter. They must read . on. I've failed unless a child wants to read on.?

Malcolm Saville's books are published in hardback by Heinemann, Collins and Lutterworth, and in paperback as Armada Lions., Asian Lions, Transworld How and Why, Carouse! and Knight.

?If there were many writers like you, many more people would read out of school time?. (A 13-year-old)

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