



Living with Eagles. Priest to Publisher: The Life and Times of Marcus Morris

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Every now and again a new figure bursts into the world of children's publishing, shaking up old practices and producing astonishing results. One such was the Reverend Marcus Morris, founder of the **Eagle** comic in 1950. A heavy drinker, near-bankrupt and occasional womaniser, Morris was also a nervous bundle of energy responsible for the best post-war children's comic ever to hit a grateful young audience. Eagle clubs, cricket coaching, football demonstrations, a junior table tennis tournament, even an enormously expensive Ballet Scholarship scheme soon followed in its wake. Readers were paid for their contributions, with cartoons from the young Gerald Scarfe and David Hockney among those printed. No wonder older readers look back to all this with nostalgia; it is a long time since anyone else has set out to entertain, educate and generally involve the great mass of children with such success. This extraordinary achievement came at a certain cost. There were serious fall-outs, including one with the brilliant artist Frank Hampson who created Dan Dare (originally to be known as Lex Christian, a tough fighting parson from London's East End). Morris's children, two of whom have written this biography, remember being left on their own for long periods of time. The house was a tip and there were rats in the garden. But for the most part they recall their charismatic father and other-worldly, actress mother with love and respect. The **Eagle** along with **Girl**, **Robin** and **Swift** eventually died following a **Daily Mirror** take-over. Competition from television and Morris's outsize expense account may in time have done for them anyway, but it was an inspired venture well described in this generously illustrated book.

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