



Our Eric way into

BRIGHTENING the pages of the *Chronicle & Echo* since the earliest days have been our columnists.

But one writer has been with us for more than two-thirds of the history of the *C&E*. Eric Roberts, now well into his 90s, has written our Country Diary for more than 50 years, making him perhaps the longest-running columnist in Britain.

He openly admits that when first appointed, what he knew about nature could have been written on the back of a postage stamp, but with his job as an instructor at Sywell Aerodrome having come to an end, he decided to give it a go. "I was horrified," says Eric. "I knew absolutely nothing about nature and told the editor, William Cowper Barrons, so. But he seemed unconcerned."

"He said there were plenty of books in the library which I could refer to and I said if he was happy to rely on books from the library then I was happy to do it."

In the early days Eric was keen to maintain a low profile and after much thought settled on the penname Robin, because in his own words, "it was the only bird I could recognise with any certainty".

With the column syndicated as far north as Sunderland and as far south as Exeter, Eric soon gained a loyal following and the offers of more work flooded in.

"I had a slot on Radio Four," he says. "One day I was talking about snails and a publishing company heard the piece and asked me to write a 60,000 word book on the subject."

"I told them that what I knew about snails could be stretched to 600 words if that, so we

decided that perhaps it should be a little more general."

Eric's first book *The Oddities of Animal Life* was soon followed by *Animal Ways and Means*, but despite a growing workload, his Country Diary remained a priority and he has never yet missed a deadline.

"Although my conscience won't allow me to look back and simply type the same column out again, I must have written about birds migrating dozens of times over the years," he says.

"And of course I do get asked the same questions again and again, but there are a few letters which I particularly remember."

"There was one elderly lady who wrote to say she had found a ladybird on her window ledge at the start of autumn and was going to keep it in a matchbox as a companion for her throughout the winter."

"Early the next year she wrote to say she had tried to wake it up with some whisky and a piece of cake, but it didn't seem to respond... you had to be quite delicate in these situations."

"I wrote back saying maybe it was still hibernating but if it didn't wake up soon, there may be not much hope."

Eric is joined in the *Chron* of the 21st century by a host of other regular columnists: Gerald Smith, Aufona, Steve Scoles, Pandora, Northampton's two MPs (Sally Keeble and Brian Binley), Helen Blaby, John Dickie, John Grosvenor, David Saint, Clive Holmes. Add to these our experts from the world of sport, and the *Chron* has a wide window on the world!



Eric Roberts
COUNTRY DIARY

THE
C&E's team of reporters covers all local issues, and for national and international news we rely on the Press Association, UK's leading agency

The most popular newspaper topic is local news... nearly 40 per cent of adults say this is the category they find most interesting, say researchers

■ **A YOUTHFUL Eric Roberts signs a copy of one of his books for a young fan in the 1960s. This picture was scanned from one of the C&E's 30,000 glass photographic negatives**



Chronos in the cellar

SOME of the first editions of the *Chronicle & Echo* were recently found bundled up in the cellar of a Northampton home, where they had lain unnoticed for 18 years.

Peter Hodge (left) found the heap of 10 old *C&Es* dating back to 1932 wrapped in a string and black ribbon in his cellar in Bostock Avenue, Abington, and there are multiple copies of some editions, suggesting they may have been kept for a reason.

Mr Hodge said the cases kept seemed to relate to the story of a man who was assaulted and beaten around the head at the Boot and Shoe Union office of St Crispin Hall.

Mr Hodge, who works as a lecturer, said a man called Mineard was later linked to the crime.

He said: "I didn't look at the papers for a few weeks after I found them and so I did not realise they were so old. Obviously someone has kept them for a reason."



writes his history...



■ Eric Roberts writes another column on his trusty typewriter

Our other columnists . . .



Commons View

With SALLY KEEBLE
Northampton North



John
GROSVENOR



Clive
HOLMES



Pandora's
BOX



John
DICKIE



Commons View

With BRIAN BINLEY
Northampton South

AUFONA

Helen **Blaby**



David
SAINT



Gerald
SMITH

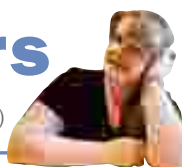


Steve
SCOLES



Family Matters

with Hilary Scott (helped by sons Billy, Dougie and Jed)



Paper is used again and again



■ If our vendor John Harris doesn't manage to sell all his papers, they will be sent back for recycling

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE Newspapers, publisher of the *Chronicle & Echo*, works to ensure it is an environment-friendly company. With thousands of copies streaming off the presses daily some may worry about the effect on the environment. But newspapers support recycling. All papers that are not sold are collected and taken back to our works in Northampton. They are then passed on to Moulton-based company Alibone, where the papers are baled up and sent all over the country and abroad to be pulped and recycled. As well as providing a streamlined paper waste recovery system, Alibone ensures the waste is correctly graded and re-used in the manufacture of new stock and other paper products. Newsprint, the giant rolls of paper used on our presses, is a renewable resource which comes from managed softwood forests mainly in North America and

Europe. For every tree cut down, two or three more are planted. Between 1980 and 1990 these forests grew by 18 million hectares.

In the late 1960s the de-inking process was developed which meant papers could be cleaned and re-used. This breakthrough meant newspapers were no longer a big drain on the environment . . . but they cannot be recycled indefinitely. Each time the paper is cleaned and re-used, fibres are broken down. The paper can be re-used four or five times before the fibres will finally become use-less.

Because of this the UK publishers set a target in 1991 of achieving a 40 per cent recycling content in newspapers by the year 2000. The industry hit this target four years ahead of schedule. Recycled paper made up 80.3 per cent of the raw material for UK newspapers in 2005.