

Dedicated  
guardian  
of literary  
heritage

## OBITUARY

### RICHMAL ASHBEE

For more than four decades, Richmal Ashbee cared from her Norfolk home for the literary legacy of her aunt – author of one of the best-selling series of children's stories in the world.

The last and 37th book in the Just William series was finished by Mrs Ashbee. She was appointed literary executor and inherited the copyright on her aunt's death in 1969.

Christened Richmal Crompton Lamburn Disher, she died after a short illness, aged 76 last Thursday.

She left school at 17, and then went to the University of London to read history between 1947 and 1951. She studied at the Institute of Archaeology for two years and married her husband, Paul, in 1952. He went on to become a distinguished UEA archaeologist.

She taught history and Latin and, after they moved to Norfolk in 1969, she taught at Thorpe Grammar School and Norwich High School for Girls. She also became involved in local affairs.

Her enthusiasm for the WI soon took up more of her time. A founder member of Loddon and Chedgrave Afternoon Institute, she wrote for the EDP for almost 20 years in a monthly column for the EDP's Farm & Country pages.

A member of the Norfolk Federation's executive, she widened the scope of the public affairs, international and environment committees. A stout advocate for the Best-Kept Village of the Year, now the EDP Pride of Norfolk Awards, she took a great interest in promoting it.

When plans were revealed to double Loddon's size in a decade from 1973, she started the Loddon and Chedgrave Society. She served on the parish council and as chairman of Loddon Middle School governors. Mrs Ashbee was also chairwoman of the Norfolk Bus Users' Committee.

Her historical background helped her to become a key member of the Bishop of Norwich's committee on books and documents in the 1980s.

Later, she was a driving force in recording and charting



**BOOKS: Richmal Ashbee.**

inscriptions in the county's 600 churchyards, helped by members of 240 WIs, and building on the work started by the Genealogical Society in Norfolk.

She presided over a major revival of popularity of the Just William stories. Her aunt had started writing in 1919 and wrote a total of 385 stories. At one point, an estimated 75,000 copies a year were selling of the books. William Brown, the 11-year-old schoolboy, became enormously popular and his adventures were translated into more than 14 languages.

At least three TV series were made by the BBC including one with Bonnie Langford. When another was made in the 1990s, it spawned more success.

Mrs Ashbee was president of the Just William Society, which was formed 20 years ago, and plans to hold an international convention near Norwich next year.

She leaves her husband, Paul, children, Edward and Catherine (Kate), and two grandchildren, Jonathan and Francesca.

A service of thanksgiving will be held at All Saints Church, Chedgrave, tomorrow at 2.30pm.

**Michael Pollitt**