

**POEM by Richard Alexander Usborne. For Dorothy Watson,
Chatelaine of Windrush, Mother Superior, Aunt extraordinary.
*With a nephew's love and belated thanks. November 2nd 1967***

We drove to Calne the other day,
and branched around Inkpen on our way.
The Bath road's widened, smoother, more
Arterially the A4.

That castle-cottage on the curve
Has gone--just there the final swerve
Always woke Buzzy from his snooze
To recognize the smells and views
Of the last home-stretch wiggly miles:
The oak-tree studded hedgerow aisles,
The water-meadow bridges' humps,
The level crossing rattle-bumps,
The Bunridge town, wall-blinded still,
The T-bend halfway up the hill,
Past school and church, a four-wheel
coast
Up to the crossroad finger-post:
Then right, to gravel drive a-crunch
And Nanny, other dogs, and lunch.

I used to think that castle-cottage,
Was where, with pension, mess of
pottage,
A cat or two, white pigeons, bees,
Some bean-rows, a few apple trees,
An Aga and a radio,
Nanny, retired, proposed to go,
To live, lulled by the swish of cars,
Until she joined the morning stars.
I used, in my car driving dreams,
Myself to own the fields and streams
Near Kintbury station, hauling out
The 4-lb seasonable trout.
And shooting, faithful Buzz at heel,
The circling mallard, towering teal,
I also owned the cows that stood
Against the sky behind the wood
Above the T-bend. Cot and kine
And tilth and tenantry were mine.
(This fantasy, I reckon, dates
From when I first read Dornford Yates).
Past Gladstone woods, the Goodheart
pond,
To Inkpen Beacon and beyond,

I dreamt, imagined or pretended
My squire-ish messages wended
Got through inheritance or purchase,
I picked the vicar for three churches.

But Windrush, and Windrush alone,
Was central hearth and navel-stone.
The old front gateway has been sealed
(The drive goes round the back). The field
between the drive and rough contained
Dwarf piebald ponies, shaggy-maned.
The house itself . . . well, all that showed
Was that red shoulder on the road.
But Thatch and Patch were not so shy--
Gateless, unhinged, they met the eye
Trim, rose-bedecked, each worth a bid,
You'd say, of seven thousand quid.

When Watson Windrush opened wide
To welcome the incoming tide
Of lately orphaned Usborne cousins,
Their girl-friends and boyfriends in dozens,
Their dogs and cats and books and noise,
Their problems, poses, plans and ploys,
Enthusiasms, fads and fancies,
Sulks, silences and arrogances,
St. Peter, looking well ahead,
Indubitably must have said,
"We'll take all Watsons just for that.
Put 'Watsons Welcome' on the mat!"

Has any Usborne broken ranks
Turned back and rendered proper thanks?
I haven't. But such things, I know,
Are not the only things we owe.
Who paid for dog-biscuits for Buzz?
His last one-way vet visit? Does
My memory play tricks in thinking
Our thirsty beer and sherry drinking,
Our stamps, phones, even cigarettes
Were five-fold fifteen year bad debts?
Indeed was basic board and bed
To Usbornes ever debited?
(Is 'basic' the *mot juste*? Absurd!

'Groaning's' the trite but only word:

And 5-star treatment was the same
For wives and infants when *they* came).
St. Peter, may, at heaven's door,
Be not so certain of the score
When Usbornes try to sidle through.
He'll call, "Hey, not so fast there, you!
We don't, these days, account it sin
To break the Ten Commandments in
The special needs of modern life
To murder, pinch your neighbour's wife,
Steal, work or golf on Sundays, bear
False witness . . . and all that hot air.
But did you thank the Watsons decently
Either at Windrush or more recently?
You didn't? You forgot to? Well,
God damn and blast you! Go to hell!"

Windrush, two decades after, is
Three acres of green memories
Of rhyme sheets hung on every wall,
Jingles, the bathroom tennis ball,
Gladstone and Asquith in the study,
Dog barking, growling, dry, wet, muddy;
Nanny with three dog's dinner pails,
Juggins a-leap at ponies' tails.
Old Mrs. Marty chuckling, brawling,
The Rough, with jays and nightjars calling,
Lawn rolling penances and pride,
The tree and crocuses outside
The dining room, the cloakroom clutter,
The rise-and-fall cough splutter-putter
Of that contraption which, *on dit*,
Produced the electricity;
The mad post-prandial rush for chairs,
Bumble, tail twitching, on the stairs,
Bridge with the Pinckneys, paper-
crammed
desks in the study, smashes slammed
Over the tennis backstop wire,
The uncle, hand stretched out to fire,
Ears bent to get the wartime news,
Red-slippers worn as evening shoes
(by me: they shocked dear Mrs. Hvidt
And made her doubt if I were fit
To be her daughter's husband: such
Inelegance was rather much),
Cars packed with golf-clubs, Highclere

bound,
The Olive Branch (it's gone, we found),
The sawmills (Mr. Edwards, prop.,
The one who'd lost a finger-top,
Was killed, I learn, the other day by
a car, himself parked in a lay-by),
A windswept Ursula with Tim
(Don't let Juggins fight with him!),
Tommy pipe-smoking, talking Kant,
John girl pursuing and gallant,
John cricket-blazered, John's loud bray
Of laughter, Margaret's base-line play
At tennis, rats around the sheds
And strawberries in the strawberry beds,
Jenny bug-eyed and much enjoying
The Daily Mirror's sickly, cloying
And sentimental serial fiction,
Henry's late breakfasts, and addiction
To cream he took the lion's share . .
And babies, babies everywhere.

Most of those babies are now grown
And have some babies of their own.
I cannot wish them better than
To have, for short so'er a span,
Some kind of Windrush family fold,
Some kind of Windrush age of gold
To gas about when they are old.