

# The Real Peter Raleigh

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Readers of *The Scandaroon* know that it is written in the first person as a fragment of autobiography, and that H.W. introduces a boy called Peter Raleigh to whom he is acting as tutor at the time when he is living at Skirr Cottage. In S.P.B. Mais's *Orange Street* (published in 1926) a character named Brian Stucley — a harshly caricatured representation of H.W. — is tutoring a boy whom he taunts and bullies. My parents would probably have known the identity of this boy, but by the time *The Scandaroon* was published in 1972, it was too late to ask them. It was not until I read 'A Brief Memory of Henry Williamson' (p. 37, Henry Williamson Society Journal No. 21) that I realised that the writer must have been Mrs Foulds, and that her husband (now Major J.P. Foulds, R.A., retired) had been 'Peter Raleigh'.

Patrick Foulds and his wife now live in Barnstaple, and I got in touch with them at once. Patrick has been kind enough to let me have an account of his days as a pupil of H.W., and has given me permission to make use of it.

His father — not an admiral, as was Peter Raleigh's, but a composer, John Herbert Foulds — was abroad with his wife in the summer of 1924. Patrick was left in the care of the redoubtable Miss Gertrude Johnson, of the Barn, Georgeham. It was arranged that he should have some tuition from H.W. Aged eight, 'a small, very anxious child with spectacles and sticky-out ears', Patrick was alarmed at the prospect, but soon found that, although the three Rs had little part in his lessons, H.W. threw wide the gates of his imagination — partly by giving him *Bevis* to read. One treat was the arranging of a treasure hunt for him, and his sister, around the village; prize, a fox's skull. He was interested to discover that 'a man as wild and strange as Henry' could get himself into trouble by shooting with an air rifle at someone's revolving chimney cowl (it made a satisfactory 'ping') or annoy the neighbours by firing at a 12-bore cartridge (shot removed) wedged in a wall. 'Henry hit it: BANG: complaints'.

Finally Henry encouraged Patrick to send his over-large cap skimming through the air, like one of today's Frisbees. They were on Baggy; the cap went in the sea. Although this was 'probably the most wonderful thing that came to pass in the whole of that summer', it was too much for Mr and Mrs Foulds: 'Henry was berated. I didn't see him again until 1957'.

A grain of justification for Mais's version of H.W. as tutor may be found in the fact that Patrick admits that 'Henry roared at me occasionally, I suppose when I was being obtuse. But I was neither frightened nor subdued by his outbursts, which seemed like natural phenomena — volcanoes, earthquakes, etc. One marvelled, but kept clear!'

Although Loetitia did not marry Henry until May 1925, it would seem that she sometimes visited Georgeham during that summer of 1924, as Patrick recalls that his eight-year-old self 'instantly fell in love when she played her banjo and sang "Will ye no come back again?" especially for me. I suppose it lasted all of a week or two!'

From a school in Switzerland Patrick wrote several times to his distant hero in Georgeham, and always received replies, but unfortunately no longer has the letters.

There is considerable interest in knowing that, for all his disguised name and background, Peter Raleigh was a real boy, who after these many years remembers the Henry Williamson of the Skirr Cottage days with respect and affection.