

REVIEW

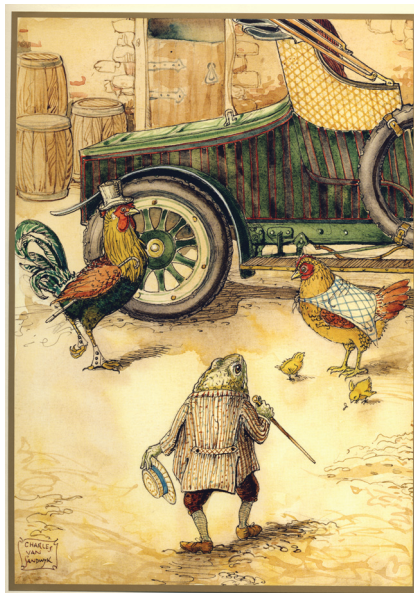
~ *The Wind in the Willows*

By Kenneth Grahame; illus. by Charles van Sandwyk (Folio Society, 2008, £595)

The Folio Society's centenary edition of Kenneth Grahame's (1859–1932) *Wind in the Willows* is truly monumental. Its merits were obvious from the moment I received Folio's attractive prospectus last October. Indeed, a charming letter from Toad was included, which addressed Folio Society members and explained that the drawings in the letter were made especially for it, and have never been printed anywhere else. That splendid letter is precisely the sort of ephemera that is highly collectible, so if you still have a copy you would be wise to save it as an example of what is arguably Folio's most enchanting prospectus. I had already purchased an illustrator's copy of the *Willows* when Folio published it in 2005 with Charles van Sandwyk's illustrations, but this new edition features a larger format (13 inches × 9.75 inches) and many newly commissioned illustrations. To describe it as a deluxe edition is a gross understatement.

Keen collectors will immediately recognize that van Sandwyk's imaginative design reveals a rich visual feast and painstaking attention to detail. To the great delight of discriminating collectors, the book has a quarter vellum binding blocked in 22-carat gold, 16 colour plates (all tipped in by hand), 40 new pen-and-ink drawings, hand-drawn captions, and a tipped-in etching signed and numbered by the artist. The etching alone is worth the price of the book! The new endpapers show an architectural plan of Toad Hall, and readers will be fascinated to see charming details like Toad's secret tunnel and the smoking room "where Badger gave a dressing down." The edition was limited to just 1,000 copies, and those who purchased the book at the introductory price of \$900 should feel very privileged because the book sold out in a matter of weeks and copies have since appeared online at nearly double the original value.

The centenary *Willows* is certainly one of Folio's most splendid books ever to appear and I suspect in years to come it will be considered one of its most sought after publications. I recently interviewed the artist at Brandywine



Cottage, his charming home in British Columbia, in preparation for a 2011 exhibition of his work at the University of Alberta's Bruce Peel Special Collections Library, and in looking at his previous books I was reminded of his great sensitivity to nature and especially animals. I cannot think of an artist better suited to portray the idyllic woodland scenes and, of course, the famous anthropomorphized characters. Perhaps the foremost attraction of the book is the abundance and beauty of the illustrations, which number over 100. They are endlessly fascinating, beautiful in a bucolic way, and one gets the impression that van Sandwyk would have loved to draw another 100 but was ultimately stymied by Folio's production budget.

I sincerely hope that van Sandwyk continues to illustrate Folio books because they are elegant and grand in every respect. For all the great achievement that this edition represents, however, it does have one very minor weakness. I am not ashamed to admit that most of my reading is done in bed and this volume is simply too heavy and oversized to handle comfortably while sitting up against a headboard. Alas, gentle reader, you are best advised to give this book its proper due and open it flat on a table, uncork a favourite bottle of wine, and spend many pleasurable hours turning the leaves, absorbing every feature of this remarkable book.

REVIEWED BY ROBERT J. DESMARAIS