

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

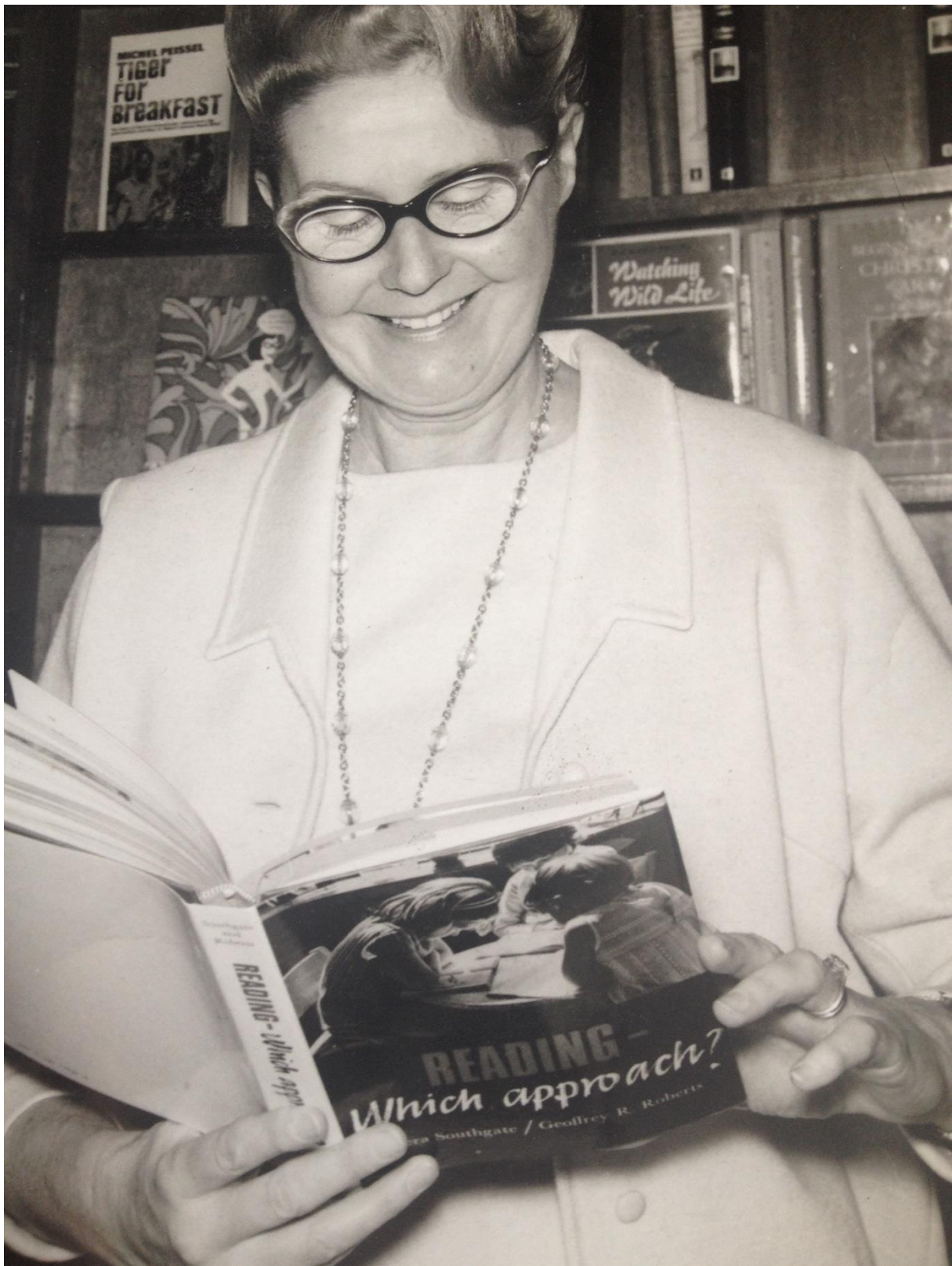
Greg Brooks (UKRA President 1999–2000)

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)

(This version of the original article has been heavily edited by Helen Day for inclusion on her 'Ladybird Fly Away Home' website)

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.

Vera Pigg was born in County Durham on 10 March 1916. She was recorded in the 1939 Register (used in World War II as the basis for ID cards, ration books and call-ups) as an unmarried schoolteacher in Seaham, County Durham; she may have begun teaching about 1936, aged 20. In 1942 she married Arthur Southgate in County Durham, and the Register was amended accordingly – and, as was customary at the time, she would have had to leave teaching. Arthur died in 1948. After the war the Register was used as the basis for issuing NHS numbers, and therefore continued to be updated. By the mid-1950s Vera had moved into academia. She married Douglas Thomas Booth in Manchester in 1961, and her new surname was noted in the Register. 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 at Summerdale Nursing Home, Shotley Bridge, 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: <https://www.readinghalloffame.org/vera-southgate>



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 606d, plus (between 1962 and 1965) *The Story of Football* and *The Story of Cricket* (series 606c), one of the People at Work series (606b): *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 French, German and Spanish, and at least one into Portuguese; some were bilingual editions. About 20 Tales, and *The Story of Football*, have been re-issued several times, most recently in 2012, and some are now also available in e-book form. Both of her nephews remember good times spent in Vera's holiday home in Llandbedrog in Wales, where she retold the Ladybird tales.

In her academic career Vera became first an 'Organising Tutor' and then a Senior Lecturer in Curriculum Studies 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), as the pre-test in the Haringey Parental Involvement in Reading project in 1976, and undoubtedly in many others. Across five publications relating to the initial teaching alphabet Vera and F.W.Warburton were cautiously welcoming of i.t.a., but warned that a larger and more rigorous study would be needed to produce firm conclusions. This work was also noted in Australia. Vera was a member of the influential Bullock Committee of Inquiry into Reading and the Use of English (1972–75).

As the list of her academic publications (below) shows, Vera wrote steadily rather than prolifically about reading, and occasionally about children's aesthetic appreciation – which may link to the Ladybird Tales. The question in the book title visible in the photograph (taken presumably on first publication in 1970), *Reading – Which Approach?* continues to stimulate lively debate.

In brief, 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 – she maintained a clear focus on the research plan, and was unfailingly respectful and supportive. I do not recall a single disagreeable moment at any point.

Academic publications

Sole-authored by Southgate, V. except where shown

Commentaries on the initial teaching alphabet experiment

(1963). 'Augmented Roman alphabet experiment: an outsider's report.' *Educational Review (Birmingham)*, 16(1), 32–41.

(1965). 'Approaching i.t.a. results with caution.' *Educational Research*, 7(2), 83–96.

(1966). 'Approaching i.t.a. results with caution.' *Reading Research Quarterly*, 1(3), 35–56.

Warburton, F.W. & Southgate, V. (1969). *i.t.a. an independent evaluation*. London: Schools Council.

(1970). 'An independent evaluation of i.t.a.: a British Government-sponsored report.' Paper presented at the International Reading (now Literacy) Association convention in Anaheim, California, 7 May.

The *Extending Beginning Reading* project

Southgate, V. & Johnson, S. (1978). 'The use of teachers' and children's time in *Extending Beginning Reading*.' In Hunter-Grundin, E. and Hunter-Grundin, H.U. (eds) *Reading: Implementing the Bullock Report*. London: Ward Lock Educational.

Southgate, V. & Johnson, S. (1980). 'The phonic competencies of children aged seven to nine years.' In Bray, G. and Pugh, T. (eds) *The Reading Connection*. London: Ward Lock Educational.

Southgate, V., Arnold, H. & Johnson, S. (1981). *Extending Beginning Reading*. London: Heinemann for the Schools Council.

Other publications

Southgate Group Reading Test 1. (1957). London: Hodder Arnold.

Southgate Group Reading Test 2. (1962). London: University of London Press.

Rump, E.E. & Southgate, V. (1967). 'Variables affecting aesthetic appreciation, according to age.' *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 37(1), 58-72.

(1967). 'A few comments on "Reading Drive".' *Educational Research*, 9(2), 145-146.

(1968). 'Formulae for beginning reading tuition.' *Educational Research*, 11(1), 23-30.

Southgate, V. & Roberts, G.R. (1970). *Reading - Which Approach?* London: University of London Press.

(ed.) (1972). *Literacy at All Levels. Proceedings of the Eighth UK Reading Association Conference*. Chichester: Ward Lock for UKRA.

(1972). *Beginning Reading*. London: University of London Press.

(1973). 'The Language Arts in informal British primary schools.' *The Reading Teacher*, 26(4), 367-373.

(1973). 'Reading 3-13.' *English 3-13*, 1(1), 47-52.

(1974). *Reading: Teaching for Learning*. London: Macmillan.

Rump, E.E. & Southgate, V. (1978). 'Teachers' understanding of pupils' aesthetic preferences.' *Review of Research in Visual Arts Education*, 4(2), 37-42.

(1984). *Planning for Reading Success: Reading-teaching for Learning Bk.2*. London: Nelson Thornes.