



Extraordinary

## MARGARET CADWALADR

BY DAVID MORRISON

Do you believe in kismet? There are occasions when I do, mere coincidence no adequate explanation for certain events. It's compelling to me, for example, that I was introduced to writer Margaret Cadwaladr by chance just days before receiving this commission to profile her – but, more significantly, a few days after my wife Susan had purchased her Canadian bestseller *In Veronica's Garden: The Social History of the Milner Garden and Woodland*. Susan could have bought any one of millions of books but, as if guided to it by interventionist cosmic forces, it was Cadwaladr's – about Qualicum Beach's beautiful tourist attraction – that had been her last purchase.

Cadwaladr published the lush *In Veronica's Garden* under her own steam, having founded Madrona Books & Publishing in 2002 for that very reason. Occupying five years of her life in intensive research and writing, it's a coffee table tome of high production value that's gone on to sell over 7,000 copies around the world. Besides being viewed as a highly regarded addition to the library of horticultural literature, it's a fascinating snapshot of the life of Veronica Milner, an imperious 'old school' aristocrat who passed on in 1998.

Milner had royal connections, bringing Prince Charles and the late Diana, Princess of Wales to stay with her in 1986, Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip visiting the following year. Naturally, such associations add considerably to the interest in both the gardens and the book about them.

Interestingly, however, this is not what motivated Cadwaladr to pen *In Veronica's Garden*, the royal perspective simply adding sparkle to a story she already deemed fascinating. "The inspiration for the book was the social history and biographical aspect," she revealed.

As surprising, perhaps, is that she hardly sees herself as overly enthralled by gardens in general. "I enjoy gardens and visit them," she informed me. "I also

like to photograph them, but I wouldn't call myself a garden enthusiast." But when pressed as to her favourite garden anywhere in the world, Cadwaladr does not hesitate in confirming: "Our own garden! We built a house a couple of years ago and are happy planning and developing the garden. We put in a large vegetable patch and fruit trees; this year we're adding a carport and trellis."

A contributor to *The Beacon's* sister publication *The Baynes Sound Current*, Cadwaladr is currently in Ireland with a side-trip to France also planned, partly in order to research a future project about which she remains guarded. But before leaving Canada, she was happy to tell me about what's going on with Madrona.

Having published George A. Reid's *Speed's War: A Canadian Soldier's Memoir of World War II* last year, the next title will be *Come Back, Judy Baba: Memoirs of India* by Mary Hargreaves Norbury and Judy Norbury, the latter of whom I had the pleasure of profiling for the Winter 2007 issue of *The Baynes Sound Current*. But what'll happen after that remains to be seen, as Vancouver-born Cadwaladr explains:

"I will be rethinking the whole idea after Judy's book is released and established," she begins, a sense of foreboding detectable. "The state of the Canadian publishing industry is very disheartening. I'm amazed at the number of independent bookstores that have closed since *In Veronica's Garden* was released. Big-box stores, online shopping and the high Canadian dollar have all taken a toll."

As someone with many years of music vending behind me, I relate to Cadwaladr's fears when observing the rapid disappearance of bricks-and-mortar music retailing as the downloading juggernaut rolls on. She continues: "I'm really just a small-time exporter. Publishing in Canada for a small press like mine is really a labour of love, not a viable way to make a living."

The enforced demise of Madrona Books in this way is unthinkable and would represent a tragedy for independent artistic enterprise on Vancouver Island. But considering the frightening speed with which shopping trends are moving, and the relentless march towards all-out cultural digitization, little these days should come as a shock. If, as Cadwaladr notes, "even Raincoast Books, the respected British Columbia publisher that released the Harry Potter series in Canada has cut its publishing program," what future might there be for a cottage operation such as hers?

Only time will tell, but I sincerely hope for the day when we meet Margaret Cadwaladr once more, Susan having just picked up Madrona's latest acclaimed bestseller. That would be quite some story. ~

Available for purchase at EyesOnBC: *In Veronica's Garden: The Social History of the Milner Garden and Woodland*; and *Speed's War: A Canadian Soldier's Memoir of World War II*. For more information: [www.4-writing.com](http://www.4-writing.com) & [www.mala.ca/milnergardens/garden.asp](http://www.mala.ca/milnergardens/garden.asp)