

Vanessa Bell:
Notes on Virginia's Childhood

Vanessa Bell's notes on her sister's childhood were written for the Memoir Club after Virginia Woolf's death and then edited for a limited edition published in 1974. The Stephen children were all born within four years of one another. Vanessa, the eldest, born in 1879, was a year and a half older than Thoby, two-and-a-half years older than Virginia and three-and-a-half years older than Adrian. Vanessa's description of the beginnings of Virginia's writing as well as the development of free thought and speech in Bloomsbury is one of the most important records of the Group's early history. As with other Memoir Club papers, the memoir assumes an audience of old friends.

The more I see of children – and I am thankful to say I do manage to see more of them now – the more I realize that their world is quite unlike ours. It is so different from ours that, it seems to me, to describe it needs a peculiar kind of imagination and understanding. And I think any real account of a childhood would necessarily be long, for how much happens in an hour or a day of a child's life, and what changes come in a year!

We were all so near in age that I cannot be very sure that many of my memories have any sort of truth. Why do I see her so clearly, a very rosy chubby baby, with bright green eyes, sitting in a high chair at the nursery table, drumming impatiently for her breakfast? She cannot have been more than two, and I therefore only about four and a half. But it is a vivid memory to me. How worried I was too, not much later, because she couldn't speak clearly; I feared she would never do so, which would