



The *Philippa Pearce* *Memorial Lecture*

celebrating excellence in writing for children

[Ann] Philippa Pearce was the youngest of four children of a flour-miller and corn-merchant. His mill stood on the upper reaches of the River Cam, in Great Shelford, a village 5 miles south of Cambridge. The river ran beside the mill house garden and then under the mill, which it partly powered; the miller's family, as usual, lived in the mill house.

The village, the river, the Cambridgeshire countryside appear more or less plainly in *Minnow on the Say*, *Tom's Midnight Garden*, *A Dog So Small*, and in some of the short stories in *What the Neighbours Did and other stories* and in *The Shadow Cage and other tales of the supernatural*. The story called *At the Rivergates* is particularly close to scenic reality. And the *Midnight Garden* and its house are based closely on the mill house garden and the mill house as Philippa Pearce's father - who was born there - knew them as a boy.

Philippa Pearce was born in 1920 in Great Shelford [although not in the mill house]. She was educated at the Perse Girls' School in Cambridge and then [on a State Scholarship] at Girton College, Cambridge, where she read English and then History. During the War she worked as a Temporary Civil Servant. and afterwards joined the School Broadcasting Department [Radio] of the B.B.C. She worked there as a scriptwriter and producer for thirteen years, until 1958. Then, for a short period, she was an editor in the Educational Department of the Clarendon Press [i.e. O.U.P.] in Oxford. In 1960 she returned to London and became Children's Editor at Andre Deutsch Ltd [1960-7]. This was a part-time job: she was also writing and producing for radio, both for adults and for children.

P.P. married Martin Christie, a fruit-grower, in 1963, and they had one daughter. Her father died soon after her birth.

P.P. continued as a free-lance writer in London until 1973. Other free-lance activities included [children's] book-reviewing [mainly for *The Guardian* and *The Times Literary Supplement*], lecturing and story-telling. In 1973 she and her daughter moved into the country, to live down the same lane in Great Shelford where she had grown up.

In 1993 P.P. became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. In 1995 she received from Hull University the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters. In 1997 she was awarded the O.B.E. "for services to children's literature".

P.P. went on living in Great Shelford, and writing, up until her death in 2006. She wrote her last book, *A Finder's Magic*, for her two grandsons, who lived nearby. It will be published by Walker Books later this year.