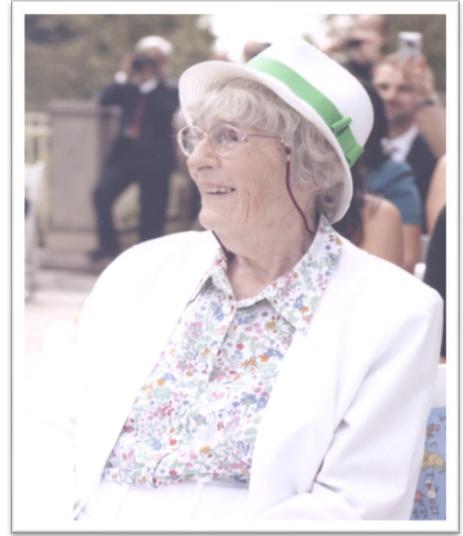


Profiles of Our Friends

Christina Duff Stewart: Code Breaker, Librarian, Book Collector

“That child should be a librarian.” —a prescient aunt of Christina’s

Born in Dundee, Scotland, in 1926, Christina Duff Stewart grew up surrounded by books and can scarcely remember a time in her life when that wasn’t her general state. Some childhood books that linger in her mind are *The Arabian Nights* and *The Wind in the Willows*, and of course Jane Austen was a favourite in her early teen years. Her later teen years, when she was in the Navy, didn’t leave a lot of time for personal reading. *The Wind in the Willows* has continued to hold a special charm for Christina, thanks partly to the wonderful audio version read by British actor Richard Briers. It may be a surprise to some to know there were also three marvellous sequels, written by William Horwood; they’re mostly unavailable in North America, but plenty of copies can be found for sale online.



Christina began her career as a librarian in London, England, in 1949, shortly after completing her time (1944–1947) with the Women’s Royal Naval Service. During those three years she was one of the young women working on topsecret code-breaking as part of the Enigma Project. It was only in the 1970s that these women were finally allowed to reveal their story; until then not even spouses or parents could know anything about it, as it was protected by the Official Secrets Act. Years later, in the early 2000s, she visited Bletchley and ended up giving an impromptu talk after other visitors overheard her explaining to her nephew that she had worked on Turing’s Bombe, a replica of which had been built for the Bletchley Museum. She has in her personal collection the scroll and golden flywheel the British government sent in 2009 to those still alive who had worked at Bletchley and its outstation at Eastcote. For many years after the war she continued to see two friends she’d worked with on Enigma, although they never discussed their past together.

While studying in London after the Bletchley years, Christina could often be found in Regent’s Park, an ideal place for reading—not least because of the other people spending time there. One day she looked over at the tennis courts and there was composer Ralph Vaughan Williams. On another day Queen Mary passed by, three feet from Christina’s deck chair.

Christina moved to Toronto in 1954 to undertake a one-year internship with the Boys and Girls House of the Toronto Public Library. She had been greatly influenced and inspired by Lillian H. Smith’s book *The Unreluctant Years: A Critical Approach to Children’s Literature*, and once she heard about the intern programme she just knew it was for her.

After the internship, she decided to stay in Canada and turned to studying for a B.A. at the University of Toronto (1963–1967), after which she was asked by the department to consider an M.A., which resulted in her thesis on the early-nineteenth-century Taylors of Ongar, a British family of writers and artists (you can read about them if you type “Taylors of Ongar” into the search field at <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk>; or, of course, you may turn to the publications of Ms. Stewart, held at the Osborne Collection, available for reference only). One of the best-known works to come from this literary family is Jane Taylor’s “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star,” but the various members wrote more than seventy-three books on a great variety of

subjects for children and young people.

In 1968, Christina was asked to interview at the University of Toronto Libraries and she was hired, remaining there until her retirement in 1992, at which point she had been Book Selector for Graduate Research in English and Drama for nearly twenty-five years. This position was no sinecure, involving as it did English literature and drama from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. She was responsible, among other things, for studying publishers' and booksellers' catalogues in search of books to purchase for the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library and for the main collection. Very useful in her work at the library was her excellent memory, which I can tell you is still impressive.

Christina continued to be fascinated by the Taylors, and began to collect books, manuscripts, and pictures related to the family, as well as publishing further academic works about them. She became a friend of some of their descendants, one of whom left her a first edition of *Original Poems* by Ann and Jane, published anonymously, 1804–1805; a lovely painting of Ann and Jane (image on bottom of page) that hangs in the Osborne Collection; a watercolour portrait of Ann; and Ann Taylor's manuscript album. These have all been given to Osborne.

Another treasure given to Osborne by Christina is a collection of letters from Rosemary Sutcliff, the brilliant writer of historical fiction for children and young people (*The Eagle of the Ninth* is one of her best-known books), with whom she corresponded for thirty years, and met many times on her annual visits to the UK. The letters are a treasure trove for the Osborne, and for anyone studying Sutcliff's life and work.

As to Christina's current personal book collection, her interests are eclectic: art books from Van Eyck to Vermeer to Colville; biographies and favourite novels by Trollope and Rumer Godden, among many others; and a beautiful catalogue from Persephone Books, a small gem of a bookstore/publisher located in the very difficult to find Lamb's Conduit Street, London, and known for its reprints of unjustly forgotten books by early to mid-twentieth-century women writers, complete with gorgeous full-colour endpapers that reflect the books' themes and times. Although Christina now lives in a condo, she still has eight bookcases of books to keep her company.



Aside from books, she is enthusiastic about music, especially chamber music, and Haydn and Mozart quartets; poetry, from Donne to Auden to Frost to Wendy Cope; the theatre, from Shakespeare to contemporary dramatists; movies; Scandinavian series such as *Borgen*; and finally her Pointe au Baril cottage, on Georgian Bay, where for nearly forty years she enjoyed watching song sparrows, veerys, goldfinches, loons, chipmunks, and bears.

Chandra Wohleber

Portrait in oils of authors Ann and Jane Taylor in the garden of Lavenham about 1791. Painted after the original by their father, the Rev. Isaac Taylor.