



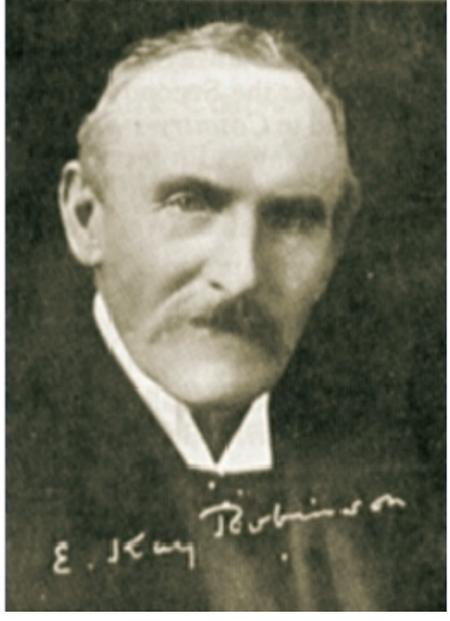
History

Roger Tabor

E. Kay Robinson

E.K.R. was a remarkable man: a canny blend of astute journalist and excellent field naturalist. He was born in India, but educated at Cheltenham College, where, when only fourteen, as a result of an essay he had written about evolution, Charles Darwin asked to see him. Darwin's 'Theory of Evolution' had only recently been published and the great man walked with the young E.K.R. discussing ideas.

E.K.R. began his journalistic career at nineteen, and after some years returned to India and Lahore, where he edited the Civil and Military Gazette. His assistant was Rudyard Kipling, who wrote the 'Barrack Room Ballads' for E.K.R.'s paper. Returning to England in 1895, E.K.R. worked for The Globe newspaper, and in the same year that Country-Side appeared, he published to wide acclaim The Country Day by Day as a serial in the Daily Mail.



As a no-nonsense journalist E.K.R. promoted wildlife with up-to-date technology. Indeed, he led the discussion on wildlife and countryside issues in the early years of this century. He not only published Country-Side and formed the British Empire Naturalists' Association (as the Association was initially called), but also Country Queries and Notes which was a forum for the exchange of views by naturalists on topics like "Are Swallows Decreasing?" or "Are Badgers Dying from Mange?" With the arrival of the BBC, he was one of the first natural history broadcasters with regular talks that were extremely popular.

E.K.R. was a pragmatist. He understood that a strictly commercial approach was essential if his ideas and work were to prosper. We understand only too well today that the survival of Country-Side and the promotion of wildlife in times of global recession depends on commercial viability - the same was true at the turn of the century. E.K.R. managed to blend his enthusiasm and philosophy with astute journalistic economics. This is revealed with what feels like charming period idiosyncrasies in the advertisements and column notes of the early editions of Country-Side and Country Queries and Notes.

Country-Side was advertised as "The Weekly Organ for All Nature Lovers with regular features that included the nature lesson for the week, a week's wildlife in pictures, the book of British birds, articles, notes, answers to correspondents, nature records, etc., is all profusely illustrated and all for 1d. weekly, available at newsagents or on annual subscription at 6s. 6d. from The Country-Side, 2&4 Tudor Street, London, E.C."

To put E.K.R.'s own advertisements into perspective, those his magazines carried for mainstream manufacturers seem no less dated. Cadbury's Cocoa was, for example, advertised as "Liquid food", with a quote from a 'medical magazine' recommending it as being 'for strength, purity and nourishment'. Alongside there were other advertisements such as unexpectedly 'The Country-Side Hair Wash' - a valuable tonic for the scalp. It was made from herbs described by botanists and physicians as "entirely free from any deleterious qualities, but abounding in volatile oil, which is aromatic, carminative, and stimulant, while they also contain an astringent tonic principle, and possess agreeable odours". A reader who has tried it says:- 'Already after a few days use I have felt the benefit, and my hair has certainly grown stronger and more rapidly than usual. 'The Country-Side Hair Wash is packed in two sizes and is sold at is. 6d. and 2s. 6d. per bottle, post free.'

E.K.R. made extensive use of photographs in Country-Side. "Picture Postcards for the Summer. The Country-Side real photographic postcards from a magnificent gallery of nature studies, unlike anything else published. Forty of these cards represent british wild fruits. They are quite unique, and are among the best plant photographs ever taken. The other 21 cards are of various subjects. Any of these cards may be obtained from the Country-Side office at twopence each post free. To those who order any 40 cards selected from the 61, we will send the cards together with a beautiful album to hold 300 cards, for 6s. 6d. The album is British-made throughout, the pages art green, and the cover is a delicate cream imitation lizard skin, decorated in gold."

The picture postcards ranged from Black Bryony and Guelder Rose to a Black-headed Gull on a nest. A further selection of postcards by Country-Side in the same year was "a very beautiful series in natural colours, offered to readers at an astonishingly low price. The cards are the best of their kind that have yet been produced and the colouring is perfect. All the latest improvements in colour printing have been applied in the production of the cards and they are really triumphs of art applied to nature."

E.K.R. made the pictures available as a resource for lectures: "To organisers of Lantern Entertainments, SPECIAL OFFER! Now is the time when Lantern Entertainments are being arranged for and we wish to draw the attention of clergymen, ministers, schoolmasters and secretaries of literary and natural history societies to the special terms upon which we are offering the Country-Side Natural History Lantern Slides. There are four different kinds of slides and any of these can be hired at a charge of 1½d. each (but no order can be received for less than 2s.) You may select any slides you like from any of the sets at this rate. British wild life, 40 slides, the London Zoo, 40 slides, the Natural History Museum, 40 slides, Nature's Year week by week, 52 slides. The Nature's Year slides have been prepared from the highly popular Wild Life pages that appear each week in The Country-Side and such a series has never before been prepared. Lantern readings for any of the above may be obtained as follows:- British Wildlife 6d; London Zoo 6d; Natural History Museum 6d; (postage 1d. extra in each case); Nature's Year week by week is. (postage 1 ½d. extra). Write for catalogue and full particulars to: Lantern Department, The Country-Side."



Advertisement for The Country-Side Stereoscope and Stereographs reproduced from The Country-Side - March 31, 1906

During 1906 Country-Side ran an offer whereby collecting 24 coupons from the weekly magazine enabled readers to obtain a stereoscope free. On the 7th July edition that year, the following advertisement was placed on the front cover: "Messers W.H. Smith & Son beg to announce that The Country-Side Stereoscope and Stereographs are on view and for sale at all their bookshop branches in London and the provinces."

Kay Robinson's entrepreneurial flair did not stop there, for: "You could not possibly give your friends a better or more acceptable Christmas present than a stereoscope and a good selection of the Country-Side stereographs. When they see how everything in the views stands out like real life they will be more than delighted." These Country-Side Christmas Presents came in "three bargain present packs at 5s., 10s. and £1. 0s. 0d." In addition to a stereoscope they all contained stereographs of wild life, zoo and museum pictures, plus "Kew stereographs in Natural Colour."

Country-Side readers in those first years of the magazine's publication could even buy an inexpensive cabinet frame for one shilling, in which they could stack twelve empty Wright's Coal Tar Soap packets to act as sliding drawers in a specimen cabinet. As the editorial mentioned: "the measurements have been chosen because so many of our readers are users of Wright's Coal Tar Soap." It may be noted with hindsight that Wright's Coal Tar Soap was a regular advertiser in the magazine!

There were also Country-Side Bird Tables "specially made of white wood, with wires for suspending", and Country-Side 'Cheap Nesting Boxes' in three types, the first for small tits, the second for great tits, nuthatches, robins and flycatchers, and the third for larger birds up to the size of a starling. The nest boxes ranged from is. 9d. up to 2s.

It was E.K.R.'s dynamic entrepreneurial spirit that brought Country-Side into being ninety years ago, and drove it forward for the first twenty years until his health failed in 1926. When he died in 1928, Richard Morse, who had taken over the editorial reigns with Ray Palmer, was able to write:

"When Country-Side first appeared, I was only a youth still at school, but it was an event I shall never forget. I felt instinctively that the originator and the editor of this journal was going to be my guide to some of the best and most fascinating things which life has to offer. Country-Side was a paper with a message. The spirit of the fields vibrated always through its pages, and made one feel ashamed to be unappreciative of the endless wonders and beauties of the great world of nature. If I dared to ask in Country-Side for a list of those whom E.K.R. had inspired with a love of nature, the number would be overwhelming. He had a great and wonderful gift, of making the study of nature popular without ever cheapening it."