
Like some Canadian city dwellers today, Londoners Percy Muir and Barbara Kaye dreamed of having a 'peaceful and more stable' life together in the country. In 1938 they moved to Taylors, 'two dilapidated cottages' in Takeley, Essex. Percy Muir was a director of Elkin Mathews [a reputable London antiquarian bookshop], author of *Points*, bibliographies of Aldous Huxley and T.F. Powys, and co-editor and publisher of *Bibliographical Notes and Queries*. Barbara Kaye was working on her first novel. *The Company We Kept* is a chronological narrative of their life at Taylors from spring 1938 through 1945. These years encompassed – expectedly and unexpectedly – the complete removal of Elkin Mathews from London under threat of the blitz, the births of daughter Helen and son David, and the hardships of life in England during wartime. Percy Muir sold books by catalogue, wrote numerous articles and published *Book Collecting as a Hobby*, his best-selling introduction to collecting 'for “Everyman”.' Barbara Kaye published four successful novels. The couple also entertained friends, visited family, housed employees, worked at repairing Taylors, and supported the war effort – she as a volunteer canteen organizer, he as a cadet platoon leader. The author highlights her story with bright sketches of characters, including Muir's partners Greville Worthington and Ian Fleming, and literary friends E.H.W. Meyerstein and Richard Curle.

Barbara Kaye's style is readable and straightforward. Hindsight gives her a masterful perspective on setbacks and discomfort that must have seemed far more significant at the time than they do in her smooth retelling. Ms. Kaye is frank about disagreements and disagreeable people, but not in the least rancorous. In fact, she writes with rather sly and understated humour, her unobvious asides and small, rapturous descriptions of frost, flowers or animals provide the most engaging writing in the book. Concerning the work of Percy Muir, respected bibliographer, A.B.A. and I.L.A.B. president, and director of the firm Barbara Kaye still operates in rural England in partnership with her son, she writes with unqualified respect.

I recommend this pleasant book to all those interested in ephemeral details of the lives of the literary people with whom Percy Muir and Barbara Kaye have been associated. But even more, *The Company We Kept* is an exemplary memoir of life as it is lived by celebrities and commoners alike. Rationing, evacuees, and suspected fifth columnists are the particular stuff of these recollections, but Barbara Kaye reminds us that very ordinary, daily life is the soil in which bibliographical achievements like Percy Muir's or a career as a novelist like her own take root before they blossom.

BETSY NUSE

*(During a brief, happy career as a publisher of bibliographies and antiquarian bookseller in Toronto, Betsy Nuse bought books by mail from Mrs. P.H. Muir.)*