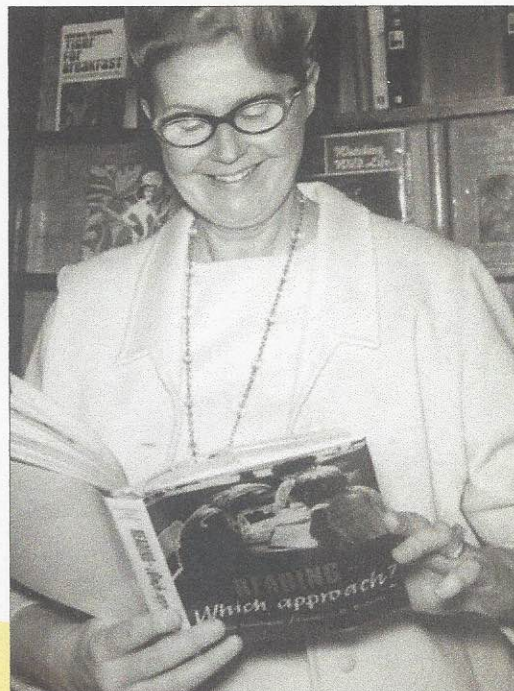


Vera Southgate-Booth was UKRA's 7th President, in 1970-71. Her presidential conference was held in Manchester in 1971 - one of the invited speakers was the then Secretary of State for Education, Margaret Thatcher - and the proceedings were published as *Literacy at all Levels* (1972). Her last appearance at a conference appears to have been the plenary address she gave at the World Congress on Reading held at the Institute of Education in London in 1986, after which the association lost track of her. Some years ago Alison Littlefair and Margaret Cook (UKRA Presidents 1993-94 and 2000-01 respectively) asked me if anyone knew what had become of Vera, and in 2020 Margaret Clark (Vera's immediate successor as UKRA President) asked the same question. Persistent searching led eventually to her great-niece Jessica Robinson. UKLA is happy to publish this (sadly belated) tribute to Vera's life and work. A fuller version, including a list of her publications, is available from Greg Brooks [g.brooks@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:g.brooks@sheffield.ac.uk)

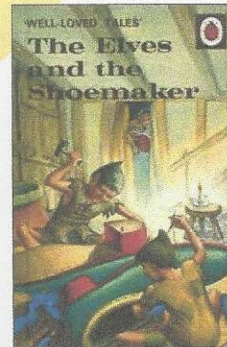
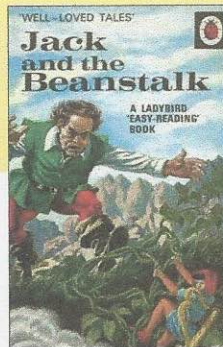


Vera Pigg was born in County Durham on 10 March 1916. By 1939 she was teaching in Seaham, County Durham. In 1942 she married Arthur Southgate in County Durham and, as was customary at the time, she would have had to leave teaching. Arthur died in 1948. By the mid-1950s Vera had moved into academia. She married Douglas Thomas Booth in Manchester in 1961. They moved to Sidmouth when Vera retired in about 1981; Douglas died there in 1986, and Vera moved back to County Durham. She died on 23 March 1995 in a nursing home in Consett. She is survived by her nephews John Martin Robinson and Stephen Anthony Robinson, two great-nieces and three great-nephews, all descendants of Vera's late sister Mary Robinson née Pigg who, according to Jessica, was also a teacher and swore by poetry to assist with reading and creativity. In 1996 Vera was elected to the Reading Hall of Fame as an Honorary (i.e. deceased) member.

## In memoriam Vera Southgate-Booth (1916-1995, President of UKRA 1970-71)

In 1964-74 Vera (who always published under the name Vera Southgate) wrote the texts for all 27 titles in the original Ladybird 'Well Loved Tales' series, plus (in 1962-65) *The Story of Football* and *The Story of Cricket*, one of the People at Work series: *The Postman*, and (with I. and J. Havenhand) another three books in that series: *The Nurse*, *The Fireman*, *The Policeman* - 33 titles in all. Many of the Tales were translated into other languages, and re-issued several times. Her nephews remember good times spent in Vera's holiday home in Llandbedrog in Wales, where she told them the Tales.

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Vera's academic career was spent at the University of Manchester. In 1957 and 1962 respectively she published the *Southgate Group Reading Tests 1 and 2*, which were very successful and ran to multiple impressions. They were used in the age 7 sweep of the National Child Development Study (1965), and the *Extending Beginning Reading* project (1970s). She was involved in an early evaluation of the initial teaching alphabet, and was cautiously welcoming of i.t.a., but warned that a larger and more rigorous study would be needed to produce firm conclusions. Vera was a member of the influential Bullock Committee of Inquiry into Reading and the Use of English (1972-75).

*(This paragraph combines information from Roger Beard, Colin Harrison and Sandra Johnson)*

Vera may be best remembered for leading the school-based Schools Council-funded project, *Extending Beginning Reading* (1973-77). Vera was the Principal Investigator, with four researchers working with her for different periods: Helen Arnold (UKRA President 1998-99), Elizabeth Burke, Gerald Keil and Sandra Johnson. The report was published in 1981 and won the UKRA Annual Book Award that year. Its findings provided evidence discrediting the practice of teachers listening to individual children reading aloud, since it was found that the teacher's attention was often diverted to other pupils who needed help. The project did much to encourage Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading in class in the upper years of primary school. A concise summary of the project and its findings is available in Roger Beard's *Developing Reading 3-13*, pp.116-117.

*(Sandra Johnson also provided this personal reminiscence)*

I was part of the *Extending Beginning Reading* team for the final 2+ years, and greatly enjoyed it. We each had four assigned primary schools to work with on a continuous basis. The 'work' involved talking to 7- to 9-year olds, hearing them read, and learning what they most liked and disliked about the books they had read, as well as testing them now and again. The team worked well together, sharing a high degree of mutual respect. I remember Vera expressing her gratitude at having found research collaborators who could write so well! Vera was a well-established and dedicated reading researcher, who was consistently passionate about her work, and who shared high mutual respect with all those teachers working to develop young children's reading abilities and interests. As a university research team leader she was a pleasure to work with.

*Greg Brooks (UKLA President 1999-2000)*

*with help from John, Stephen and Jessica Robinson (Vera's nephews and great-niece), Roger Beard (author of Developing Reading 3-13), Margaret Clark (UKRA President 1971-72), Helen Day (Ladybird Land), Caroline Gurney (genealogist), Colin Harrison (UKRA President 1990-91), Sandra Johnson (Vera's colleague on Extending Beginning Reading), Nicholas Mackay (Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society) and Denis Vincent (tests expert).*

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