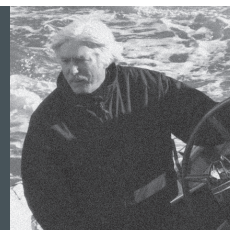


Tom Cunliffe



Deep Water and Shoal, by W A Robinson

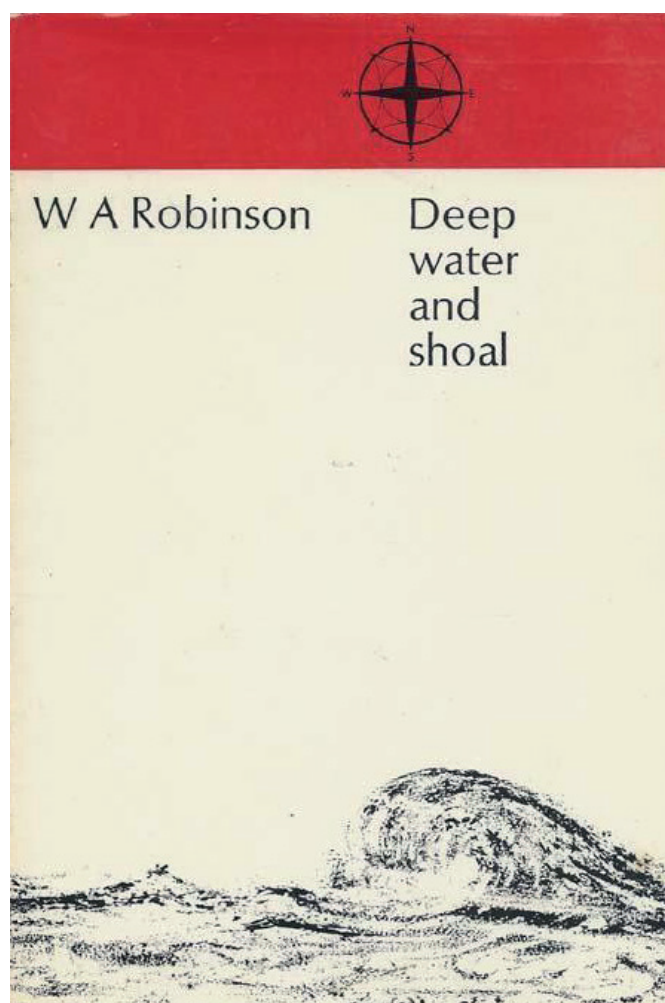
Tom Cunliffe recalls the book that influenced him more than any other

'I remember it is the fate of the majority of British readers to have to catch the 9:15 three hundred times each year, and I think this book will make every season ticket holder who reads it very restless and discontented with his life.' So said Weston Martyr in his memorable introduction to the British edition of *Deep Water and Shoal*, written by W A Robinson and first published in 1932. Martyr could not have been closer to the mark, except that in my case I was not old enough to queue for the 9:15 when I came upon this remarkable book. I was a dreaming schoolboy in Manchester whose only contact with the sea had been mackerel-fishing sorties with my father around the summer shores of the Isle of Man.

"I think this book will make every season ticket holder who reads it very restless and discontented with his life."

I discovered *Deep Water and Shoal* in a dusty corner of our local lending library one foggy winter's evening, opened it after homework time and read on into the small hours while Jack Frost whitened the bedroom window. My life was changed for ever.

Like me, Bill Robinson had no expectations of private income, yet by sheer single-mindedness he had acquired a suitable yacht and had sailed her around the world in search of adventure. And adventure he found in plenty. Svaap was



The cover of the Mariner's Library edition

"By sheer single-mindedness he had acquired a suitable yacht and had sailed her around the world in search of adventure."

a 32ft Alden ketch, bought and equipped for £400.



Bill Robinson, his wife Florence and cousin Douglas West before their departure

She set off for the Pacific with enough money for a few months only, yet Robinson determined that he would ‘chance it, never knowing whether I would have sufficient funds to continue or not.’ He succeeded by writing, fishing, hunting, bartering with natives, taking passengers, loading a ton or so of freight, and carrying occasional government supplies to isolated communities.



My wife Ros and myself at the end of our first major voyage

“Little realising that through fair weather and the foulest, through deep water and shoal, I was being inspired by the simple feasibility of what Robinson had achieved.”



Robinson at the helm

I read on as the steam locos began to shake the pre-dawn silence down in the icy sidings below our house, little realising that through fair weather and the foulest, through deep water and shoal, I was being inspired by the simple feasibility of what Robinson had achieved. Twelve years later, I set off with my wife in a 32ft traditional boat with enough cash to get us to South America - maybe. We made a long voyage of it, we survived, we made a profit, and we are ever grateful to W A Robinson who not only did it himself, but took the trouble to motivate others to follow after.

No reminiscence about *Deep water and Shoal* could close without quoting the final paragraph of Weston Martyr:

“...I feel a sudden urge which is not to be denied, to savage my bowler hat and blow the consequences and live again, too, for a change. So.....do not for heaven’s sake, take the slightest notice of my first precautionary paragraph. No. Read what this man Robinson did, and then, by Gum! go and do thou likewise!”

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