



Above: Self portrait of Inga Moore

To a Secret Garden via a Cat and a Toad

In a quiet corner of rural Gloucestershire there was no sign of *Six Dinner Sid*, but in the grounds of the eighteenth century, rather faded, mansion, there was a secret garden.

Inga Moore lives and works on the first floor here, having retreated from the noise and pace of life in London fifteen years ago. Amidst the peace and tranquility of this haven, there are one or two eccentric characters who pepper her life, but the house provided a perfect base to fulfil a lifelong ambition to create new illustrations for a famous children's classic, *The Wind in the Willows*.

When Inga was young, she went out to Australia to live and work with a group of very creative people. They were all impressed by the large number of children's bookshops – bright stores, full of children's story and picture books. "People took children's books seriously there, and bought masses for their children." Inga's friends would look at them and talk about them until suddenly, someone suggested that she should create one. "I did, and to my amazement it was accepted and published." She was greatly influenced by John Burningham whose work she finds fantastic and witty. Equally important, each of his books tells a story.

"When I came back to England in the eighties I knew I wanted to go on making children's picture books. Although I had no formal art education I had worked in a drawing office where I had amassed drawing skills and patience; and it was certainly easier then, than it is now, to get a book published. I was very fortunate that Klaus Flugge at Andersen gave me the chance with *The Truffle Hunter* and *The Vegetable Thieves*."

But how did the creator of *Six Dinner Sid* become involved in new illustrations for *The Wind in the Willows*? Inga was asked to provide illustrations for part of it to be presented as six instalments. Company take-overs and mergers prevented the commission from ever being realised. Happily it was picked up by Walker Books who wanted the whole story. "I was apprehensive because I knew how respected the E.H. Shepard drawings were, but I wanted to extend those and include the world to give a bigger picture. I felt I succeeded although many people commented on Shepard's influence on Toad and his friends. I think this was inevitable. Grahame's text is so precise that it paints those characters for you."

After this success Inga was asked to illustrate *The Secret Garden*. She had many reservations but felt it might help to bring the book back to life. "Overall I am pleased with the way it turned out. Living in this house, with these extensive grounds, helped to give me the right atmosphere in which to work." Surrounding herself with flowers indoors, and collecting flora and fauna books and magazines about country living all

contributed. Inga added that if she had remained living in London she would never have been able to complete it. Her real love of the English countryside shines through the whole book.

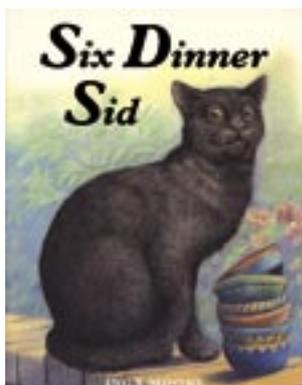
Achieving such distinguished illustrations takes immense amounts of graft, expertise and worry. Inga makes many drawings of sites and objects around her and uses models of trains, cars and buildings to complete her pictures. The roughs are drawn with pencil and she showed us a dummy which may be presented to a publisher. The pages were all fully defined drawings, most complete in detail apart from colour. No text, but it may be wordless. She told us that finding ideas was relatively easy, getting them to work in a book was the hard part!

Inga works in three different rooms. Very large windows provide lots of natural light, and all have functional tables and drawing boards, many chests of drawers – big and small – and battalions of pencils and crayons. She uses a mixture of media to create the finished art work, although she uses fewer water colours now as she prefers crayons, pastels and even tubes of house paint! Interestingly, the size of the picture does not wholly determine how long it will take to produce, even the simplest one can take a long time to find its voice while the larger one finds it straight away.

What can we expect from Inga next? She is currently working on a story about a parrot – as long as it doesn't encourage readers to invest in one as a pet! She also has a story about a birthday and a bear family which has reached the final drawing stage and she would quite like the chance to illustrate *The Sword in the Stone*.

Before leaving it was time to visit Inga's own secret garden. As we walked through the door and saw the walls covered with ivy it was very clear from where the inspiration for her illustrations had come. Most of the garden was overgrown but it didn't need much imagination to envisage what it had been. Watching and listening to a robin, sitting on the branch of a gnarled tree, made the whole magical experience one to remember.

David Blanch



Sid Dinner Sid Hodder £5.99 ISBN: 978-0340894113
The Wind In the Willows Walker £14.99 ISBN: 978-0744575532
The Secret Garden Walker £15.99 ISBN: 978-0744586282