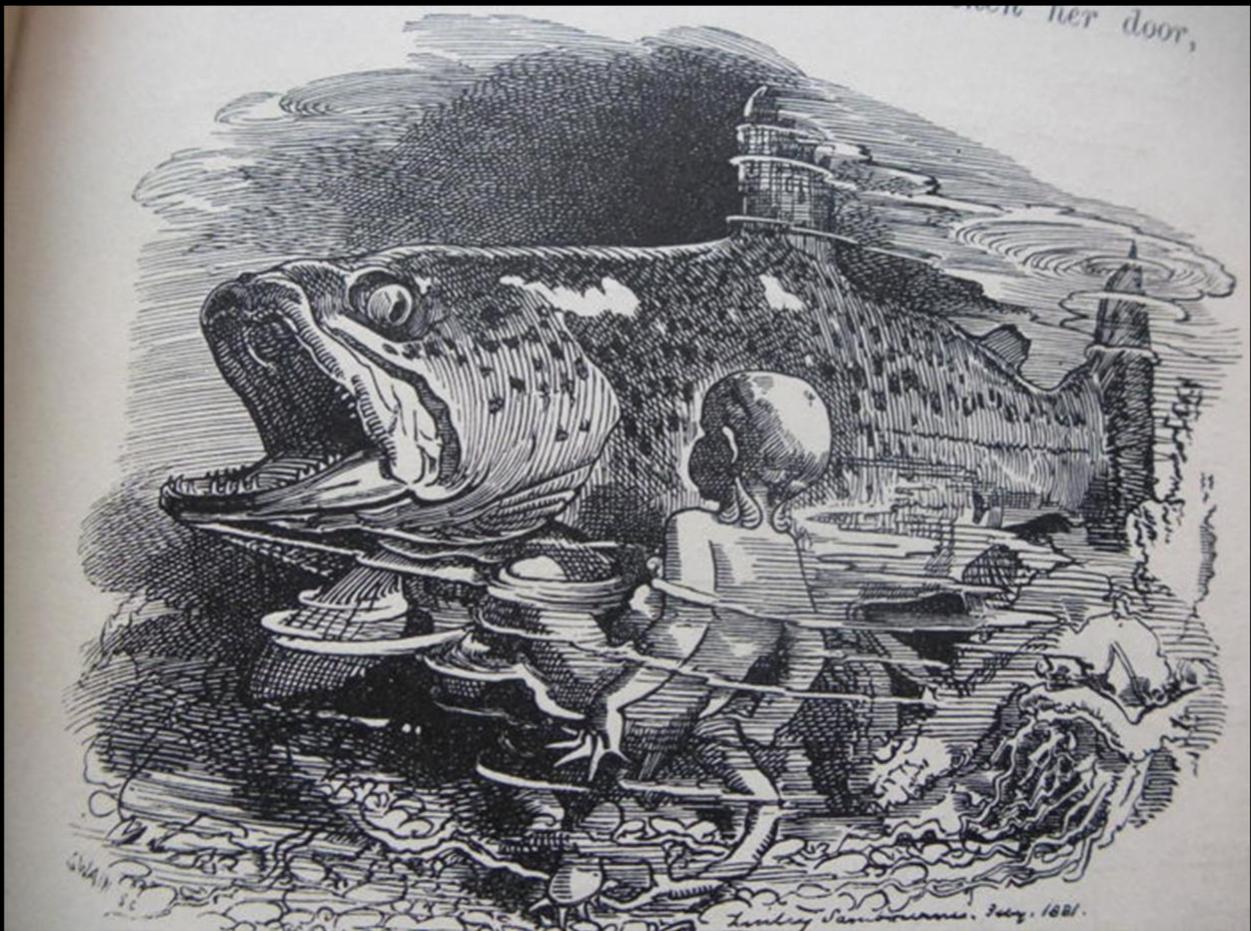


Puppet Theatre Barge

presents



The Water Babies

by String Theatre

String Theatre

Based in London, String Theatre was founded in 2011 by puppeteers **Stan Middleton** and **Soledad Zárate**, both of whom learnt their craft on the Puppet Theatre Barge. The company presents live performances using long-string wood-carved marionettes and tours its productions on a custom-built touring stage to festivals and theatres around the world (Argentina, Bosnia, France, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Italy, Romania, Russia, Serbia, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland, Tunisia, Turkey & UK). In 2017, the company was awarded the *Harlequin Trophy for Marionette Manipulation and Presentation*, awarded by the British Puppet and Model Theatre Guild.

www.stringtheatre.co.uk



The Water Babies

inspired by Charles Kingsley

After a harsh beginning of child labour in an unforgiving adult world, a little chimney sweep's suffering ends when he is transformed into a water baby. As he plunges into an underwater realm of fish, caterpillars and caddisflies, we follow his adventures into the colourful depths, and are swept along with his dreams and new freedom.

The story is told in two acts, with an interval.

Credits

Manipulation

**Elizabeth Barron, Sarah Fitzpatrick
& Stan Middleton/Soledad Zárate**

Puppets

Soledad Zárate

Scenography

Stan Middleton

Soundtrack

Jimmy Sheals

Director

Stan Middleton

Thanks to

Rob Humphreys & Kate Middleton



Charles Kingsley

Charles Kingsley was born in 1819 and spent his childhood in the seaside village of Clovelly, on the North Devon coast, where his father was curate, and later rector. Charles himself served as rector of Eversley, in Hampshire, for 35 years, and was one of the founders of Christian Socialism. He was a keen advocate of adult education, and helped establish the first Working Men's College in Britain in 1854, offering evening classes for workers.

Despite being a man of the church, he was also a friend and keen supporter of Charles Darwin, at the time of the controversy surrounding the publication of *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. In the same year, Kingsley became chaplain to Queen Victoria, and was appointed private tutor to the Prince of Wales (the future Edward VII) in 1861. He was Professor of Modern History at Cambridge (1861–69), a canon at Westminster Abbey (1873), and died in his beloved Eversley in 1875 at the age of 55.

Kingsley's literary output was prolific and wide-ranging, from sermons and lectures to dramas and history books. His first novels dealt with the social issues that most concerned him, such as the living and working conditions of the rural poor and factory workers. But he found his greatest success as a writer with his historical novels, such as *Westward Ho!* (1855), a maritime adventure celebrating English victories over Spain in the Elizabethan period, and *Hereward the Wake* (1866), a fictionalized account of Anglo-Saxon resistance to the Norman Conquest. Probably his most famous work, however, is his children's book, *The Water Babies*, published in 1863, and combining his concern for sanitary reform, with his interest in natural history and the theory of evolution.



And Tom?

Ah, now comes the most wonderful part of this wonderful story. Tom, when he woke, for of course he woke – children always wake after they have slept exactly as long as is good for them – found himself swimming about in the stream, being about four inches, or – that I may be accurate – 3.87902 inches long, and having round the parotid region of his fauces a set of external gills (I hope you understand all the big words) just like those of a sucking eft, which he mistook for a lace frill, till he pulled at them, found he hurt himself, and made up his mind that they were part of himself, and best left alone.

In fact, the fairies had turned him into a water-baby.

A water-baby? You never heard of a water-baby. Perhaps not. That is the very reason why this story was written. There are a great many things in the world which you never heard of; and a great many more which nobody ever heard of; and a great many things, too, which nobody will ever hear of...

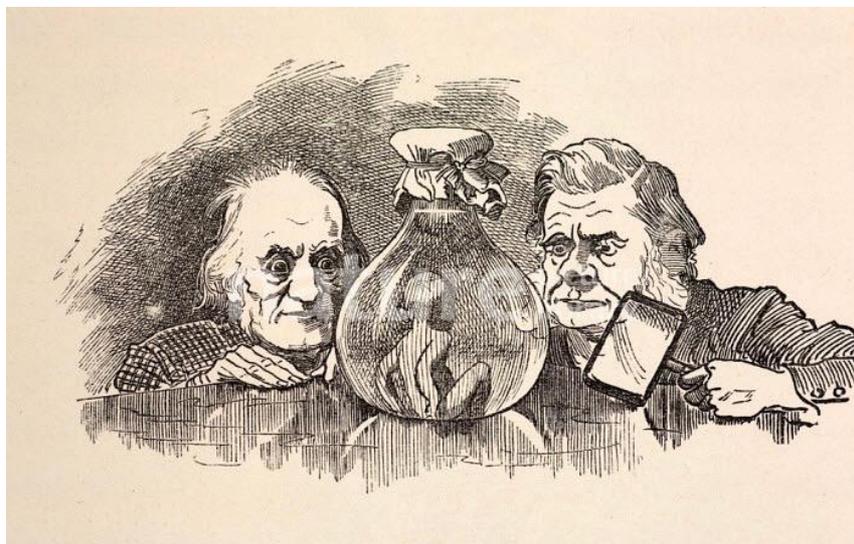
"But there are no such things as water-babies."

How do you know that? Have you been there to see? And if you had been there to see, and had seen none, that would not prove that there were none. If Mr Garth does not find a fox in Eversley Wood – as folk sometimes fear he never will – that does not prove that there are no such things as foxes. And as is Eversley Wood to all the woods in England, so are the waters we know to all the waters in the world. And no one has a right to say that no water-babies exist, till they have seen no water-babies existing; which is quite a different thing, mind, from not seeing water-babies; and a thing which nobody ever did, or perhaps ever will do.

"But surely if there were water-babies, somebody would have caught one at least?"

Well. How do you know that somebody has not?

from *The Water Babies* by Charles Kingsley



Child Labour in Victorian England

The industrial revolution in Britain, in the 18th and 19th century, drew workers from the countryside into the factories and the cities, and, with a rising population, many of them were very young. Mills and mines employed thousands of children, who worked in cramped conditions, were paid less than adults, and suffered beatings with impunity. Child labour laws were slow in coming, and seldom enforced – the 1819 Cotton Factories Act merely banned children under 9 from working in the mills, and limited them to shifts of no more than 12 hours.

One of the most visible occupations for small children was as a “climbing boy” for a chimney sweep. Houses in the 19th century had a fireplace in nearly every room, and chimneys were frequently blocked up with soot and ash. Small children were the perfect size to climb up the inside of chimneys to clean them – some bosses would even light a fire under the boys to force them to climb right to the top, and some would deliberately starve them to keep them skinny enough to do the job. Many were orphans, who were effectively enslaved and forced to do the work – others were so desperate, they volunteered. Either way, it was extremely dangerous – injuries from falls were frequent – and unhealthy – with long-term breathing problems inevitable.

The Chimney Sweep Act of 1834 made it illegal for anyone under 14 to climb up the inside of a chimney, and in 1840, the age limit was raised to 21, but the average age of a climbing boy remained at 7, and some were as young as 4. The publication of *The Water Babies* in 1863, helped highlight the continuing exploitation within the industry, through the main character, Tom, a climbing boy, who is treated harshly by his chimney sweep boss, Grimes.

However, it wasn't until 1875, after the death of a 12-year-old from a fall whilst cleaning a hospital chimney, that the tide turned against using children as climbing boys. That year, Lord Shaftesbury (of Avenue fame) managed to get a law through parliament, forcing all “sweeping masters” to register with the police, who, in turn, were charged with enforcing the new law.



Young and Old

*When all the world is young, lad,
And all the trees are green;
And every goose a swan, lad,
And every lass a queen;
Then hey for boot and horse, lad,
And round the world away;
Young blood must have its course, lad,
And every dog his day.*

*When all the world is old, lad,
And all the trees are brown;
And all the sport is stale, lad,
And all the wheels run down;
Creep home, and take your place there,
The spent and maimed among:
God grant you find one face there,
You loved when all was young.*

Song from *The Water Babies* by Charles Kingsley



Puppet Theatre Barge

Gren and Juliet Middleton, of Movingstage Marionette Company, founded the Puppet Theatre Barge in 1982. The boat itself is an old Thames lighter which has been ingeniously converted into a unique puppet theatre specialising in string marionettes. Moored in Little Venice from mid-October to mid-July, the Puppet Barge journeys to Richmond every year for the summer season. All three generations of the Middleton family are involved in running the theatre, which is now cruising through its fourth decade.

