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The Hidden Roads: A Memoir of Childhood

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Most childhood memoirs, even those by children's writers, are not written for young readers. Exceptions, such as Roald Dahl's **Boy**, are rare, and **The Hidden Roads** is not one of them. Such books often begin their life as a private record intended first and foremost for the author's family. From these beginnings they can develop into significant works of literature, as did Emma Smith's magnificent 2008 memoir, **The Great Western Beach**. Crossley-Holland's book makes no such leap, and remains primarily a memorial scrapbook from a fairly uneventful and conventional boyhood. The author was born in 1941, and the book ends 13 years later, when he goes to public school. For adult readers interested in childhood and children's literature its importance lies in Crossley-Holland's eminence as a children's novelist and reteller of myth and legend. His is the first name that comes to mind when you associate present-day children's books with myth and folk-tale, with Arthurian legend, or with Anglo-Saxon England. In its account of the standard commerce of a generally happy and lucky childhood, **The Hidden Roads** engagingly reveals the crucial starting-points of a career. Happening to live just down the road from the ancient chalk landmark Whiteleaf Cross in Buckinghamshire is one of them. Making a museum in the garden shed, or cycling to churches to take brass-rubbings, are others. These unpretentious reminiscences are full of clues to how a children's writer is made, in this case one with a distinctive niche in current writing.

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