

A lost legacy: a critical assessment and catalogue of the illustrated work of Ernest Aris: Alfred Ernest Walter George Aris (22 April, 1882-1963: children's author.

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A lost legacy: a critical assessment and catalogue of the illustrated work of Ernest Aris: Alfred Ernest Walter George Aris (22 April, 1882 -1963: children's author, illustrator and commercial artist

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Abstract

Ernest Alfred Walter George Aris FZS, SGA, (1882–1963) was born in Islington and moved to Bradford where he spent his formative years and attained a

diploma at the Bradford Technical College of Fine Art in 1900. Aris was a professionally trained commercial artist, author, and prolific illustrator of 170 children's and natural history books. He also illustrated over 250 books for other authors, including Enid Blyton, Beatrix Potter, and May Byron, as well as contributing to a number of leading periodicals, magazines and newspapers. Aris was not a member of any of the active artists' clubs or societies and was possibly shunned by his contemporaries and peers, who considered him unoriginal and an unscrupulous opportunist. Volume I of this thesis seeks to examine these suggestions and assesses why Aris's name, despite his significant output, has remained relatively anonymous and why much of his legacy appears to have been unidentified, overlooked or forgotten. Chapter 1 discusses the historical influences of anthropomorphism on Aris's style and those of his immediate predecessors. I have categorised Aris's books into three periods for this appraisal and examined his technical attributes and qualities, together with his trademark features and characteristics, with the purpose of identifying what makes Aris's creative design instantly recognisable and his output of illustration so distinctive. Chapter 2 discusses Aris's relationship with the children's author and illustrator, Beatrix Potter. Aris holds a unique place in history in that he was commissioned by Beatrix Potter to provide illustrations for her book and was the only artist with whom she seriously contemplated a professional working partnership (1916). However, Frederick Warne and Beatrix Potter later accused Aris of plagiarism and of exploiting any opportunity to achieve a commercial advantage. There is an argument to suggest that Aris's affiliation with Potter and the allegations of plagiarism had a significant impact on his long term reputation and was possibly the reason for adopting the pseudonym Robin A. Hood. Chapter 3 examines the creative scope and features of Aris's prestigious commercial partnerships. These start from the beginning of his professional career at the turn of the twentieth century, which coincided with the technical development and advancement of the colour picture postcard. Aris was at the forefront of this revolution, designing several series of comic and humorous postcards for leading printers that are now associated with and representative of a bygone era. In 1915 Aris was commissioned to design six tram posters, which were selected by Frank Pick at London Transport, as part of the National Collection of Posters. Pick single handedly revolutionised poster art in Britain and was responsible for establishing the national collection, where these posters now reside and have remained

forgotten and out of sight for the last century. In the 1920s the trend for collecting novelty cigarette cards enabled Aris to produce a number of outstanding natural history designs as well as the infamous Frisky series, where his mischievous sense of humour is much evident in his trademark characters. Perhaps Aris's final and greatest legacy, however, lies in the legendary Cococubs campaign for Bournville Children's Cocoa, which was described as 'one of the cleverest publicity schemes of the year.'¹ The success of the advertising campaign meant demand outstripped supply of the product, as youngsters eagerly sought the 'free toy in every tin' promotional figurines that Aris designed (1934-1936). Volume II of this thesis comprises of a unique catalogue of Aris's creative output over fifty years and spans a range of commercial fields of art. The catalogue is divided into four parts. Part one consists of Aris's literary publications, with a detailed bibliographic record and image of the cover of each book that he wrote and illustrated under his own name and pseudonyms, as well as prominent books Aris illustrated for other eminent authors and a compendium list of books Aris illustrated for authors and other publications. Part two is a record of Aris's commercial work, including the early series of pictorial postcards that he completed for leading quality publishers at the start of his career (1904-1909) and the six pictorial natural history posters, which Aris was commissioned to undertake for the London Transport tram system (1915). Part three comprises of Aris's collectables and contains the four unique series of cigarette cards that Aris designed for leading tobacco manufacturers (issued 1929-1935). Part four includes a comprehensive description of each of the limited editions and subtle colour variants of the Cococub lead figurines inserted into Bournville Children's Cocoa (1934-1936). The aim of the thesis is to justify why I believe Aris deserves further merit for his contribution within the field of illustration and commercial artwork. I have sought to highlight the factors that make his contribution and the success of his creative designs within these different fields so significant. ¹ The Grocery and the Provision Merchant Journal, November 1934, p. 276.

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A lost legacy: a critical assessment and catalogue of the illustrated work of Ernest Aris: Alfred Ernest Walter George Aris (22 April, 1882-1963: children's author, in the work" the Paradox of the actor " Diderot drew attention to how the lack of friction profusely oscillates inter-layer functional analysis, even if the direct observation of this phenomenon is difficult.

