APPENDICES

1. Summary of The Railway Children

The story concerns the Waterbury family who moves to “Three Chimneys”, a house near the railway, after the father who works at the foreign office, is imprisoned as a result of being falsely accused of selling state secret to Russians. The three children, Roberta (Bobbie), Peter, and Phyllis, find amusements in watching the trains on nearby railway line and waving to the passengers. They become friendly with Albert Perks, the station porter, and with the Old Gentleman who regularly takes the 09.15 am and 10.07 pm down train. He is eventually able to help prove their father’s innocence, and the family is reunited. The family takes care of the Russian exile, Mr. Szczepansky, who came to England looking for his family (later located) and Jim, the grandson of the Old Gentleman, who suffers a broken leg on a tunnel.

The theme of an innocent man being falsely imprisoned for espionage and finally vindicated might have been influenced by the Dreyfus Affair, which was a prominent worldwide news item a few years before the book was written. And the Russian exile, persecuted by the tsars for writing “a beautiful book about poor people and how to help them” and subsequently helped by the children, was most likely an amalgam of the real-life dissidents Peter who were both friends of the author.
2. Biography of Edith Nesbit

Edith Nesbit was born in London in 1858. When she was four her father died but her mother bravely continued to run the agricultural college her husband, and before that, his father, had founded in Kensington London. Her childhood was shared with her sister, half sister and 3 brothers. She was educated on the continent when she accompanied her mother and Sister Mary traveling throughout France, Germany and Spain. This was not an educational grand tour but an endeavor to get her sister well as she was suffering from tuberculosis. Upon their return to England Edith’s mother moved the family from London to Halstead, Kent. This was the start of Edith’s love of the countryside and especially of Kent.

At 18 years of age she met Huber Bland whom she was eventually to marry. They married in a Registry office in the city of London and Hubert found Edith a home overlooking blackheart. A move to a small terraced house in Elswick Road, Lewis ham (still standing) with their first child, Paul, was to be one of the many homes in the South east of London they were to occupy. Edith had begun writing in her teens and her artistic talents were needed to bring in money when she and Hubert were first married. Her flourish for writing poems articles and children’s stories eventually led the family which now numbered three children to move to large home in Lee and Grove Park.

In 1899 the family moved to well hall. Eltham (pictured). The three storey house surrounded by orchards and farmland adjacent to a Tudor barn was to be their home for 22 years. Edith was a very generous, gregarious person and would host parties at well hall, which attracted the many literary friends she and Hubert had
come to know. Friends such as HG Wells, George Bernard Shaw and friends from the Fablan society, Sydney and Beatrice Webb. The first world war and Hubert’s death in 1914 brought a change to their fortunes. Managing a large house was becoming difficult and at the suggestion of a family friends she left well hall for her beloved Kentish Countryside.

Prior to the move she found solace and happiness with Tommy Tucker whom she married in 1917 and together they built a home at St Mary’s Bay, Dymchurch, Kent where in May 1924, Edith Nesbit died. Her last resting place is at St Mary in the marsh. Tommy Tucker went on to make a name in the community of Jesson St Mary where he died eleven years later with Edith’s adopted daughter at the side. To a read in more detail of Edith Nesbit’s life look for to a copy of two biographies the first E Nesbit by Doris Langley Moor, published in 1993 and Julia Brigg’s ‘A Woman of Passion published in 1987. They may take some finding as both are out of print.