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CHAPTER 2

Revisiting the production of *Watership Down* through the Arthur Humberstone Animation Archive

Klive Humberstone, Nigel Humberstone and Chris Pallant

This chapter seeks to present new ways of thinking about the production history of *Watership Down* (Rosen, 1978), with the ambition being to expand the conversation, and, in doing so, cast light upon the contributions of a hitherto neglected yet long-serving member of the UK animation community: Arthur Humberstone.Given the potential for ambiguity and confusion, throughout this chapter the initials K and N will be used in combination with the family surname, when relevant, to denote Klive and Nigel Humberstone, whereas 'Humberstone' presented without initials will refer at all times to Arthur Humberstone. For example: Humberstone, who worked on *Watership Down*, was the father of K. and N. Humberstone. We also aim to contribute to the overall project of this book, which is to enable a more nuanced appreciation of this important animated film. The intention here is not to lose sight of the collaborative nature of film production, which was a characteristic of the production of *Watership Down* with its crew of almost 100 individuals across a variety of roles; rather, it is simply to take advantage of a surviving archive and to revisit the materials found within to establish fresh ways of understanding

this production.Crew information gathered from Arthur Humberstone Animation Archive and IMDb listing. Drawing upon the autobiographical insight of Klive and Nigel Humberstone, Humberstone's sons, interviews with individuals who worked alongside Humberstone on the production of *Watership Down*, and working from the privately managed Arthur Humberstone Animation Archive (which contains a wealth of pre-production materials spanning his forty-five-year career), this chapter reveals the role played by Humberstone during the film's eventful production.

After a short discussion of the chapter's methodology, we will then provide a brief biographical account of Humberstone's working life, before engaging with a number of documents from the Arthur Humberstone Animation Archive. The archival documents consulted here, combined with the new key informant interview conducted during the preparation of this chapter, present new insights related to: the non-standard dialectical production practices employed on *Watership Down*; Humberstone's profound – yet hitherto overlooked – influence over the animal aesthetics found in *Watership Down*; and how the archive can be used to rebuild and deepen our understanding of the richly layered animation workspace.

A brief note on methodology

Given the mixed-method approach adopted when researching this chapter, it is worth highlighting a few key observations about the pros and cons of the methods employed, and how the combination of these methods goes some way to mitigating their individual shortcomings. The three research methods employed here are archival study, key informant interview and the interrogation of autobiographical memory.

Understandably, the privately held Arthur Humberstone Animation Archive has not benefitted from the many activities that support the accession, management and preservation of professionally curated archives. When working with an archive such as the one in focus here, it is essential to remain aware of the many forces – seen and unseen – that have shaped the archive in profound ways before your encounter with it. For example, what motivated Humberstone to keep these documents and, perhaps more importantly, what documents did he discard – either because he perceived little value in keeping them (notes to self, photographic reference, used pens and pencils, for example) or because their continued existence problematized the imposed sense of teleological draughtsmanship evident within those drawn works that were preserved (there is a conspicuous lack of rejected or crossed-out work). Then, in the intervening years between Humberstone's retirement and death, how was the original ordering preserved – or adjusted – as the material artefacts were moved between files, cabinets and storage

sites? What is certain is that the archive in question represents just a snapshot of *Watership Down*'s production. With this in mind, the archival documents were treated with caution, and every effort has been made to triangulate our inferences by using the other methods noted here in an overlapping manner.Many of these anxieties around archival research, particularly in the context of television studies, are covered in greater detail by the likes of Kristyn Gorton and Joanne Garde-Hansen, eds. *Remembering British Television: Audience, Archive and Industry* (London: BFI, 2019), Helen Wheatley, ed. *Re-Viewing Television History: Critical Issues in Television Historiography* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), and Christine Geraghty and David Lusted, eds. *The Television Studies Book* (London: Arnold, 1998).

The key informant interview was conducted with Humberstone's colleague from the production of *Watership Down*, Colin White, who worked as an animator on the production. As a qualitative information gathering tool, interviewing key informants has the potential to be a high-value research method. However, it must also be acknowledged that this approach carries a high potential for bias. For example, biases introduced inadvertently by the interviewer, whereby personal appearance, facial expression, tone of voice, misrecording of answers and ill-considered responses all have the potential to misdirect the informant.Geoff Payne and Judy Payne, *Key Concepts in Social Research* (London: Sage, 2004), 131. Additionally, failure of memory, given the time spans being covered, and the natural editorialization of memory that occurs as we recall details from the past stand as possible obstacles when interviewing key informants. As Stephen Frosh notes, the human subject is never a whole, since it 'is always riven with partial drives, social discourses that frame available modes of experience, ways of being that are contradictory and reflect the shifting allegiances of power as they play across the body and the mind'.Stephen Frosh, 'Disintegrating Qualitative Research', *Theory & Psychology* 17, no. 5 (2007): 638. Yet, when considered in combination with the archival record and the autobiographical memory of K. and N. Humberstone (discussed next) this potential for unconscious – and unhelpful – bias is reduced to an acceptable level.

Finally, the autobiographical memories of K. and N. Humberstone also proved a valuable source of information throughout the researching of this chapter, and also throughout the wider project of bringing this private archive to a wider audience (discussed in more detail later). As a research act, the parsing of K. and N. Humberstone's autobiographical recollections was done in a more organic manner, with notes taken at regular intervals based on unstructured, reflective conversations, but with several instances of more formal semi-structured interviewing taking place over the lifetime of the research. At all times, the highly constructed and performative nature of memory was kept in mind. As Robyn Fivush writes, autobiographical memory 'is a socio-culturally constructed narrative of one's specific personal life, and as such, is culturally saturated and must be understood through the subjective lens of individual meaning-making'.Robyn Fivush, 'Autobiographical

Memory', in *Research Methods for Memory Studies*, ed. Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 13. By remaining attuned to K. and N. Humberstone's place within the wider sociocultural collective, and vigilant of their own familial biases, the autobiographical insights gained were evaluated carefully before feeding into the mixed-method framework identified here.

Who was Arthur Humberstone?

The biographical detail presented in this section is informed by Humberstone's unpublished memoir and the recollections of K. and N. Humberstone.

Given that a key objective of this chapter is to cast light upon the hitherto forgotten contributions of Humberstone to the UK animation industry, we must first establish a clearer biographical picture of Humberstone the man. Born in Derby, 1912, Humberstone was an avid film buff and hand-cranked home projection enthusiast with an early infatuation in Cameraless Animation.Following in the footsteps of contemporary filmmakers such as Len Lye, Norman McLaren and Harry Smith. Following this passion, Humberstone enrolled at Derby Technical College School for Arts & Crafts, learning art, fashion drawing, light and shade modelling but found it to be a piecemeal affair due to there not being an obvious route to a career in animation.

So, in 1942, after reading Robert D. Field's *The Art of Walt Disney*, Humberstone joined the Eagle Amateur Film Society with the intention of making cartoon films. Buying a couple of paint brushes, paints, an office letter punch from Woolworths, he then cut the ends off the brushes to fashion into two pegs to make a rudimentary but effective peg registration system, before punching holes in a wad of typing paper to match. Spurred on by his sister Mary, Humberstone sent some of his drawings to the Walt Disney studio in London, only to have the parcel returned a few days later with a covering letter informing him that the Disney offices were simply a British subsidiary business unit acting on behalf of the Californian parent studio, and that Disney cartoons were not made in this country. However, at their suggestion, he sent his drawings to J. Arthur Rank, as he was starting a new cartoon unit called G. B. (Gaumont British) Animation in the village of Cookham, Berkshire.

Humberstone was interviewed by the highly regarded American animator Dave Hand who, when shown his work, said, 'Yes, they have possibilities, when you come here we will be able to teach you how to draw but the ability to animate comes from in here' – with Hand indicating to Humberstone's head.David Jefferson, 'Arthur Humberstone: Senior Animator', *Animator* 14 (1985): 25. Hand, who was heading up the new G. B. Animation studio (which would

became known in the animation community as Moor Hall), subsequently offered Humberstone his first professional employment as an animator.

In his unpublished memoirs, Humberstone recounts how Hand often attended the 'sweat-box' sessions and was present at the screening of one of Humberstone's early test sequences. As an exercise he had been asked to animate a sack of fertilizer marching over to a flower. The sack had arms and the bottom corners of the bag were made to act as feet. Upon reaching the flower, the sack put its hand into a pocket in its side and pulled out a handful of fertilizer to sprinkle on the plant. Immediately, the flower responded by growing tall and strong. When Hand saw his work, he declared this was not animation, and Humberstone had to do it all again. He was so chastened by Hand's reaction that he promptly telephoned his old firm in Derby and asked for his job back; they were very understanding and agreed. Meanwhile, Humberstone had another go at the offending sequence. This time he made all the movements bolder – the sack marched with a swagger, when the arm went into the pocket it went right down in an exaggerated manner, all rather overdone he felt, but then, he had nothing to lose. When Hand saw this new version the following Thursday, he declared, 'Now that's what I call animation!'Jefferson, 'Arthur Humberstone', 21. Humberstone was elated – he wrote to his old firm cancelling his request for reinstatement.

While Moor Hall produced two series of short animated films (nine *Animaland* cartoons and ten more *Musical Paintbox* shorts), they failed to find an audience and G. B. Animation folded within three short years of its launch. However, the studio's legacy was to live on through the draughtsmanship and quality of the animators it had created. Following Moor Hall's closure at the start of 1950, Humberstone returned to Derby, taking a job as newspaper cartoonist producing a regular strip for the sports page, but when the Halas & Batchelor studio started recruiting for *Animal Farm* (1954), one of his ex-Cookham friends recommended him to John Halas. At his interview, Halas asked Humberstone which animals interested him, to which he replied 'horses', prompting Halas to proclaim: 'Good . . . Then Boxer and Benjamin are yours!'

Moving to London in September 1951, Humberstone took up residence in a flat across the road from the studio in Paddington. When John Halas learnt of this, he said, 'In that case, you can have a key so that you can come back in the evening to animate.'Arthur Humberstone, *Unpublished Memoirs*, in Arthur Humberstone Animation Archive. *Animal Farm* was undoubtedly a hard slog for Humberstone, but whose enthusiasm saw him return to put in overtime most evenings, making countless corrections and winning best 'footage outputs', all helping to meet the target figures set by the American investors.Humberstone, *Unpublished Memoirs*.

After *Animal Farm*, Humberstone set up his own company undertaking a variety of freelance work including animated commercials for TV and cinema (Esso Oil, Surf Detergent, Kellogs Ricicles), shorts and TV series

(Man of Action, Principle of X-Rays), working with companies such as Rank Screen Services, Shaw Films, Stewart Hardy Films and TV Cartoons. This was a period of prolific output and saw Humberstone amass over 100 titles including his self-initiated pilot *Noddy Goes to Toyland* (1964).

During the mid-1960s, when TV Cartoons (TVC London) were looking to enlist a team of national and international animators to realize the artistic vision of *Yellow Submarine* (Dunning, 1968), Humberstone was identified as an experienced member of the British community and someone to bring in for that production. Alongside feature productions and commercial advertising work, Humberstone still maintained his working relationship with John Halas, contributing to a number of Halas & Batchelor productions including *Dodo, the Kid from Outer Space* (1964), *The Jackson 5ive* (1971–2), *The Osmonds* (1972) and *The Addams Family* (1973).

In 1976, Humberstone landed a job on *Watership Down* as Senior Animator.During the production of *Watership Down*, Humberstone quite literally became a 'Senior Animator', by reaching retirement age in 1977. Once again this was initiated by his pro-active nature as, purely on spec, he had sent some drawings of a fox to Martin Rosen, who then invited him to a meeting when John Hubley (the production's original director) would be present. They looked through the storyboard, then Dennis Gardiner (the studio personnel officer) arrived and Humberstone was invited to start work the same day! In the early days, Humberstone worked with Phil Duncan, a former Disney animator who had worked on *Bambi* (Hand et al., 1942). He recalls, 'There were just the two of us in the beginning. We walked the route the rabbits took in their flight to freedom, and a long trek it was, too, but a beautiful day. I shot some film, even obtaining shots of two hares.'Humberstone, *Unpublished Memoirs*. Other animators joined during the production, including Gordon Harrison, Alan Simpson, Peter See, Ted Pettingell and George Jackson, constituting a core team of three Layout Artists, three Background Artists, six residential animators and four freelancers.

Humberstone recalls in his memoir: 'Rosen would ask for criticisms. He sat on the floor cross-legged and invited comments. When you pointed out things to him he nodded wisely and said, "Oh yes! we noticed that – we're dealing with it".'Humberstone, *Unpublished Memoirs*. 'He sent out appraisal sheets with questions followed by spaces for our comments, such as "what did you think of Hazel?" and "is the character of Big Wig [*sic*] developing?", and we submitted our thoughts on the matters'. It was a good idea, Humberstone notes, but there was never any follow-up to the questionnaires.Humberstone, *Unpublished Memoirs*.

While the film was in production, Humberstone kept twenty-six rabbits in his back garden. He filmed them on Super-8mm running up and down the grass banks and then used the recording of their movements to draw, frame-by-frame, their motion onto sheets of paper. These were then Xeroxed and

circulated among the other animators so they could be used as a source of reference.

In 1979, following the completion of *Watership Down*, Humberstone relocated to San Francisco in order to join the rest of Rosen's team to make *The Plague Dogs* (1982).

Gradually winding down his career through the late 1970s and 1980s, Humberstone kept his hand in working with companies like Stewart Hardy Films and Bill Melendez on productions such as *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1979), *SuperTed* (1983–6) and *The Charlie Brown and Snoopy Show* (1983–5). His final big production, as key animator, was *The BFG* completed in 1989.

Looking at the archive

Dialectic production

Typically, animated feature production is a tightly regulated endeavour, whereby various department leads work together across various teams, coordinating the actions of junior staff and reporting back to the director and producer, thereby ensuring that very little energy – and budget – is wasted. As Chris Pallant has written elsewhere:

> In simple terms, live-action filmmaking is a subtractive exercise, while animation, by contrast, is necessarily additive. In almost every situation the live action filmmaker will seek to capture more raw footage than is required, with the foreknowledge that it is the post-production phase of editing that provides the opportunity to best assemble – through distillation – the already-imagined film. Contrastingly, the process of animation typically sees the same pre-agreed narrative building blocks remade over and over, with increasing refinement on each pass, until what remains is the complete material artefact – the final film.Chris Pallant and Steven Price, *Storyboarding: A Critical History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 53.

However, in the context of *Watership Down* and after the departure of Hubley, Rosen's relative inexperience as an animation director created opportunities for less conventional working practices. Trusting his team, Rosen encouraged a more dialectic approach to production, whereby sequences evolved from a series of creative exchanges. Rosen remarks:

> The process in animation is that you give the script or the words that you want the artist to read, and you explain to them what you're looking for

> in the scene and you read a little before and a little after and read as much of the script as is formed. And then they record it. From that recording the animators then draw what's called line tests, which is a pencil test of the scene, and we film that. And I thought it would be useful to show that again to the voice artist and see if they could bring something else to it. And invariably they did, they brought something else which caused some additional animation to be done, but it was worth it. Because the second reading is always so much better.'Defining a Style', in *Watership Down,* Blu-ray (UK: Universal Features, 2013).

Reading Rosen's words, and the iterative process that he describes, it is tempting to see his inexperience as an animation director as a positive, given that this approach to production allowed him to work in ways not rigidly defined by prevailing animation production convention.

We can see that this approach to development recorded within the archive. In a production memo dated 22 August 1977 from Rosen to Humberstone, Rosen requests changes to be made to a previously completed sequence. Rosen writes:

> I would like this scene to open with the Chief Rabbit, full frontal view, answering Hazel's remark with his line 'A bad danger'. After that he should turn slowly around as if reaching to find some tidbit [*sic*] so that his entire backside is facing Hazel. Then, after a beat, his second line, 'How very upsetting,' which should link with the existing material, 'now what sort of danger I wonder?'Production memo (22 August 1977) from Martin Rosen to Arthur Humberstone, in Arthur Humberstone Animation Archive.

Here, we see an example of Rosen relying on Humberstone's experience – and ability – to adjust the scene accordingly. For the sequence in question, the first round of animation would have been created after – and been informed by – the initial sound recording. This was a fairly typical arrangement for hand-drawn animation production. However, Rosen then frequently encouraged the vocal performers to review this rough cut, and quite often this resulted in the audio for sequences being re-recorded, with the performers – in this case John Hurt (Hazel) and Ralph Richardson (Chief Rabbit) – adjusting their delivery based on the completed animation. This second round of review/re-recording/re-animation, which played a large part in the production of *Watership Down*, was – and is – a much less common feature of hand-drawn animation production given the added cost that it brings.Colin White telephone interview with Chris Pallant, 19 March 2021. Returning to the archive, we see in Rosen's memo of August 1977, precisely this second round of re-animation being advocated, with the instruction being to revise the animation to take account of the updated vocal performance.

Another similar example can be seen in an earlier memo dated 13 December 1976, whereby Rosen explicitly instructs all animation staff to adjust their work on Silver. As Figure 2.1 reveals, as well as highlighting the new ways that Silver is to be characterized, Rosen also instructs staff to disregard the existing voice track, noting that the audio will be 're-shot as post sync'. Furthermore, the performance style of Terence Rigby in *Softly, Softly* (1966–9) is invoked as guide for the animation staff prior to the circulation of the new model sheet. Exchanges like this help to open up new ways of thinking about the chequered production of *Watership Down*. While the bumpy three-year production is well documented, with experienced animation director Hubley departing mid-production (causing a year of disruption), leaving the less experienced Rosen to steer the project through to completion, our examination of the Humberstone archive reveals how this directorial change paved the way for a more dialectical mode of production to develop.Whether Hubley left *Watership Down* due to creative differences is a contested point. Whereas John Pym, writing in the contemporary trade journal *Monthly Film Bulletin* (1978), suggests the departure was due to creative disagreement, Faith Hubley unambiguously stated when interviewed by Pat McGilligan in 1988 (*Film Quarterly* 42, no. 2: 2–18) that it had 'nothing to do with creativity', hinting that her own ailing health at that time, coupled with that of her husband's, might have played some part in his exit. This exchange-based production, as detailed earlier, invites a reconsideration of *Watership Down*'s production journey as one of creative freedom rather than directorial disorder.

Drawing from life

Given the subject matter of Richard Adams's original book, which does not shy away from the themes of violence and death, adopting a Disney-esque look, as seen in contemporary features such as *The Aristocats* (Reitherman, 1970), *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* (Stevenson, 1971) and *Robin Hood* (Reitherman, 1973), would not have worked. However, in an early character line-up (Figure 2.2), we can see a Disney-esque aesthetic where the rabbits are all quite rounded with little attention given to visually distinguishing them based on their individual personalities. While not quite as doe-eyed as Disney's Thumper, these early rabbit designs did not fit the look needed for *Watership Down*.

As noted earlier in the chapter, Humberstone gained a comprehensive professional education working at large animation studios such as Moor Hall and Halas & Batchelor, as well as running his own animation studio, prior to joining the *Watership Down* crew. Consequently, his grasp of the production pipeline was such that he had a clear understanding of the need to use all of the available tools at his disposal to create the specific aesthetic required for *Watership Down*. In a revised model sheet signed with Humberstone's overlapped 'AH' initials and dated 1976, we can see a clear evolution in the character design (Figure 2.3). With more variety across the individual characters in terms of height, weight and demeanour, we can see a commitment

MEMORANDUM

TO:- All Animation Staff cc: Tony Guy
Gordon Harrison
Memo.13.12.76.

FROM:- Martin Rosen

You will be receiving new hand model sheets on the character of Silver within the next day or two. We are changing his character from one of dumb and comedic-looking to a stronger, albeit slow-thinking, personality. Consequently, when you receive hand-outs which include Silver do not interpret him according to the value on the track. This will be re-shot on post sync.

You might keep in mind the character of Terence Rigby, who plays Sgt. Snow in "Softly, Softly", as being representative of the quality of Silver.

Martin Rosen

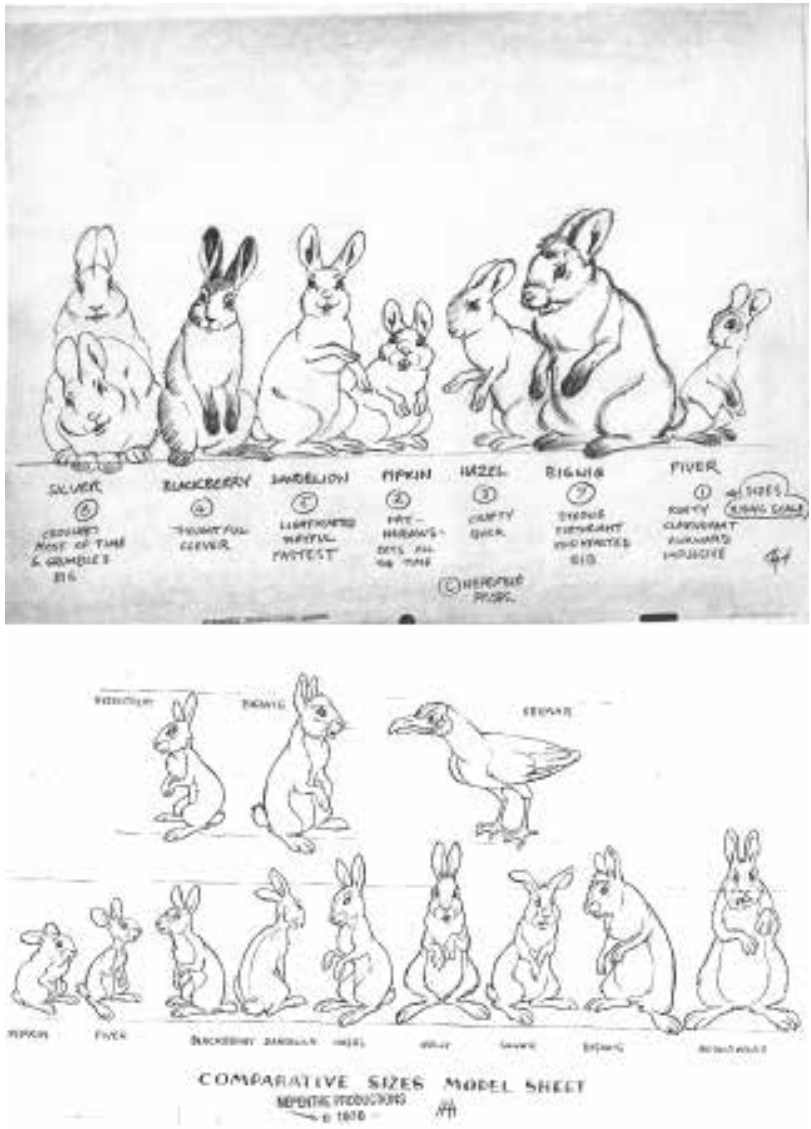
MR:mpb

FIGURE 2.1 *Memo from Rosen to* Watership Down*'s animation staff, 13 December 1976.*

to developing an aesthetic that is grounded in the real physical appearance of standard rabbits, with their more elongated faces, more expressive ears and arched bodies, which moves away from the more spherical facial designs, floppier ears and plumper bodies of the earlier model sheet.

When asked about the evolution of these character designs, Colin White recalled:

> I don't know who exactly did it. There was obviously a lot of pre-production stuff that had happened before the production started again [after the departure of Hubley] and looks like someone not so talented has done an earlier concept. So, they've then given this to Arthur to clean



FIGURES 2.2 AND 2.3 *Model sheets showing the development of* Watership Down*'s characters.*

up, because his stuff is very anatomical, it is very precise, and he gives the muscles definition, so I think they gave it to him for that reason. The second one is definitely Arthur's style.Colin White telephone interview.

White is in no doubt that the look of the rabbits seen in the final film stemmed directly from Humberstone's intervention. Noting how there were just two main animators in the production, Humberstone and George Jackson, White notes how Humberstone 'very much wanted to be the big gun in town, the best', before observing that, while their styles were different, 'Arthur was always trying to make his stuff the very best. He would shoot reference . . . he would use this reference and research, and try really hard to be Walt Disney, really.'Colin White telephone interview.

Consequently, Humberstone created many pencil and ink sketches of animals such as badgers, rabbits, ducks, horses while working on the film, so, by the end of the 1970s, he had generated quite a large number of animal studies. This study of animal life proved particularly useful when animating the scene where we see the curious farmer's dog sniffing along the bank of the river Enborne. After filming the Humberstone family dog (Ranger) on 8mm, he then projected it back to analyse it. Working from the reference footage he created the sequence we can see in Figure 2.4, which shows how the movement of a dog can be broken down into smaller connected motions. By working in this way, he was able to get a feel for the weight of the dog, how it shifted its weight between its legs and how its tail moved while he sniffed the air with his nose.

What is now apparent, given the triangulation of the new archival- and interview-based research presented in this chapter, is the profound influence that Humberstone had over the film's final aesthetic. Singlehandedly giving definition to the rabbits and Kehaar, as well as informing many of the other animal design choices by virtue of his extensive reference and research work, it is time that Humberstone's contributions received greater attention and credit.

Recovering lost workspaces

Given the richness of the Humberstone archive, a key objective in recent years has been to bring these materials, and the insights they provide about the production of *Watership Down*, to new audiences. Picking up momentum in 2018 and feeding into the British Film Institute's focus on animation that year, Humberstone's 1963 short *Noddy Goes to Toyland* was selected for inclusion as one of the season's free-to-view films hosted on the BFI Player. As part of this initiative, Klive and Nigel granted Jez Stewart, Curator of the BFI's Animation Collection, access to their family archive to help inform the retrospective that was installed at the BFI's South Bank exhibition space that year.

In November of 2018, the authors of this chapter gave the Keynote presentation at the conference 'The Legacy of *Watership Down*: Animals,

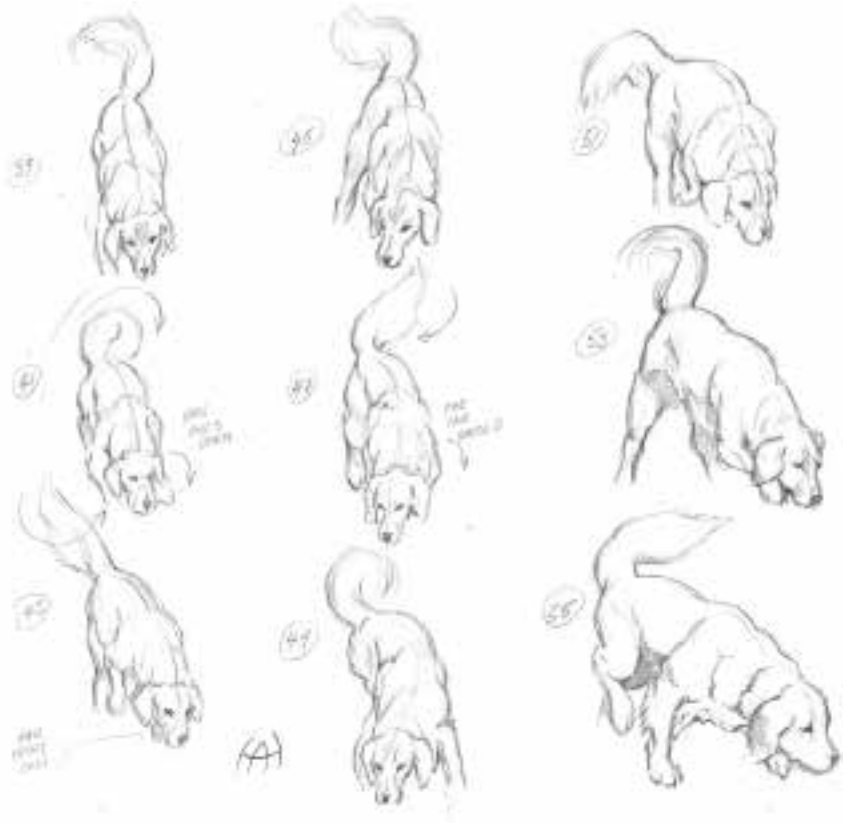


FIGURE 2.4 *The breakdown of a dog in motion, by Arthur Humberstone.*

Adaptation, Animation' held at the University of Warwick. Then, in June 2019, Nigel Humberstone delivered a paper entitled 'Noddy Goes to Toyland (1963): A Case Study from the Arthur Humberstone Archive' at the Society for Animation Studies annual conference. The objective of this conference activity was to bring into focus the contributions of Humberstone by unearthing the narrative exposition, background information and historical context behind the ten-minute *Noddy Goes to Toyland* pilot produced by Humberstone. As a result of changing finance criteria and sales inertia, the film was effectively shelved upon completion, remaining dormant and unseen for years. The presentation featured a rich collection of visual materials, production insight and accounts of correspondence between Humberstone, Enid Blyton and the executive producer Victor Broadribb.

More recently, in 2021, insights from the archive were shared at Canterbury Anifest, with members of the public. As part of this presentation,

a recreation of Humberstone's workspace was staged, drawing upon photographs taken during the production of *Watership Down*. Rather than simply treating this in some totemic sense, the curatorial process that supported the recreation of the workspace actually allowed new associative connections to be considered. Several documents from the Humberstone archive contain visual jokes or playful notes written on company paper, which, when taken in isolation, hint that Humberstone may well have been a source of levity within the production. By considering how these seemingly disposable materials might have been displayed for varying lengths of time within the workspace, these documents are granted additional meaning.

To date, little focussed effort has been made to recover the history of the hand-drawn animation workspace. While references to these spaces proliferate animation scholarship, when reference is made to them it is often matter of fact, being just background detail in a discussion focussed elsewhere. The consequence of this neglect is that the social, industrial and individual histories of the hand-drawn workspace, during the form's most pervasive era, are in danger of being lost to time. You might wonder why we should care, but to follow that logic overlooks the layered nature of this particular animation workspace and the extra-textual perspectives they afford.Arguably, stop-motion and CG animation workspaces offer a less concentrated focal point for study, given the fact that many stop-motion animators work standing up, by virtue of the materials employed, and therefore the concept of a workspace morphs more into the concept of a workshop or studio space, while CG animation encourages (with some exceptions, such as Disney and Pixar, for example) a less personalised or invested approach to the workspace habitat.

Examples of the storied nature of the workspace can be found across the world of hand-drawn animation. Writing in his book *Sharing a House with the Never-Ending Man: 15 Years at Studio Ghibli*, Steve Alpert, who worked as Head of International Sales at the studio, writes:

> For a long time at Ghibli, even after the success of *Princess Mononoke*, anybody could just walk upstairs and stand in front of Hayao Miyazaki and watch him work. Miyazaki is an iconic figure in Japan. . . . At work on a film, Miyazaki would sit in a tiny corner of the animators' area at an animator's desk that was identical in every way to any other animator's desk in the room, though the aura emanating from him identified him at a glance as someone unique and special.Steve Alpert, *Sharing a House with the Never-Ending Man: 15 Years at Studio Ghibli* (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 2020): 86.

While Tom Sito, writing in *Eat, Drink, Animate: An Animators Cookbook*, tells a story about Eric Abjornson, who he worked with on several productions, actually cooking at his animation desk with a convection oven that he kept under his desk.Tom Sito, *Eat, Drink, Animate: An Animators Cookbook* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2019), 36.

In the context of *Watership Down*, documents such as this fake production memo (Figure 2.5), this caricature (Figure 2.6) or this model sheet (Figure 2.7) reveal instances of humour, centred around Humberstone's work or demeanour that were situated within his workplace. As a senior figure within production, but with a tolerant personality, Humberstone was evidently seen as a safe individual at which to direct such well-meaning exchanges. By elevating these documents from their current situation, arranged in a decontextualized folder within an organically arranged private archive, and considering them once more as artefacts situated in space – the workspace of Humberstone – draws our attention to small, yet important details.

Looking more closely at Figure 2.5, for example, we find three small holes at the top of the document. While we cannot know with absolute certainty, it is likely that these holes were made by noticeboard pins, perhaps the same pin, as the document was re-mounted on three separate occasions. There is a possibility that only one of the holes was made by the pin that initially fixed the memo to the noticeboard, and that the other two holes were made when other documents were pinned over the top of the memo; this is unlikely given the photographic records of Humberstone's workspaces across his career, which show consistently orderly arrangements with little or no overlapping documents (Figure 2.8), and it is also unlikely that these were made by adjacent pins given how closely the holes are grouped, thereby indicating that it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to fix three pins in such close proximity.

By the fact that this document resided in private possession, in an undisturbed state until after the death of Humberstone in 1999, we may also judge with some confidence that these pin holes originated when the documents were in active circulation, and not at some intermediate moment of review.For a thoughtful consideration of the acts – and hazards – of archival inference, see Jennifer Meehan's 'Making the Leap from Parts to Whole: Evidence and Inference in Archival Arrangement and Description', *The American Archivist* 72, no. 1 (2009): 72–90. Our inferences then, which appear reasonably plausible, suggest that although the memo might well have been intended as a throwaway joke, once in Humberstone's possession this artefact became a treasured possession, which, given the puncture pattern, seemingly moved around his workspace as the production developed and his pinboards become more crowded.

When asked about the nature of the *Watership Down* workspace, White recalled:

> It was a bunch of creative people working in the same space, so it was like a little society. Once you're working on a common project when you're 'in house', you can hear feedback from all the other people there, it was tremendously good! It doesn't happen anymore, really. Nobody was plugged into a Walkman, people would walk around and chat to each


MEMORANDUM

TO:- A.R. HUMBERSTONE DATE:- 10/8/76

FROM:- PRODUCTION OFFICE

The Unit would prefer if you would refrain from singing on the company's time

NEPENTHE PRODUCTIONS LTD. SUFFOLK HOUSE, 1–8 WHITFIELD PLACE, LONDON, W1P 5SA. Tel: 01 387 3441

FIGURE 2.5 *A fake production memo addressed to Humberstone from the production office, requesting that he 'refrain from singing on the company's time'.*

> other, forming friendships. There was a real sense of community and a common project. . . . We'd be sitting in our cubicles working, but we'd get up and move around a lot more than when you work in a digital studio, there was more interaction. In your cubicle you'd have shelves, space to pin things for reference, or just things you liked, and it created a nice atmosphere.Colin White telephone interview.

White's words neatly capture the richness of the workspace, as well as offering a reminder of Norman McLaren's oft-rehearsed statement about the collapsible temporality of animation production, whereby McLaren proposes that 'animation is not the art of drawings that move but the art of movements that are drawn; what happens between each frame is much more important than what exists on each frame; animation is therefore the art of manipulating the invisible interstices that lie between the frames'.Georges

FIGURE 2.6 *A playful caricature of Humberstone.*

Sifanos, 'The Definition of Animation: A Letter From Norman McLaren', *Animation Journal* 3, no. 2 (1995): 62. Therefore, the workspace-specific documents found in the Humberstone archive not only point towards the filmic text, but they also present a fresh perspective on the past, or the past-present, of the production moment – and the many in-betweens experienced in that moment. The recreation of Humberstone's workspace represents an attempt to spotlight the material flow of *Watership Down*'s production and the active curation of personal workspace that took place.

Conclusion

Having discussed the value of this privately held archive and having only scratched the surface of the materials held within it, the challenge that lies ahead is ensuring the long-term preservation, management and access of this archive. Furthermore, while this chapter has increased our understanding of the role played by Humberstone both within the production of *Watership*

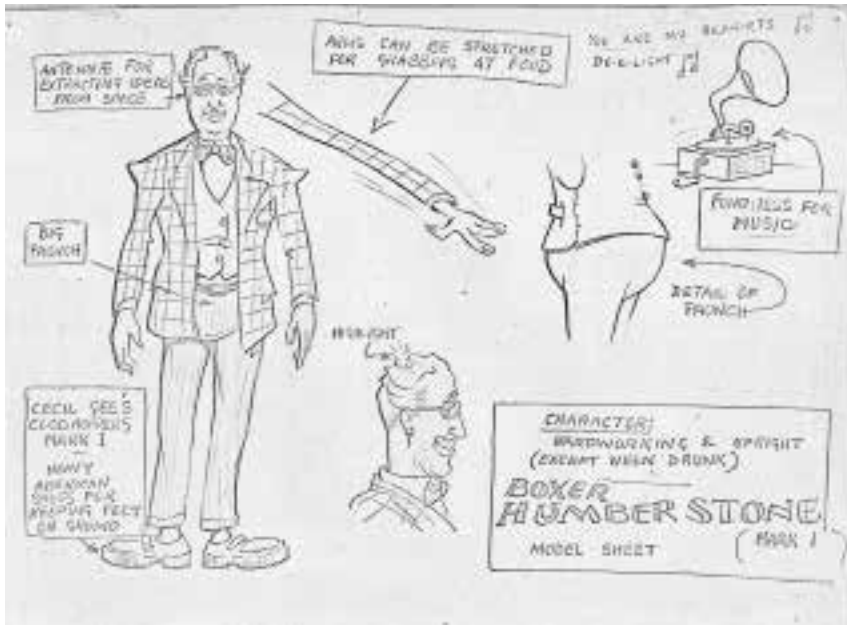


FIGURE 2.7 *A fake model sheet depicting a cartoon Humberstone.*

FIGURE 2.8 *Humberstone at work during the production of* Watership Down *at Nepenthe, London.*

Down and as a respected figure within the UK animation community, and in doing so helped to add greater nuance to our sense of UK animation history, there remains more work to be done – far beyond the scope of this chapter – to reclaim the personal narratives of Humberstone's many

colleagues whose personal archives and professional contributions have yet to be studied with the level of detail offered in this chapter.