

BOOKS FOR KEEPS

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Special CHRISTMAS Issue



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Cover story

Our cover illustration this issue is by Tomie de Paola from *The Night Before Christmas* (Oxford University Press). See Seasonal Stories (page 28).

The cost of producing *Books for Keeps* continues to rise relentlessly. From 1st January 1982 we shall be increasing our rates as follows:

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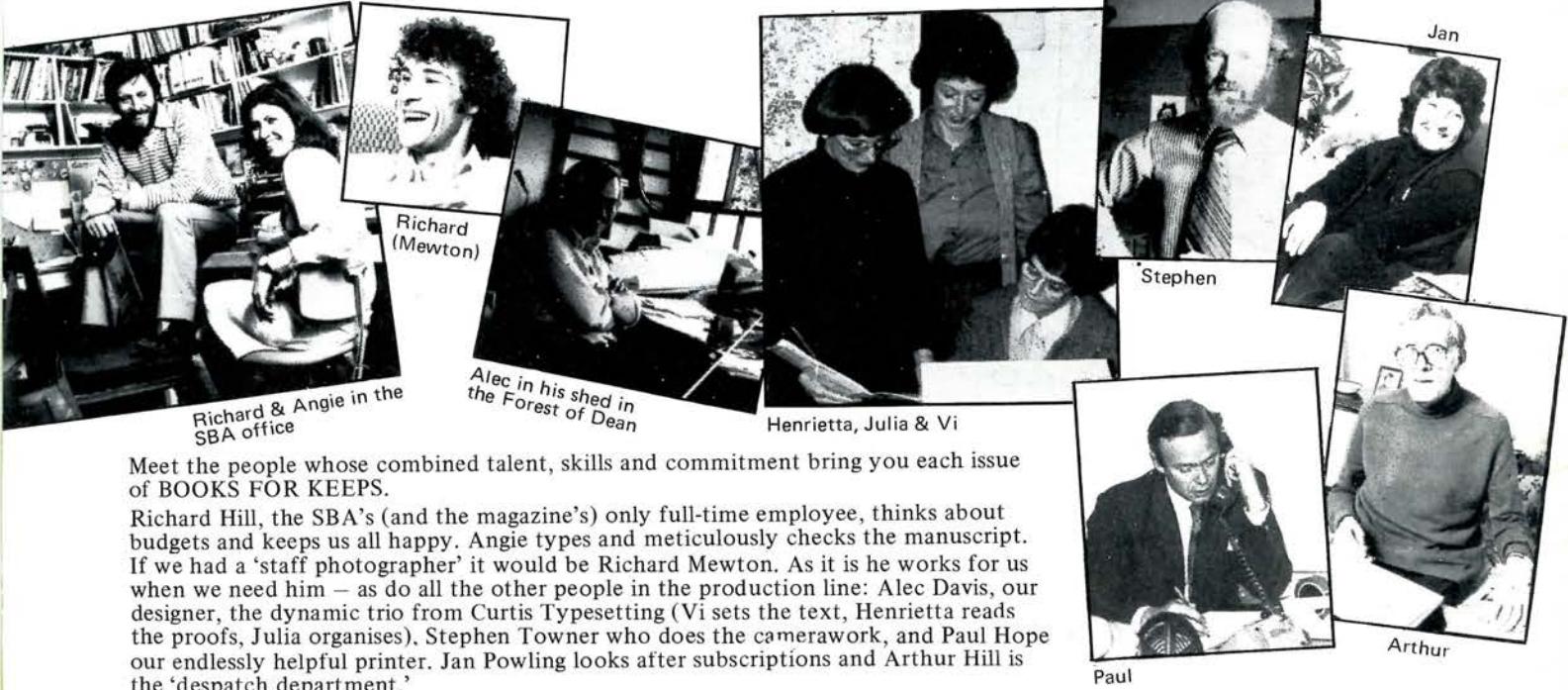
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SEASON'S GREETINGS FROM THE *Books for Keeps* TEAM!



Meet the people whose combined talent, skills and commitment bring you each issue of BOOKS FOR KEEPS.

Richard Hill, the SBA's (and the magazine's) only full-time employee, thinks about budgets and keeps us all happy. Angie types and meticulously checks the manuscript. If we had a 'staff photographer' it would be Richard Mewton. As it is he works for us when we need him — as do all the other people in the production line: Alec Davis, our designer, the dynamic trio from Curtis Typesetting (Vi sets the text, Henrietta reads the proofs, Julia organises), Stephen Towner who does the camerawork, and Paul Hope our endlessly helpful printer. Jan Powling looks after subscriptions and Arthur Hill is the 'despatch department.'

My thanks to all of them. You'll find me, as usual, on the next page. —Ed.

EDITOR'S PAGE



This Books for Keeps is something different. Tucked in alongside lots of information about books to help you through the festive season and beyond are some rather special features. Since Books for Keeps started we've introduced you to lots of people from the children's book world. For this issue some of our favourite authors and illustrators have given us contributions as presents to you, our readers.

Robert Crowther tells you how to make a Christmas pop-up; Jane Walmsley has designed an original, Happy Christmas miniature book for you to make; Jan Needle writes about a children's classic which haunts him; and Willie Rushton offers a small slice of autobiography. Our thanks to all of them for the pleasure their work has given us as well as for their presents.

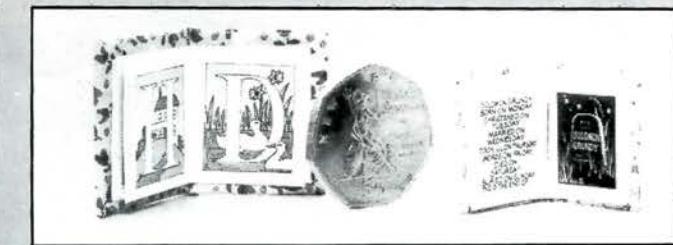
On Your Broomstick

We had quite a different present a while back from Willie Rushton — or at least from his publishers, Golden Acorn. Richard Hill and I were having a high-powered editorial meeting, round my kitchen table, when the doorbell rang (well, it croaked actually, it hasn't been feeling too well lately). Outside our front door (it's yellow for those of you who like to visualise in colour) stood a man from Securicor with a very long thin package. Most of the parcels that arrive at our house are square or rectangular (book-shaped in fact) so I thought it must be for next door. But no. Books for Keeps it said on the label. So I signed nineteen pieces of paper, gave them my fingerprints and three signed photographs, and the man handed it over. Back in the kitchen Richard and I looked at it. A bomb? Did we have that many enemies? We decided to risk it. Fighting our way through tape, unwinding yards of thick shiny brown paper (it was a very high quality wrapping job) we finally revealed — a broomstick. Was someone trying to tell us something — 'On your broomstick, Books for Keeps!' But wait. Wrapped around the handle and tied with yellow ribbon was a message on parchment, with a seal and red ribbon. It was a letter from Noragunge — nice witch — inviting us to meet her and Willie Rushton and hear some tales of her Incredible Cottage.

Richard went by car. I kept the broom. It doesn't fly too well but it's doing a grand job sweeping up the leaves in the back yard. Thanks Noragunge. But what an elaborate piece of publicity.

Marketing books . . . and bookshops

Perhaps it's because we are researching our second article in 'The World of Children's Books' series but we've been very conscious lately of different approaches to publicising and marketing books. One ploy which seems a little odd to the naive (like us) is the tendency to promote still further books which have already had a lot of publicity and look like being good sellers without much help from anyone. This year's IBIS Books for Christmas guide (2 million copies in circulation) for instance includes among its twenty specially featured titles the little-known *Guinness Book of Records*. Also up there is Jill Barklem's *The Big Book of Brambly Hedge*, another facet of marketing: producing more of the successful same (or publisher's overkill). This time they may have slipped up. The big format (16" x 12") with its hugely enlarged pictures completely destroys the charm of the originals.



If you would like to own (or give away) one of Jane Walmsley's irresistible miniature books, see details of our SPECIAL OFFER on page 21.

which owed much to their very smallness. And there's the problem of where to keep it. It can't stand up (too floppy and no shelf big enough) and lying down it gets covered up, trodden on, creased or generally moved irritably from surface to surface (at least that was its fate in several test households).

Sharpening up to the need for marketing Bookshops as the place to go for books is the Booksellers Association. Research, they tell us, has shown that much of the public (66% of the population actually) are intimidated by Bookshops; they feel more at home in other stores. (Surprise, surprise!) So what is the marketing team going to do about it? Well, their main suggestion for bringing people in and making them feel more welcome is 'eye-catching displays'. Now who's being naive? Can they seriously believe that a bit of display is going to do anything about such deep-rooted distrust and cultural alienation? Think again lads — it's more complex than that. You'll have to start farther down the line. Perhaps by persuading more Bookshops to support and join with the school bookshop movement. If you can't get them to come to you, there is another alternative. And kids in school are the customers of the future.

Christmas presents no problem

Part of the 34% unimimidated by Bookshops (though sometimes unimpressed by their service) is me. I shall be in even more than usual in the coming weeks because we always give books for Christmas. Our friends, adults and children, are used to it now. It's a sort of institution. Establishing such a predictable pattern has enormous advantages. For starters you only have to visit one sort of shop — no more fighting your way from toy shop (what sort of lego did they say she wanted?) to Marks and Spencer (well, socks are always useful) via all those other places that never have what you're looking for in the right size, shape, colour or quantity. Then books are so beautifully easy to wrap up.

More fundamentally, in the midst of the madness of conspicuous consumption, I'm reassured by the thought that books are such good value for money. Compare the cost per hour of reading a novel with going to the cinema or the theatre. Even a £5 novel wins hands down — and that's if you read it only once. They are also, usually, durable — no workings to go wrong, no crunch of expensive plastic to follow a careless backward step on Boxing Day.

The reception of our presents varies. In some cases book and reader vanish reappearing protesting only for annoying interruptions like Christmas dinner; in others books are set aside with a resigned shrug or a casual glance. These, we're told, have often come into their own only months later when competing

attractions have paled or vanished. The trick is to get the right match between book and child. A difficult but endlessly intriguing challenge. And if you succeed and that success becomes part of a growing love for books and reading, what better present could you give anyone?

Two new novels

To give you something of the flavour of what's around we invited five regular contributors to BfK to join me in making a personal choice of books to give this Christmas. Two of them, Chris Powling and Steve Bowles, have new books out themselves. Chris's third book, *The Mustang Machine* (Abelard, 0 200 72764 8, £5.25), introduces into a recognisably urban setting a single element of fantasy: a superbike, the best bike in the universe, that behaves like an unbroken horse and rides up walls, across roofs, even upside down. Whoever catches it and 'brands' it is its master. By page 18 Chris Powling has you totally believing in the bike and very involved in the struggle that's developing between the gang — Becca, Tim, Sharon, Leroy and Georgie, all juniors — and Dennis Doggerty — the local bully newly graduated to the comprehensive — and his mob. (Who dares call him Dennis Doggerty to his face? Becca does.) Large questions about bravery, leadership and competition underlie this story. But its surface is an exciting, fast-moving, frequently funny adventure with an amazingly imaginative climax — a twentieth-century challenge by ordeals.

Steve's book *Jamie* (Gollancz, 0 575 03015 1, £4.95) on the other hand is about nothing more unusual than the day to day life of its twelve-year-old hero. What is remarkable is Steve's skill in getting this onto the page. I haven't read anything which more successfully captures the everyday encounters of 'ordinary' kids — their families, their friendships, their talk. It recognises too that 'everyday life' is a complicated mixture of drama, suspense, tragedy, comedy and pathos. Jamie is a survivor and he should be greeted with relief and recognition by kids all over the country. I just hope that the irrelevant but predictable protests about 'bad language' which will no doubt arise will not stop this book from getting through to those who will enjoy it most.

Robin recommends

When you are reading our 'Books for Christmas' feature please remember that it was compiled from the books available to us at that time (September). We were not able to see some titles which are published this month. As a stop-press footnote, Robin Hill (16 months) would like to recommend *Spot's First Walk*, Eric Hill,



Heinemann, 0 434 94289 8, £3.95, which looks like being as big a success as last year's *Where's Spot?* Also a big hit with Robin just now are the Methuen Chatterbooks — small square books with colour photograph illustrations and simple storylines by Leila Berg and John Walmsley, Camilla Jessel, and Helen Piers (£1.25 each).



Kate Triggs and Robin Hill exploring *Spot's First Walk*.

For all my neighbours

Thus runs the dedication to Tomie de Paola's lovely picture book version of *The Night Before Christmas*. In the book you'll find it at the foot of the illustration we've particularly chosen to put on our cover for this Christmas issue. We are very grateful to OUP for helping us in this. The grave formality of the family from the American 1840's suggests a serenity so often missing from Christmas. Tomie de Paola used his own home in a small New Hampshire village as a model for the setting and the varied designs of borders which frame the pictures are based on the patterns from New England patchwork quilts, many of which he owns. The whole book glows and we couldn't think of a better way to start an issue we'd like to dedicate

For all our readers

Merry Christmas

Pot

BOOKS FOR CHRISTMAS

Six pages of books
for giving chosen
by some of our
regular reviewers
and contributors

Chris Powling picks six sumptuous picture books across the age range.



Chris Powling is head of an ILEA primary school, has just had his third book published and still finds time to read books and write about them. He lives in London with his wife, Jan (who helps keep the SBA running smoothly), and their two daughters, Kate and Elly. Chris has just joined our panel of regular reviewers.

Books for Christmas should be a bit like Christmas fare — rich, special and guaranteed to repeat on you for some while afterwards. I've opted for six picture books sumptuous enough for the most gourmet taste. And since Christmas is nothing if not inclusive, it's a choice that spans the age-range too . . .

Grandmother's Tales, story and pictures by Celia Berridge, André Deutsch, 0 233 97357 5, £4.95

Fans of Celia Berridge will recognise her formula at once: the tried-and-true revamped into something fresh and oddly original. In this case she offers a visiting Grandma who tells stories that outclass treats or even extra pocket-money . . . about a bully on a broomstick, about a china dog who survives burial alongside a dead goldfish, about a dynamic duo (Jack plus Mum) who get rich quick by climbing down a beanstalk. The starting-point, as always, is once upon *our* time — we get a single-parent family, a mixed-race hero, a backstreet witch and a gang of goblins who look uncannily like the sort of nastiness the family Hoover is supposed to beat as it sweeps as it cleans. All are presented without fuss or falsity. The words are brisk, the pictures chunkily deft in the familiar Berridge manner. 'If you found lots and lots of treasure, what would *you* do?' Grandma asks at the end. Any sensible five or six-year-old would instantly commission umpteen books like this.

They Came from Aargh!, 0 416 05840 X

The Great Fruit Gum Robbery, 0 416 05790 X

Russell Hoban and Colin McNaughton, Methuen/Walker, £2.95 each

The Hoban/McNaughton team also reaches out to Everychild. Here the words and pictures are pitched at Infants old enough to savour tongue-in-cheek. *Aargh!* is a sci-fi spoof in which — thanks to the high technology provided by saucepans, upside-down colanders and bits of old anglepoise lamp — we explore the perilous terrain of the mod-con kitchen, habitat of the dreaded mummosaurus. In a similar vein, *Robbery* is a caper-spoof which draws its essential equipment from the broom cupboard and the dressing-up box. These are needed to kit out a king of the desert, a mermaid queen and a deep-sea diver, all bent on vengeance after baby Turpin's daring fruit-gum heist. In both books Russell Hoban mimics superbly the

'The next morning he came upon a castle in the middle of a wood. It was the most magnificent castle Gawain had ever seen.'

One of Juan Wijngaard's breathtaking colour plates from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Methuen/Walker.

voice of kids-at-play, while the look of them is niftily caught in Colin McNaughton's superstrip illustrations. They're the ideal launching-pad for youngsters on their way to Asterix and beyond . . .

Trick a Tracker, Michael Foreman, Victor Gollancz, 0 575 02975 7, £3.95

. . . or on their way to Michael Foreman, perhaps. He's not always the safest of bets for youngsters, but here he judges his audience perfectly: seven-year-olds, actual and honorary, who have an ear for a witty story-line and an eye for a stylish image. The front-cover says it all — a skateboarding elephant poised above a couple of slack-jawed paleolithic spear-carriers. No one can blame them for getting in a panic since, amongst other diversions, they've already been got at by kangaroos who sweep as they hop, giraffes who wear sneakers and pelicans who plonk down arrows pointing in the wrong direction. And that's just for starters. As the animals develop a taste for locomotion, they roller-coast their way through an alternative pre-history that takes account of Stonehenge, the pyramids, Aku-Aku and the Aztecs. Never has Michael Foreman been so outrageous or so funny. He's never drawn better either — his weirdly distinctive caricaturing sets off his droll text perfectly. By the time he brings us up-to-date with a final bitter-sweet joke, we swallow his environmentalist moral hard-edge, soft-focus and all. If there's a better picture-book published this year, I'll eat a jumbo-size skateboard.



Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Selina Hastings and Juan Wijngaard, Methuen/Walker, 0 416 05860 4, £3.95

This book almost had me reaching for the pepper and salt. It's not for the purist, let me say, who will refer us to the middle-English masterpiece, or, at the very least, to Brian Stone's line-by-line verse translation for Penguin. But how well Selina Hastings suggests both the prowess and the courtesie of the original . . . along with its marvellous jewel-like stateliness. You don't have to go along with every cut and thrust of her version to welcome it as a handsome introduction, for junior-age children, to one of the two best tales in the language. And has it ever been better illustrated? Juan Wijngaard's colour-plates are breathtaking — a blend of the decorative and the decorous that spans six centuries and makes the printed page feel as rich and dense as a tapestry. Perhaps Hastings and Wijngaard will now turn their attention to Chaucer's *Pardoners Tale*. That's the other one, of course.

Fabulous Beasts, Monika Beisner and Alison Lurie, Jonathan Cape, 0 224 01971 6, £3.95

Like *Gawain* this is less a picture book than a book-with-pictures. Each double-spread reminded me of the next exhibit in a gallery — with an adjacent blow-up of the relevant catalogue-entry lest I got lost amongst the Unicorns and Gulgols and Dragons and Salamanders. If the format sounds

pedestrian, don't believe it. Every aspect of the book is a delight owing partly to the deadpan elegance of Alison Lurie's writing and partly to Monika Beisner's portraits, enamelled on the surface, intricately detailed beneath. As with their previous venture *The Heavenly Zoo* it's the sort of book that gets coffee-tables a good name and I don't say this from fear that they'll set their Mimick Dog on me, a creature that will 'tag after you, mocking your walk, gestures and conversation in such a comic manner that no one who sees it will be able to help laughing.' I'd rather face a Gryphon any day. Age level? Eight to eighty.

The Highwayman, Alfred Noyes and Charles Keeping, Oxford, 0 19 279748 4, £4.50

Another book able to take on all-comers. Alfred Noyes' poem was included last year in Kaye Webb's anthology *I Like This Poem* and this version confirms that her young selectors knew a good thing when they saw it. The verse has enough rum-tum splendour to bring out the actor-manager in all of us — writing that's easy to patronise and difficult to emulate. Try matching the swash and buckle of this line, for example: 'And he lay in his blood on the highway, with the bunch of lace at his throat.'

Mere rhetoric? You bet — and it grabs you every time. So do Charles Keeping's drawings which have such panache they give black-and-white the impact of full-colour ... and that, come to think of it, is just what successful rhetoric does. Altogether this is the best collaboration of versifier and image-maker since the Coleridge-cum-Peake *Ancient Mariner*. Well, almost. Certainly enough to make me ponder on the best way of cooking a jumbo-size skateboard.

Happy Christmas ... burp.

Tony Bradman puts poetry top of his list



Tony Bradman is a journalist. In his spare time he specialises in unpublished poems, unfinished novels and unending conversation. He and his wife Sally have two daughters, Emma and Helen, whose arrival started Tony off on children's books.

Photo by Anne Baum

Seeing as it's Christmas I might as well come out of the closet at last and admit to being a poetry freak. And this year I'm out to get the rest of you. To do it I'm using

Strictly Private, ed. Roger McGough, Kestrel, 0 7226 5694 7, £4.95

Enough said, seeing as the first edition's sold out and it's gone to a second. Some think that Roger McGough should go to gaol immediately, without collecting the £200, because there's a real risk that he could spread this minority madness to the masses. I'd buy this book for any kid over 12 who's been immune so far, along with

Gangsters, Ghosts and Dragonflies, ed. Brian Patten, Allen & Unwin, 0 04 821053 6, £6.95

Any normal child who's presented with poems by Adrian Mitchell, the ubiquitous McGough, Ted Hughes, Ivor Cutler and — gasp! — John Lennon will probably be instantly corrupted. Isn't the government doing anything about this shocking depravity? I am, hopeless corrupter of our nation's youth that I am. Why, I've even been known to recommend the work of that nefarious pair Mike Rosen and Quentin Blake, whose *You Can't Catch Me*, André Deutsch, 0 233 97345 1, £4.95, can now be bought together with the paperback of *Wouldn't You Like to Know* (Puffin). What with the appearance of Mick Gowar's *Swings and Roundabouts* (Collins), Kit Wright's *Hot Dog and Other Poems* (Kestrel) and various others, I think there's no hope for our nation's youth. Anyway, before the Royal Society for the Prevention of Verse comes to take me away, I'll recommend a few more respectable books I'd be willing to be seen reading on a bus, like

Mouldy's Orphan, Gillian Avery, Puffin, 0 14 03 1269 2, 75p

I love it, but then I'm a right old softy, and this touching (it really is) tale of a Victorian Child's 'adoption' of an orphan is one I'd love to introduce an eight or nine-year-old to. For slightly older kids, and worth every penny of its price is

Another Fine Mess, Jan Needle, André Deutsch, 0 233 97370 2, £4.95

the follow-up to *The Size Spies* (Fontana Lions). It's also a good excuse to say that I think Jan Needle's a superb writer, and I

What the baby sees:
'He sees his father
sleeping
In the big brass
bed,
And his mother
too,
With a hairnet
on her head.'
Janet Ahlberg's
1940s period
illustration
from *Peepo*.

hope someone gives me a complete set of his books for Christmas, or his brain. I think I'd rather have the latter.

It's been a great year for picture books. I'd buy

Peepo!, Janet and Allan Ahlberg, Kestrel, 0 7226 5707 2, £4.50

for anybody. Allan's rhyming text, Janet's beautiful 1940s period illustrations and the simple device of a hole in a page to play Peepo! through combine to make a superbly warm and friendly experience. A classic, and a great way to round off a great Ahlberg year — buy

Funnybones, Heinemann, 0 434 92503 9, £3.95, and

Each Peach Pear Plum, Picture Lions, 0 00 661678 X, 85p

Another classic in the making is Jan Ormerod's wordless picture book

Sunshine, Kestrel, 0 7226 5736 6, £3.95

The finely drawn illustrations of a little girl's morning go down a bomb with pre-schoolers. Kestrel are following up next year with *Moonlight* (the same girl going to bed), and next year I'll be buying the two as one present for somebody (probably me).

On a slightly heavier note — and for slightly older (and heavier?) children, i.e. up to eight, I'd go for

Hansel and Gretel, illustrated by Anthony Browne, Julia MacRae, 0 86203 042 0, £4.95

Oh no, I can hear you saying, not another Hansel and Gretel (there are another two out for Christmas)! Well this isn't just another Hansel and Gretel. It's the same



story, but Anthony Browne sets the illustrations foursquare in a contemporary-but-not-quite context. The pictures are sombre, and therefore work well with what is, after all, a very sombre story. But for those who like their experiences to taste sharp, even in picture books, this is a genuinely valuable updating. I'd be careful about which child I bought this one for; but for the right child it could be a book in a million.

A book I'd buy any child is

Frank and Polly Muir's Big Dipper, Heinemann, 0 434 95170 6, £5.95

Remember the annuals of your childhood? Giant compendia of all sorts of (mostly appalling) stories and pictures, read in an hour, consigned to oblivion by Boxing Day? Well, Frank Muir's resurrected it, and as with the promised second coming, this one's got the lot and more staying power. Specially commissioned material from all sorts of minor names like Harry Secombe, Bill Tidy, Spike Milligan, Quentin Blake and John Yeoman, Colin McNaughton and a cast of thousands make this little number a real bargain.

Finally, I've got to admit to my other perversion; historical fiction, that minority taste which still refuses to lie down and die. Good to see that Rosemary Sutcliff is still on form with *Frontier Wolf* (OUP) and *The Sword and the Circle* and *The Road to Camlann* (both Bodley Head), and also that Puffin are still keeping faith by re-issuing *The Lantern Bearers* this year. I'd buy the lot for any child I could tear away from *Swap Shop* long enough to get them to read them. You can't beat a good story with a beginning and a middle and an end. Which is where I've come to, so Merry Christmas and a reading new year.

Cathy Lister fits books to people



Cathy Lister is an Australian who's been living in this country for 16 years. A speech therapist turned teacher, she now works in a middle school in Staffordshire and is responsible for English and Language on the curriculum. She is married to Rupert and they have two children, Clare and Simon.

Whatever else awaited me under the Christmas tree, as a child, there was always a book. My mother chose those books for myself and seven brothers and sisters with great care and, I am sure, found great pleasure in the task. It was a task that was perhaps easier in the fifties as she would not have been as overwhelmed by the sheer number of books published for children each year. Choosing for 1981, the never ending flow from the publishers adds to the pleasure but also to the difficulty of the task.

What to buy is the problem faced by the child in

On Market Street, Anita and Arnold Lobel, Benn, 0 510 00118 1, £3.95

an intriguing alphabet book with an extravagant character garbed in goodies to match each letter of the alphabet from apples to zippers. For a child who delights in checking detail and is ready to match words to pictures this should be an absorbing gift. Among the twenty-six stall holders are an elegantly gloved lady, a zany dancing girl in a costume of lollipops, and a well and truly zipped up gent with twirling moustache. The lack of instant action may cause adults to feel this is not an exciting book but I feel it is one that a child will pore over for many hours and recall many years later.

Christmas is a time for books to keep and two that I would choose to give children of seven-plus, to be shared and treasured by the family, are newly illustrated versions of Oscar Wilde stories:

The Happy Prince, ill. Jean Claverie, Oxford, 0 19 279750 6, £4.95

The illustrations fit exactly the period in which Wilde wrote and perfectly reflect the loneliness and love of which he tells.

and

The Nightingale and the Rose, ill. Michael Foreman and Friere Wright, Kaye and Ward, 0 7182 1259 2, £3.75

This is a harsher, more tragic story than the previous one and the translucent shades of blue pervading each illustration are an expression of the tragedy of unrequited love. There is not the lasting joy of the Happy Prince but a fragile beauty in the illustrations which makes it a perfect partner.

Tony Ross's perceptive wit and audacity in rewriting traditional folk and fairy tales is in sharp contrast to the evident acceptability of Wilde's 'fine' writing. In particular his rakish drawings must cause any child already familiar with the traditional version of one of his texts to smile.

Little Red Riding Hood, Puffin, 0 14 050 314 5, 80p

has the heroine toppling downhill on a bicycle. I shall not resist the temptation to slip this one into a stocking.



Warton and Morton, two endearing, home-loving brother toads.

Sadness and fear are very much elements in a story by a new author.

Goodnight Mister Tom, Michelle Magorian, Kestrel, 0 7226 5701 3, £5.50

tells of a small, timid boy evacuated to the country and the trust that grows between him and a lonely old man. It is a lengthy story and at times runs away with itself but having observed children share and discuss this book at length and with evident enjoyment I feel it will find a wide audience. There is much pain for the reader in this tale of a child brought up by a mother so mad that she has taught him that happiness is a sin. There is also opportunity to laugh at the antics of fellow evacuee, Zac, and to smile as Willie's happiness is released. It is not a book that every child will want to tackle but a thoughtful story for the child of twelve or more who enjoys reading about people and relationships but rejects stories of everyday modern life for something a little more profound. My son has thought and re-thought **Goodnight Mister Tom**. His own copy will be under the tree.

My fourteen-year-old daughter is an avid reader of any and everything from the cornflakes' packet to Charlotte Bronte! somewhere in between she has recently read and enjoyed K.M. Peyton's **Flambards** series (Puffin). She is delighted that the set is now complete with

Flambards Divided, Oxford, 0 19 271452 X, £5.95

I suspect that fans will find it a sad and frustrating book as the reality of Christina's marriage to Dick is unfolded and she eventually remarries the reckless Mark Russell. There is something woolly but satisfying about K.M. Peyton's combination of romance and historical background. Perhaps I should await the paperback edition but the spirit of Christmas persuades me to complete this series with the hardback edition as a much wanted gift.

I shall assuage my guilt at such extravagance by buying another hardback with a horsey theme but one which should help to make a positive bridge between child and adult reading.

The Dark Horse, Rumer Godden, Macmillan, 0 333 32183 9, £4.95

is essentially a true story of a failed race horse imported to India and to renewed success. It is also the story of British people who risk their reputations through acknowledging the Eurasian community in Calcutta. In the background, quietly influencing the story, are the love and hardship of an order of nuns, working for the oldest and poorest of Calcutta's people. It is an absorbing story of relationships between men and animals, made intriguing by the truth that lies behind it.

Roll on Christmas!



Jack the swineherd hands over the injured green man to the lord of the green people in 'The Squirrel Wife' by Philippa Pearce. One of Ann Strugnell's enticing black and white illustrations for **The Faber Book of Modern Fairy Tales**.

BOOKS FOR
CHRISTMAS

David Bennett combines sure-fire standards with new discoveries



David Bennett, an ex-librarian, is Head of English in a Nottinghamshire secondary school and a tireless promoter of books and school bookshops. Aside from that he likes to read, dig the garden and go to quiet places with his wife, two sons and the dog.

Compiling my own Christmas present booklist comes very easy to me; compiling one for others is far more difficult. However, I do have certain rules of thumb. For instance, any child old enough to focus gets Raymond Briggs' *Father Christmas*, Pat Hutchins' *Rosie's Walk*, Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*, The Ahlbergs' *Each Peach Pear Plum* or Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, all of which, in my opinion, ought to be available to every household through vouchers in the back of Family Allowance books. Since successive Governments haven't woken up to this fact I do my bit, sometimes benignly bestowing the whole lot on a single, very special child.

This year I'm tempted to break out and give *Queen Yesno*, Mary Tozer, World's Work, 0 437 79422 9, £3.95

I found it visually very appealing, after the style of Caldecott and brimming with amusing detail, plus a salutary tale of a Queen who changes her mind to the exasperation of all around her, who are reduced to engage the services of the witch Isabella Bella and her six sisters to see if they can effect a cure for the lady's annoying indecision.

I shall buy

Georgie and the Buried Treasure, Robert Bright, World's Work, 0 437 28815 3, £3.50

for my own five-year-old Georgie, who sees it as a personal accolade every time his name appears in print and, incidentally, loves Bright's little ghost, portrayed in those curious black and white illustrations. This time Georgie and his friends are trying to stop their neighbour, Mr Sneed, from digging up and ruining the entire neighbourhood in his hunt for treasure. Luckily they also manage to trick him into sinking a much-needed well whilst he's about it.

Children that can focus and read get *The Church Mouse* by Graham Oakley, Russell Hoban and Quentin Blake's *Captain Najork*, Florence Parry Heide's *The Shrinking of Treehorn*, (when I can catch it in print) or *Flat Stanley* by Jeff Brown. Once again, they seem like standard equipment for a happy and healthy young life, alongside a good selection of folk and fairy stories.

Out of this year's abundant crop

Moira Kemp's *Cinderella*, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 10636 2, £3.95

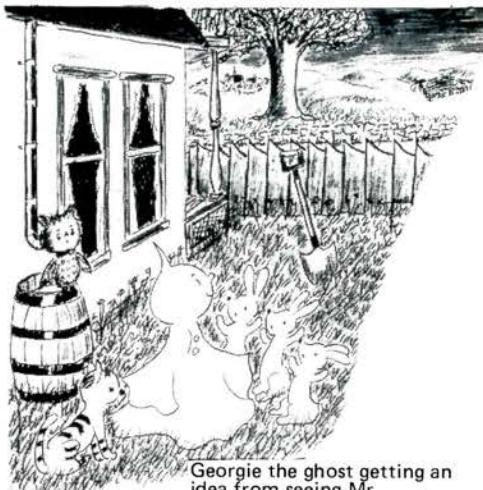
has caught my eye. The exquisite, medieval-looking, illustrations convey all the sinister cruelty of The Grimm Brothers' version, upon which it is based. The pumpkin and white rats of popular panto have been replaced by a magically generous hazel tree

and protective white bird, which might confuse some children, but, on the other hand, could prove a welcome twist to others, who feel a bit jaded by the oft-repeated, more usual version. There are shades of direct cruelty which could upset sensitive types, but which, after all, is the essence of traditional fairy tales.

Number one eight-year-old, son, who no longer believes that he is the prototype for Sendak's Max, is stuck on *Wide Range Readers Green Book II*, only because his Junior School is dedicated to their reading scheme and offers him nothing else. He gratefully casts his colour-coded reader down and reaches for *Asterix*, *Tintin*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Mrs Pepperpot* when he gets home. I shall certainly load his stocking with a couple of the former and add

The Great Ice-Cream Crime, Hazel Townson, Andersen 0 86264 005 9, £2.95

Embryo magician Lenny finds a sack of cash which leads him and his pal Jake into a kidnapping and possibly treasonable tangle involving no less a personage than Princess Anne, plus two ice-cream vendors! This fast, well-illustrated tale should hold the attention of most rumbustious boys and make a good middle-distance bridge between short stories and full-length tales.



Georgie the ghost getting an idea from seeing Mr Whittaker's spade in *Georgie and the Buried Treasure*.

Maggie Gumption Flies High, Margaret Stuart Barry, Hutchinson, 0 09 143450 5, £3.50

is a useful new collection of stories which should prove successful, especially with girls. Here zany Maggie and her attic friends Polly and Pinky Dars carry on their tit-for-tat exploits, scoring points off each other in a mildly engaging and amusing way, which no doubt will cater for that fascination which many imaginative children have for the private lives of their toys.

Children's own lives should be brimming with a sense of magic for as long as possible in my estimation and there's no better time than Christmas for ladling out great puddin' basins full of the stuff. Nine, ten and eleven-year-olds will come in for two types of magic from me this year.

A wary look came into Constable Barlow's eye. He'd had trouble with young lads like this before. From *The Great Ice Cream Crime*.



The Kettlewitch, Maureen Osborne, Heinemann, 0 434 95584 1, £4.95

offers the Witches and Boggarts kind, very humorous and fast moving, with Cathy and Mike chasing around London and the Eastern Counties after their younger rather sulky sister Emily, who has gone off with the Green Witch of Greenwich, the Wool Witch of Woolwich, the Old Witch of Aldwich and the Dull Witch of Dulwich. They are assisted along the way by a group of highly suspect Weighing Machines, who are in fact Boggarts bewitched by The Evil Green Witch when they tried to steal her green glass eye, the remaining vestige of her magic powers. I'm sure it would serialise well for bedtime story sessions or for the Junior school classroom in the latter years.

My second choice is *Ann Phillips' The Multiplying Glass*, Oxford, 0 19 271455 4, £5.95

where the magic is a more salutary experience. When the wing mirror presents Elizabeth with her two other selves, Liz the worse and Lisa the better, she sees at first only the exciting possibilities of her discovery. However, when Liz gains control of the glass and incarcerates Elizabeth in a disused grotto, then she comes to realise those unavoidable aspects of her own character that she finds hardest to face. The complicated powers of the glass take some sorting out but once mastered make for a very rewarding and entertaining read for early secondary readers.

Unfortunately the magic doesn't remain with most youngsters for ever and realism intrudes more and more so that many teenagers soon prefer non-fiction to fiction.

You Never Knew Her As I Did, Mollie Hunter, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 10643 5, £5.25

is a very acceptable blend of both. Mary Queen of Scots' imprisonment in Lochleven Castle is told in historically correct terms but as seen through the eyes of the illegitimate son of the Douglas household, Will, who falls under the spell of that charismatic Queen and is instrumental to her escape plans, benefiting the Lady no doubt, put profiting the Knave equally, who finds a raison d'être far exceeding that of the household bastard, midway between Lord and Serf and in neither camp of both. Mollie Hunter's clear, fast-moving prose style and her astute portrayal of roguish Will makes this a highly acceptable novel that both instructs and gives flight to the imagination. I reckon terms of History lessons should be based on such stuff!!

Happy Christmas.

Steve Bowles picks paperbacks for teachers



Steve Bowles was until recently a secondary English teacher, and co-producer of *Reviewsheet* until it ceased publication. He is now writing full-time, and his third book has just been published. Steve lives in Essex.

As a child, I was always particularly disappointed if someone gave me a book as a present and, although as a callow youth I went through my concerned-uncle phase, inflicting paperbacks on my brothers' and sisters' numerous brood, I've grown beyond that now. Now I don't give them anything.

My recommendations, therefore, are for adults. More specifically, for teachers. They are all books which I think kids will enjoy but, at Christmas, I would only give them to the exceptionally bookish. And to teachers. (Both ways, I've a nice let-out because the rest of my family is quite normal. More or less.)

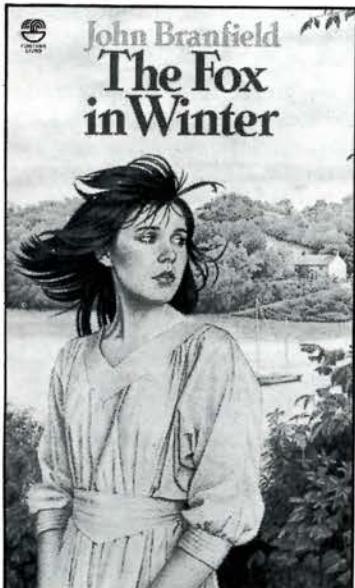
Secondary English Departments should club together and buy Robert Leeson's *Grange Hill* books for the Headmaster. Now that Lions have tastefully gift-boxed them, they'll look nice amongst his Folio-Society-bound wooden blocks and he'll appreciate them when he needs to impress one of those trendy HMs who drop in from time to time.

Any colleague who reveres Naughton's hoary old *Goalkeeper's Revenge* must be given a copy of

Chris Powling's **Daredevils or Scaredycats**, Lions, 0 00 671897 3, 95p

to bring them into the twentieth century. Admittedly, the opening stories lean a little towards the old school but, at its best — *Mad Eric, Thingy* — this book could do wonders for language work at top junior/lower secondary level.

Some schools will have a member of staff who deserves something a bit special and, for them



Drawing by Tony Ross to illustrate 'Moths' from *The Magnet Book of Strange Tales*.

Fontana Lion's attractive new cover for the paperback edition of **Daredevils or Scaredycats**.

John Branfield's **The Fox in Winter**, Lions, 0 00 671932 5, £1.00

is the book. This is the touching story of a teenage girl's relationship with an old man she meets through her district-nurse mother and one of this year's more hopeful signs was to see it listed as a runner-up for the Carnegie alongside Jan Needle's *A Sense of Shame* (Deutsch). It's true that Dickinson's *City of Gold* eventually topped the heap but at least the whole Carnegie business showed signs of returning to sanity after last year's descent into *Tulku*.

Another secondary title that you might buy is

Tex, S.E. Hinton, Lions, 0 00 671763 2, 95p

especially if you work in a department that's a little slow on the uptake. A copy for everybody — with a specially-prepared document inside the Head of Department's copy to explain how it might profitably be used in a CSE course. If you are the H.o.D., then you'll need to prepare several copies of the document, persuasively written, to show that *Joby* and *Of Mice and Men* aren't the last word in teenage fiction.

As a small gift for teachers who're enlightened enough to run a wide-ranging class library at top junior/lower secondary level, there's

The Magnet Book of Strange Tales, ed. Jean Russell, 0 416 21190 9, £1.00

This might be doubly welcomed because — if they flick through it before dropping it into the book box — they might find three or four useful read-alouds to spice up their lessons. Class library users will no doubt grab it for its cover and then be further amazed to find it's a book of supernatural stories that they can actually read. And if you can rise to two

BOOKS FOR CHRISTMAS

DAREDEVILS OR SCAREDYCATS

CHRIS POWLING



paperbacks, there's another child-orientated ghost book compiled by Barbara Ireson,

Spooky Stories 3, Carousel, 0 552 52140 X, 85p

though I should point out — just in case it's one of your performance pieces for virtuoso public display — that this has Philippa Pearce's *Shadow Cage* alongside the obligatory Palmer/Lloyd and Joan Aiken.

The new Lions catalogue (got yours yet?) informs me that there's been a crafty reprint of the John Yeoman/Quentin Blake comic fantasy

The Boy Who Sprouted Antlers, 0 00 671116 2, 85p

which I thought had disappeared for good. If you've got into kids' books since this was last in the shops, then don't just leave it to Santa, make sure someone buys you this for the 25th. If they insist that you have tooth-rotters or after-shave, then buy one for yourself.

Lastly, in case you hadn't noticed, Hippo have brought out

Love You, Hate You, Just Don't Know, ed. Josie Karavasil, 0 590 70079 0, 90p

This isn't, as you might think from the title, about teaching — it's a collection of stories for teenagers. Marion Rachel Stewart's *A Mother's Fondness* is getting to be fairly well-known amongst English teachers now — I've even seen it in a course book! — but anyone who hasn't come across it yet will thank you for a copy of this book. There are a couple of others that teachers will enjoy too (Westall, Jan Mark) and even more that kids will approve. Another Hippo cover, unfortunately, but who looks at the wrapping when it's Christmas? Happy humbugs!

Pat Triggs tries to find a perfect match



Pat Triggs teaches in the Department of Education at Bristol Polytechnic. She is a past chairman of the Federation of Children's Book Groups and is on the Board of the SBA. Pat is married and has three children.

If, like me, you've decided that books are the thing to give — the pleasure and challenge lies in finding just the right book for each person.

This year I'm buying two copies of

The Mother Goose Book, illustrated by Alice and Martin Provensen, Beaver, 0 600 20478 2, £1.95

now in large format paperback and encouraging prolific giving. One is for two friends with a new baby — and a reawakened interest in nursery rhymes. This collection is great for checking the half-remembered and extending the repertoire, and the illustrations with their muted colours, the layout and the design make this book a pleasure in itself. The other copy is going to a rising five who is enough at home with books to enjoy searching the crowded pages, 'reading' the pictures and sharing the experience with his parents.



Maggie, magpie,
Flutter and flee,
Turn up your tail
And good luck come to me.

A Pet for Mrs Arbuckle, Gwenda Smyth and Ann James, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 10543 9, £4.25

is for a six-year-old with a sense of humour and a ginger cat (although it will appeal to many outside this limited category). Mr Arbuckle 'didn't need much looking after and he watched the football on TV instead of listening.' So Mrs Arbuckle advertises for a pet and travels to eleven different countries to interview applicants for the job. With her goes the gingernut cat from down the street just to see she doesn't make a mistake. The repetitive pattern of the story, the jolly get-up-and-go Mrs A. who emerges from words and pictures and a very characterful cat combine to make this a very appealing and satisfactory book.

Also to a cat-loving family goes

The Patchwork Cat, Nicola Bayley and William Mayne, Cape, 0 224 01925 2, £3.95



This time the cat is Tabby and her moods and movements are beautifully caught in Nicola Bayley's detailed paintings. Mayne's story of Tabby's adventures saving her patchwork quilt from the rubbish is simply and vividly told. Children who grow familiar with the story will find it good for early reading.

Others going it alone, especially long-suffering brothers of obstreperous younger sisters, should be pleased to find

Stanley and Rhoda, Rosemary Wells, Picture Lions, 0 00 661807 3, 90p

in their stockings. As these three hilarious short stories unfold, the changing expressions on Stanley's furry bespectacled face tell a story all their own. It's Rosemary Wells' special talent to make an apparently simple book reverberate with meanings (*Noisy Nora* (Picture Lions) and Morris's *Disappearing Bag* (Puffin) are also well to the top of my stocking possibles list).

Words and pictures work together in an essential combination in

The Church Mice at Christmas, Graham Oakley, Macmillan Picturemags, 0 333 32483 8, £1.50

This is going to all those eleven-and-up-year-olds who have discovered (via Fungus the Bogeyman) that not all picture books are meant for infants. Arthur and Humphrey, leaders of mice, with the long-suffering but unenthusiastic co-operation of church cat Sampson, decide the mice must have a Christmas party. The words, and more especially the pictures, are packed with jokes and sly references for the alert and discerning. A very sophisticated seasonal offering.

Into the stockings of lots of eight-year-olds and any of my librarian friends who haven't met it yet goes

The Great Piratical Rumbustification and The Librarian and the Robbers, Margaret Mahy, pictures by Quentin Blake, Puffin, 0 14 03 1261 7, 80p

Beneath the sober exterior of many an ordinary grey-haired, distinguished lawyer or businessman lurks a pirate just longing for news of a stolen party. And Orpheus Clinker — with his wooden leg, eye patch, bottle of rum and spotted kerchief — who arrives to babysit for Alpha, Oliver and Omega. Terrapin looks just the man to steal one. So begins the first story. In the second, librarian Serena Laburnum proves more than a match for her robber kidnappers. Margaret Mahy's outrageous stories go with a wild and witty swing. Good for reading aloud or alone.

Girls mad about ballet or horses have been traditionally well-served with fiction to feed their passion (even if most of it is pulp). This year two excellently written and very readable novels have appeared with a new obsession, gymnastics, as a background.

The Fortunate Few, Tim Kennemore, Faber, 0 571 11732 5, £3.95

is the shorter (107 pages, biggish print). It's set in a future where gymnastics is big business and local teams of young girls attract the kind of support we associate now

with football. Success is all that matters and corruption and exploitation are rife. To survive you need to be tough and Jodie Bell (our anti-heroine), well on her way to her first million, is certainly that. Fast-moving, action-packed, it raises the same sort of issues as Cormier's *The Chocolate War* while managing to remain accessible to the less sophisticated reader. Quite a book.

Comeback, Marjorie Darke, Kestrel, 0 7226 5743 9, £5.50

The issues here are more personal, although the background (authentic and carefully researched as always with Marjorie Darke) is very definitely the world of gymnasts aspiring to the national team. One of these is Gail Knight, abandoned as a baby and brought up in Council Homes. The story of her bid for recognition is intertwined with her search for her real parents (Can old Emily Box who once knew a suffragette called Bella Knight who was descended from an African ex-slave called Midnight help her? Seasoned Darke readers will get the idea.) and the problems of being part of an emotional triangle with fellow gymnast, Heather, and attractive black Milton. Totally absorbing from page one.

Bright, thoughtful fifteen-year-old girls — like my daughter — currently being exposed to Juliet and Estella as types of O-Level females could well do with being introduced to some of the titles on the excellent Virago paperback list. As well as a wide range of possible female behaviour, they may well find bridges to adult novel reading. I'll be handing out

My Brilliant Career, Miles Franklin, Virago, 0 86068 193 9, £2.95

Sixteen-year-old Sybylla Melvyn tells the story of her life in the Australian outback of the 1890s and her refusal to conform to what is expected of a mere woman. Miles Franklin wrote the novel when she was only sixteen and it's full of life and energy. (There's a sequel *My Brilliant Career goes Bung* for those who get hooked.)

and

Invitation to the Waltz, Rosamond Lehmann, Virago, 0 86068 202 1, £2.95

Superficially the story of Olivia Curtis, just 17, going to her first big country house dance in 1920 may appear to have little to offer today's young women. But coping, behaving, reacting, responding, surviving in a new situation is fundamentally the same even sixty years on. The first disco may well be as significant a landmark in interior growth for a thoughtful teenager as Olivia's dance was for her. Comparing notes could be interesting.

My final choice is a family present. Homes which relish the very best children's literature has to offer will treasure

The Hollow Land, Jane Gardam, Julia MacRae, 0 86203 023 4, £5.25

Nine stories, rich in character and incident, combine to form a mini saga of two families — one local to the Cumbrian fells, one 'incomers' from London. Individually the stories speak easily to young readers; the whole which spans over twenty years, reaching forward to 1999, presents the experienced reader with a pattern of developing relationships and linking incidents which is both satisfying and intriguing. The writing is individual, observant, funny: a celebration of a landscape and its people by someone who clearly loves both.

With apologies for the cliché, this really is a book that lingers in the mind and the imagination. I'm giving it to us.

The books in this feature were selected from this year's hardbacks and in-print paperbacks. ●

NEEDLE ON TREASURE ISLAND

For Jan Needle *Treasure Island* has always been a very special book, one which he returns to often. Here he makes us a present of his thoughts about why it fascinates him and why he believes it has much to teach us about writing for children.

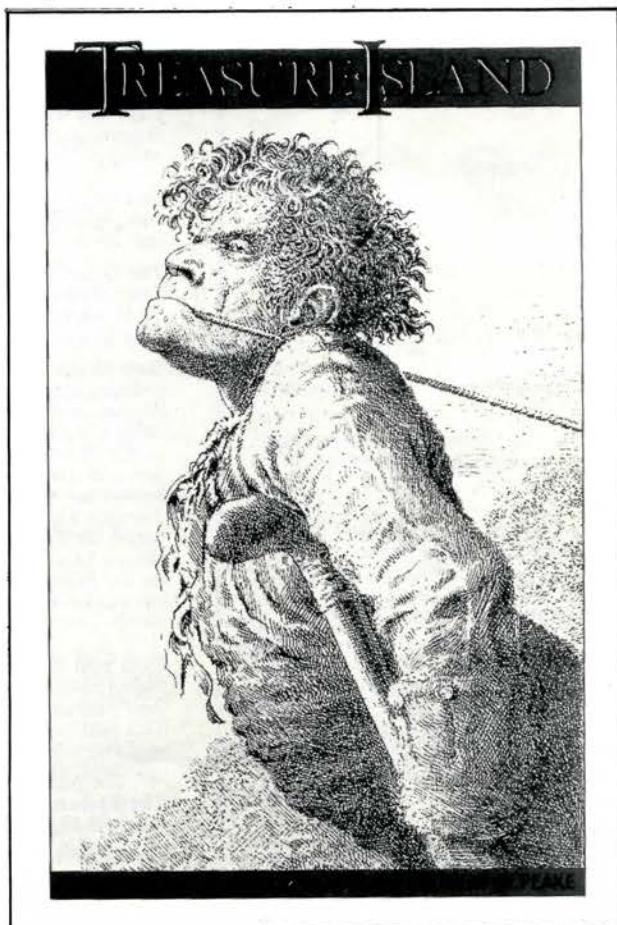
Ever since it was published almost a hundred years ago, *Treasure Island*, by Robert Louis Stevenson, has been recognised as one of the best children's books ever written. On the surface, the reasons for its success seem obvious. The map, the treasure, the pirates, the brave young hero; they are, simply, classic ingredients for an adventure yarn. But *Treasure Island*, I think, is far far more than just an adventure yarn. I reread it quite frequently — the last time before I started writing this — and I remain convinced that it is a deeply important book in terms of children's literature, both for readers and practitioners.

Even at its simplest level of success, its story, *Treasure Island* has much to teach us about writing for children. Many many other books, of course, have the 'classic ingredients' I mentioned before, but I know of no other that deploys them with such unremitting intensity. After only 8,000 words, at the end of a mere six out of thirty-four chapters, we have seen the quiet life of a simple country boy transformed. Jim Hawkins has met and been terrorised by three appalling villains — Billy Bones, Black Dog and blind Pew. He has shared in the deaths of two of them, as well as that of his father. His livelihood (the inn) has been smashed, and his thirst for adventure — and treasure — has been aroused. Six chapters further on, and Jim is faced with the awareness that the 'adventure' is a nightmare that will almost certainly end in torture, degradation and death.

In *adventure* terms, the way the story works through and on Jim Hawkins is vital. Everything (except three chapters necessarily told by Dr Livesey) happens to him. But because of his character — a magic mixture of naivety, intelligence, stupidity, impatience, modesty and self-congratulation — it also usually happens *because* of him. A good example is the sequence of events that forms Part Five: Jim's 'Sea Adventure'. After the bloody and terrifying attack on the stockade is over, Jim — like the mere boy he is — gets fed up and goes walkabout. This utterly stupid action quickly runs away with him and he finds himself cutting free the Hispaniola, which is at anchor in the hands of the pirates. In a rush of events totally beyond his control he is forced to kill a man, gets pinned to a mast by a knife in the process, then 'escapes' back to the stockade only to walk into the arms of the enemy. Like almost every other twist in the narrative (and there are plenty more to come, well after the point where most writers would have begun to cruise towards their conclusion) it is entirely organic, entirely uncontrived.



It is the organic nature of the narrative, the fact that it is a natural progression of events which come about through the actions of the characters, that lifts Stevenson's story into far more complex areas of success than as a mere adventure. For what he did was to write a book about a child, ostensibly for children, which utterly refuses to fudge the issues raised by its basic situation. The hero is



Illustrations by Mervyn Peake from *Treasure Island*, Methuen, 0 416 55270 6, £5.50.

young, but nothing that happens is allowed to be softened by this fact. **Treasure Island** is the story of a child in a world not just of adults, but of totally ruthless, indeed mentally crippled, adults. And Stevenson was prepared to stare this fact in the face.

The violence of this world is at first handled with subtlety. Horrible as Bones and Pew are, they are kept firmly in check. You marvel at their nastiness, but you are not made to fear it, it is nastiness at a remove. But as soon as Jim is on the island, his escape-routes cut off, Stevenson drives home his point. It is a hammer-blow; a stark and startling revelation of just what the expedition means and where it will all quite possibly end.

The revelation comes — as it must to achieve its complex effect — through the agency of the real giant of the book, John Silver. From the moment we have met him, we have been seduced. Like Squire Trelawney, like Dr Livesey, like young Jim, we love him. Here, the brilliance of Stevenson's writing is amazing — because we have been told time and again (as has Jim) that Silver is a villain. He himself has even stated, without equivocation, that when the time comes for the mutineers to rise, his 'vote' (for the others) is death, and that he will personally tear Trelawney's 'calf's head off his body with these hands'. His charisma, strangely, is undiminished.

It is Silver, then, who strikes 'the first blow'. He is trying to persuade a loyal man called Tom to join the pirates. Jim is watching from a bush, and all three of them hear the death cries of another 'loyal' who is being killed elsewhere. At this Tom, in disgust, bravely turns his back on Silver and storms off.

'But he was not destined to go far. With a cry, John seized the branch of a tree, whipped the crutch out of his armpit, and sent that uncouth missile hurtling through the air. It struck poor Tom point foremost, and with stunning violence, right between the shoulders in the middle of his back. His hands flew up, he gave a sort of gasp, and fell.'

Then, before Jim's horrified eyes, Silver leaps onto the man and — panting — stabs him to death.

From this moment forward the violence and villainy accelerate. In one extraordinary sequence Hawkins has a philosophical conversation with Israel Hands, the ship's coxswain whom he is soon to kill, in which he says that dead people, he believes, live on in another world. Hands replies: 'Well, that's unfortunate — appears as if killing parties was a waste of time.' Right until the very end, too, Silver seeks the greatest success for himself alone, and is prepared to murder anyone, including Jim, to achieve it. The death toll, in fact, is amazing.

Because Jim is narrator, and because Jim is a child, the other strand of moral viciousness in the story goes unremarked. But it is there, and it is not deeply buried. This is the undercurrent of greed that motivates the 'good' camp. Almost at the beginning Jim notes that his mother has risked their lives through greed, and he reflects, as narrator, the stupidity and stubbornness of Squire Trelawney. Even more fascinating, perhaps, is the background which Stevenson (a Scot) gave to Livesey (one of the very 'best' of the 'good' characters): 'I was not new to violent death,' the doctor tells us. 'I have served his Royal Highness the Duke of Cumberland.' Livesey, in fact, served the butcher of the Scots.

It is a chilling point, but not one that should be made too much of. Stevenson was certainly aware of the moral ambiguities in his story and characters, but far more importantly he was prepared to write about the evil in mankind in its most naked manifestations. He was writing about a time in which a boy could quite easily have become enmeshed in such a situation, and he wanted him to survive it. But it is worth remembering that Jim alone of the characters is never deeply interested in the treasure. From the moment the island is sighted he hates it, and at the end he has nightmares about a place that 'oxen and

wainropes' would not drag him back to. He does not even bother to mention how he used his share of the loot.

Jim saves the adults in his camp, and they in turn recover the treasure, through a series of adventures that are extremely exciting. But the process is hardly a romp, and it is certainly not a game. At the end, seventeen men have died, many of them horribly and in full view, a charismatic mass-murderer has been allowed to escape, and a boy has had his taste for adventure shattered. As to the treasure itself, Jim writes:

'How many [lives] it had cost in the amassing, what blood and sorrow . . . what shame and lies and cruelty, perhaps no man alive could tell.'

It is a strange feeling to be left with at the end of a 'good pirate yarn'.

One must never forget though, that the extraordinary success of **Treasure Island**, its many levels and moral complexities, are a product, first and foremost, of the fact that it is a rattling good yarn. It has a superb story, and a host of brilliantly achieved characters (even minor ones, like Ben Gunn, Hands, Pew, and so on, are vivid with life) who are totally at one with it. For a reader, that's a lot to be thankful for. For a writer, it's a lot to try to achieve! ●



Jan Needle's first book for children, **Albeson and the Germans**, appeared in 1977. It caused quite a stir in the children's book world because of the power and directness of the writing and its unusual plot — Albeson, his view of Germans formed by his elders' war-time recollections and by comics, faces the prospect of two of them coming to his school.

Four years and ten books later, Jan Needle is still stirring things up. A **Fine Boy for Killing** (1979) was attacked by some for its 'brutal realism' and 'violence'. It is, says Jan, 'the novel which could be said to be most influenced by **Treasure Island** in that it poses boys in a violent and entirely adult situation that starts, and remains, beyond their control or even understanding.' Its setting is the British navy of the Napoleonic wars; but its themes are in no way irrelevant to the 1980s: something which has not escaped its many teenage readers.

In **Books for Keeps 4** Eric Hadley wrote: 'In the best sense it is completely serious. Jan Needle looks deep into the moral pressures on children living in a world of pernicious class divisions, bullying thoughtlessness and egomania, as well as unlooked for heroism.'

Three Needle titles have been published this year: **Wild Wood** — an alternative **Wind in the Willows**, **Losers Weepers** and **Another Fine Mess** — a sequel to **The Size Spies** in which Cynthia and George with the professor and some others tangle with a less than perfect time machine. He's also been writing. 'I've just finished a novel that takes me firmly back into the social realistic mode after these three which were all rather gentler. It's not titled or typed yet, though, so I can't tell you much about it.'

What next? 'I have another sea adventure in mind, this time involving a female. I'll probably write that next year.' Something to look forward to. Like it or hate it, you'd be unwise to ignore a new Jan Needle if you're in any way involved with children.

Albeson and the Germans

André Deutsch,
0 233 96900 4, £2.75
Lions, 0 00 671900 7, 95p

A Fine Boy for Killing

André Deutsch,
0 233 97106 8, £4.95

Wild Wood

(ill. William Rushton) André
Deutsch, 0 233 97346 X,
£5.95

Another Fine Mess

André Deutsch,
0 233 97370 2, £4.95

Losers Weepers

Methuen, 0 416 21510 6,
£3.95

THE DETERMINED FREELANCE

Pat Triggs meets Robert Crowther



Robert Crowther with his famous Madame Tussaud's escalator posters which this year won him the Campaign award for the best poster in the media and entertainment section. 'All the other winners were from big advertising agencies. It was quite nice just being a small freelance.'

Robert Crowther is an only child. He was born in Leeds but the family moved around a lot because his dad was a commercial traveller. 'We were in the north-east, Peterlee and Sunderland, from when I was eleven until fourteen. That's the place I think of as "home".' At grammar school in Knaresborough he was always the one who 'did the posters' and art school was the next step.

'I did the foundation year at Leeds College of Art; but they turned me down for the next stage. I got rejected at Leicester and Manchester too. Looking back it was probably the right thing. They placed too much emphasis on fine art for me. I went to Norwich and it suited me. It was a good place to go.'

It allowed him to find his own way, an important freedom for an independent-minded individual. It's an independence he's sought to keep and for eight years now he's been trying things out, discovering slowly but increasingly surely what he thinks he does best and what he likes to do best. In 1973 when he finished the Graphics course at the Royal College of Art it was a question of choosing which job you went for. He was offered a full-time job doing graphics for the BBC 'as a sort of assistant to the assistant something' but chose instead to chance his arm, keep his freedom and become a freelance. 'Mum wasn't keen. I think she would have liked me to go into a bank or something with some security. She's wavering a bit now though.'

It wasn't however a complete step into the unknown. For the RCA degree show he had done a self portrait in biscuit dough. Exactly coincidentally Madame Tussaud's were planning the opening of their Amsterdam waxworks. The Dutch, they reasoned, are keen on biscuits. Why not have some relief plaques made in biscuit for publicity? Robert was offered his first commission and accepted. He has been working for Tussaud's ever since designing posters, programmes, signs and the graphics.

Apart from starting him on a career as a freelance the RCA degree show was the beginning of yet another part of the Robert



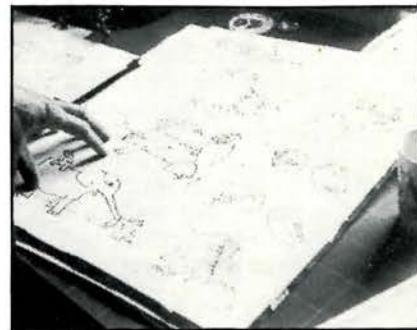
The original designs for the Hide-and-Seek alphabet which appeared in the RCA show. 'I changed the style of the 'a' for publication. My editor pointed out it was the wrong one for young children.'

Crowther story. At the show he displayed the prototype of his **Most Amazing Hide-and-Seek Alphabet Book**. Publishers were interested but it wasn't until 1977 when pop-ups became commercially possible that almost by accident it finally got into print. The phenomenal success of that book was in one sense a problem. How to follow that? Four years later **The Most Amazing Hide-and-Seek Counting Book** is the answer. It's been a liberating book for its creator. 'Patrick Hardy at Kestrel always said "Get the second one over and you'll be OK." He was right. I now feel much more confident about going ahead.'

The four years between those two books saw Robert trying out yet another role. He teaches part-time on illustration courses in Leicester and Oxford. A kind of irony he feels as he's really not sure about the value of formal art education. Still he's enjoyed it and it might be a way to go. But he thinks not. So far he's been exploring the options. Increasingly this year he feels, 'I am working towards what will satisfy me.' The ideas for children's books are coming through clearly. 'I've got four or five in my head at the moment. I'm beginning to feel that other things are getting in the way.' He's interested in the educational potential of

books for young children and thinks he'll stay in that area, at least for the moment.

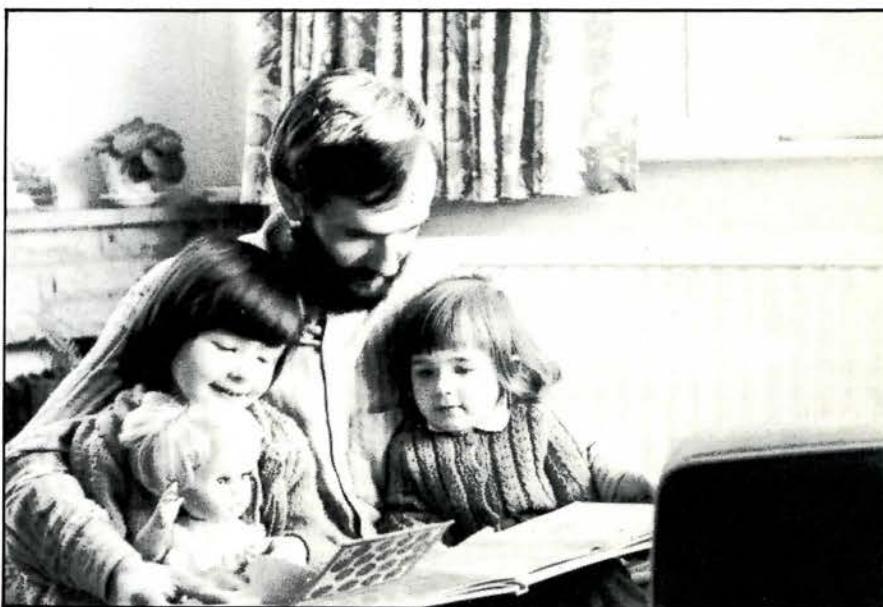
Contact with older children could change that. During Children's Book Week he met all ages from fifteen-year-olds down. 'I get very self-conscious drawing for children and I had to make myself do it; but I want to put something back. And meeting children keeps your feet on the ground. I got quite a lot out of it.' He intends to do more of it and is working on ideas for things to do. 'I couldn't go and just sign books in a shop.' ●



Some ideas for a book Robert is working on at the moment. 'It will be small and very simple with lots of surprises as you turn the page. I like surprises. It's animals again. I suppose I find animals easier to draw than people. I'll do a drawing again and again until I know it's right.'

The Most Amazing Hide-and-Seek Alphabet Book
Kestrel, 0 7226 5314 X, £4.50

The Most Amazing Hide-and-Seek Counting Book
Kestrel, 0 7226 5598 3, £4.50



Robert with his daughters Victoria (6) and Kate (3) enjoying **The Most Amazing Hide-and-Seek Counting Book**. On the facing page you'll find Robert Crowther's present to us — a make-it-yourself pop-up. You may photocopy it if you want to make more than one or don't want to cut up your copy of Books for Keeps.

MAKE YOUR OWN POP-UP Robert Crowther shows you how

1. Colour picture. 2. Cut out the main illustration and the strip at the right-hand side. Cut out and stick
brace tabs A to A and B to B. 3. Feed the strip through the cut lines on the main illustration.



ALLY, ALLY, ASTER

Ann Halam

'Ann Halam has a genuine descriptive gift, she knows how to build tension, and she has created in Ally a strangely powerful sad and frightening figure'

TES 24th July 1981

'An atmosphere of cold, natural to the moorland setting but deepened by Ally's mysterious powers is brilliantly sustained, supported by curiously enigmatic dialogue which defines characters particularly well.'

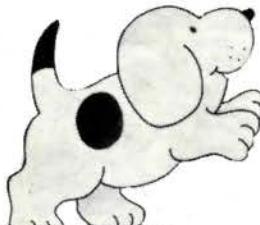
Sunday Times

'Ann Halam has been clever, deftly weaving her enchantments and cosily frightening us in this interesting attempt to import ancient Norse legend into present day Yorkshire.'

Daily Telegraph

George
Allen & Unwin

£4.50



Eric
Hill
Spot's
First
Walk

The perfect pop-up book for very young children - a follow-up to *Where's Spot?*, one of the best-selling children's books of 1980.

434 94289 8 £3.95

Frank & Polly Muir's Big Dipper

A big, fat, colourful book for the whole family to dip into! Big Dipper is the subject of a Christmas television special to be networked by Yorkshire Television on 21 December.

434 48160 2 £5.95

GANGSTERS, GHOSTS AND DRAGONFLIES

Brian Patten

Illustrated by Terry Oakes

Spike Milligan, George Macbeth, Neil Innes, Libby Houston, Adrian Mitchell, Jaques Prevert, Adrian Henri, Ivor Cutler, Charles Causley, Christopher Logue, Mervyn Peake, John Betjeman and Pablo Neruda - these are some of the poets that make up this choice of today's poetry, designed to fill the gap between collections for younger readers and those for adults.

'manages never to be conventional or boring'

'a stimulating anthology of poems'

Alan Brownjohn, TLS



£6.95

THE LAST OF DANU'S CHILDREN

Alison Rush

An enthralling story of magic and danger which adults as well as children will find enriching and enjoyable.

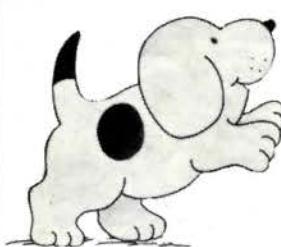


£6.95

5 IRRESISTIBLE FAMILY BOOKS FOR CHRISTMAS



**Heinemann
Young Books**



Eric
Hill
Spot's
First
Walk

The perfect pop-up book for very young children - a follow-up to *Where's Spot?*, one of the best-selling children's books of 1980.

434 94289 8 £3.95

Jan Pienkowski
Robot



Meet the Robot family!
A spectacular new mechanical book, with over 80 moving parts, from the creator of *Haunted House*.

434 95643 0 £5.95

Tommy
Steele
Quincy



Tommy Steele's first book is a children's Christmas story of enduring charm. Beautifully illustrated and produced, this is a book to treasure.

434 96455 7 £3.95

JOHN INMAN CURTAIN UP!

Everything you need to know about putting on a show at home. A compendium of ideas from this popular family entertainer.

434 94380 0 £4.50

PASSING THE TOBY TEST

Willie Rushton, cartoonist, illustrator, writer, actor and all-round humourist, writes about getting involved with children and books.

The first kids' book I ever illustrated was in 1960 and (isn't Life odd, particularly in my experience, Fridays) I owed the job to none less than Michael Foot. As I remember, it had been a strange week altogether.

On the Thursday for the first and last time in my life I had voted Conservative (there had been something so deeply reassuring about their final Party Political Broadcast with Harold Macmillan poking a globe in a God-like manner) and on the following Monday I joined Tribune as Political Cartoonist. Michael Foot was then Editor and a great admirer of Vicky. So was I, but Mr Foot wanted me to do cartoons in his style and I never was too keen on labelling clouds 'Recession' or writing people's names on their brief-cases or trousers. However we cobbled out one cartoon together complaining about the wishy-washy policies of the Labour Right that had blown the election. At his behest I drew a large bull labelled 'Labour Party' being fed from a bucket (labelled 'Milk and Water') by Douglas Jay (labelled 'Douglas Jay'). Meanwhile a person labelled 'Left' waved a red rag ('Tribune') in an attempt to excite the slumbering beast. Plus ça change, baby. I hated it, and it was the first and last cartoon I ever did for Tribune. Mr. Foot, however, a generous man, rang Harrap the Publishers and they, given my Bull which I must admit I was quite impressed by myself, asked did I ever do elephants? Certainly, I cried, lying in a good many more teeth than I boast today. I think the book was called Ebdulum E. Elephant, and I could certainly dash off elephants by the end of it. Incidentally, to prove the mercenary nature of the young Rushton, within a week I was Political Cartoonist of The Liberal News.

I should think it was ten or more years before I did anything for kids again. In those days I rarely appeared in daylight, but my wife and I gave birth to a fine son, and it's extraordinary how quickly you find yourself imitating the actions of Old Grimm. My stories aged with Toby. When he was very young, I passed the odd one, usually about our lunatic dachshund, Mrs Saunders, and her friend, our Mynah Bird (known as The Pouf) who could only say 'Good Morning'

in my voice (Better than Mike Yarwood, the Pouf!), to Playschool. As he grew I graduated to Jackanory, writing, illustrating and reading for them.

My excuse for engaging in all three activities is that I'm the only person I know who can read my writing. I did a week's stories for them about the ruler of Europe's smallest country called The Geranium of Flüt. In one the Queen and Prince Philip paid an Official Visit to Flüt and were given 150 trees to plant in the afternoon. (André Deutsch published another of the stories as a strip-book.) As well as that, I wrote a Jubilee story about The Queen's Beasts, and had a good time reading most of Winnie the Pooh!

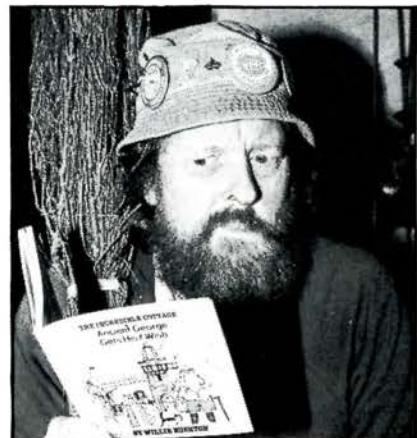


Photo of Willie Rushton by Derek Winger

The pleasure of writing for kids is the discipline. You can whack out a Play for Today or whatever which starts in the middle, continues in the middle and ends in the middle, and leaves the audience brow wrinkled and shouting for less. Not so with kids.

When I was carving out the Jackanory stories about the Geranium and his lovely wife The Lobelia, I was on holiday in the Dordogne and surrounded by children. It was a sobering exercise to read the results of the Midnight Oil to them on a morning. The air was thick with questions, and if I couldn't answer them, forget it. Sobering, but rewarding. I got Toby to read the proofs of The Incredible Cottage books and blue-pencil where Father had shattered Plot or Logic. (He also did all the black-and-white illustrations in the style of the young hero, Waldo — I believe in Jobs for Youth.)

I'm certain I could never do anything for kids be it a book, a stage or a telly without seeking their opinion first and weathering the

backlash, the abuse and the probing queries. In that regard I've been lucky, not only with a scrupulously honest son and friends but also that over the years I've done a deal of Christmas Shows at the Mermaid Theatre in London. You get to know your audience there. I certainly learnt one lesson: it is best to aim for all the family. If the kids see parents getting restive, you lose them and conversely if you aim solely at Mum and Dad, the kids are out with their potato crisps and noisily rustling their copies of the Financial Times.

'Children of All Ages' is a happy cliché. There has to be something for everyone. There's nothing so depressing as reading a bed-time story to a small child and going to sleep before he does.

I like to think there's something for everyone in The Incredible Cottage series. The books are basically for amusement only, but I've tried to inject one fascinating fact or goblet into each, whether it be that Buffalo Bill was one of the first to climb the Eiffel Tower or simply that the interior of the Great Pyramid is deeply dull. Above all, I have sweated over Plot and Logic.

I once wrote a line into an adaptation of Gulliver's Travels I did for the Mermaid which I think extremely wise. 'There's very little to be said in my book for anything that can't be explained to children.' Try Monetarism on them for instance and see how far you get. ●

The Incredible Cottage stories are Willie Rushton's latest books for children. Hundreds of years ago the first inhabitant of the cottage, Noragunge, a Nice Witch, decided that travelling by broom was too uncomfortable. So she cast a spell and thereafter travelled by cottage. When young Waldo Trumpet and his parents move in and he discovers the secret of instant travel the stage is set for (so far) four amusing adventures.

The Story of the Incredible Cottage,
0 86185 324 5

Ancient George Gets His Wish,
0 86185 325 3

The Incredible Cottage Goes to the Moon,
0 86185 326 1

Waldo Meets the Witch, 0 86185 327 X
published by Golden Acorn Publishing at 65p each.

Earlier this year Willie Rushton's talents as an illustrator were demonstrated in The Stupid Tiger and Other Tales (Deutsch, 0 233 97256 0, £3.95), a collection of Indian stories translated from the Bengali by William Radice. The black-and-white drawings are witty in just the right way to catch the flavour of these wise and funny stories. And there are at least two elephants.

Authorgraph No. 11



In 1946 when Jan Pieńkowski came from Poland with his parents to live in this country he was ten years old and spoke no English. For all the childhood he could remember he had lived in an occupied country, at first far from towns where the war and its effects were less noticeable and then in Warsaw where they were not. Settled in London, he quickly developed a passion for comics which he still has. 'At my grammar school comics were banned. They weren't considered to be edifying or uplifting. When we were in the sixth form there was always a race to see who could be the first to confiscate an *Eagle* on the day it came out.'

From school he went to Cambridge to read for a degree in English; but he spent most of his time designing posters, sets and costumes for student drama productions. A friend suggested that selling Christmas cards that they had designed and printed would be a good way to get their own cards for nothing. They actually made a profit of £2.10.0. (it was before decimalisation) on the operation and promptly ploughed it back into the business which was to become Gallery Five, the source of all those well-designed wrapping papers, greetings cards, tags and carrier bags. Jan is still a director and under his influence Gallery Five has expanded into publishing books like the recent pop-up, *Dinner Time*.

But when he finished at Cambridge all that was yet to come. It was necessary to get a job. He applied to join the art department of advertising agencies. 'They all thought I was very eccentric. With an English degree you were supposed to want to be a copywriter.' But he got a job, became an Art Director and 'learned a lot.'

Jan Pieńkowski's first book, an ABC, *Annie Bridget and Charlie* was published in 1967. The next year saw *A Necklace of Raindrops* a collection of Joan Aiken stories with the first of the now famous Pieńkowski silhouette illustrations. Their origin is

Pieńkowski at home (photo by Tony Bradman)



From *The Kingdom under the Sea*,
by Joan Aiken

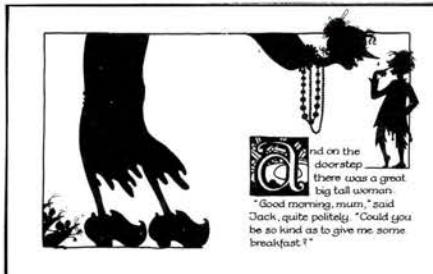
interesting. 'To get the commission I had to do one picture as a sample. I really slaved over it but the figures were dreadful.' The day came for delivery. 'I had to set off with this dreadful picture. In despair I blacked in the face of the worst figure. It looked a bit better, so I did them all.'

In the same style came *The Kingdom Under the Sea*, *The Golden Bird*, *Tales of a One-Way Street* (which Jan thinks demonstrates the limitations of the medium; 'silhouettes work better against an abstract background.') and the six exquisite little books in the Fairy Tale Library. All these show that Pieńkowski is more a designer of books than simply an illustrator. He has the designer's preoccupation with making books in the style, size and shape that will suit the content best. Sometimes there is quite a battle and books

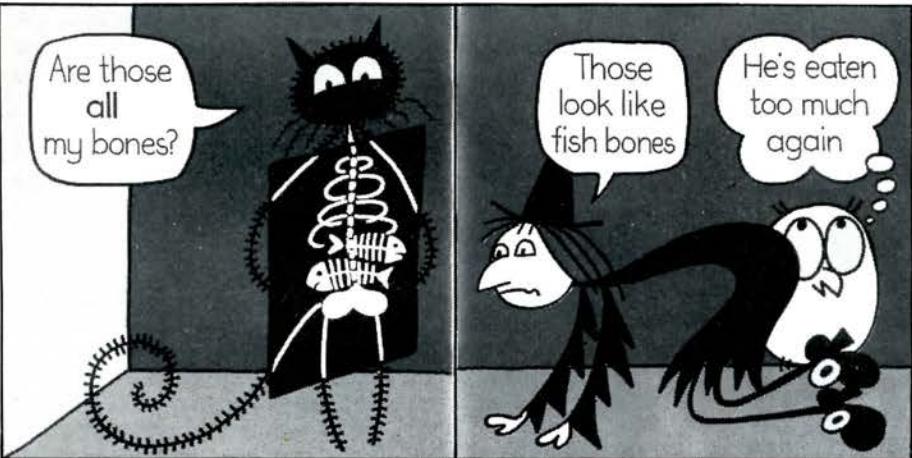
have a long gestation period. 'I'm obsessive about getting things right. I drive everyone crazy. I go on and on until I get it right.' Nowadays that concern takes him to Colombia in South America to be involved in setting up the production line for his very successful pop-up books; but it's been like that from the start.

'When I did *Kingdom under the Sea* I laid out the text line by line and put in the pictures so the whole thing was welded together. I made a chart of the whole book too so that I could work out where the colour fell. That way I got colour on 20 pages instead of only twelve and I could do the coloured initials'. All that care paid off. *The Kingdom Under the Sea*, eleven stories from Eastern Europe retold by Joan Aiken, is a visual enchantment, with its marbled endpapers, decorated capitals and brilliant use of black and white and colour.

For Jan, 'The picture is part of what you are reading. When I was



a child I could not bear books with pictures labelled "Illustration to page 110" or whatever and which were miles away from their bit of the story. That's why I like hand lettering best; it gives you total control of the relationship of text to pictures.' That relationship is a particular feature of the Meg and Mog books on which he collaborates with Helen Nicoll. The partnership began in 1977 and the tenth book in the series is on the way. 'We fight so much; it's a really good working relationship.



Mog, Meg and Owl from *Meg's Mumps*, the latest Meg & Mog to go into Picture Puffin, 0 14 050357 9, 90p.

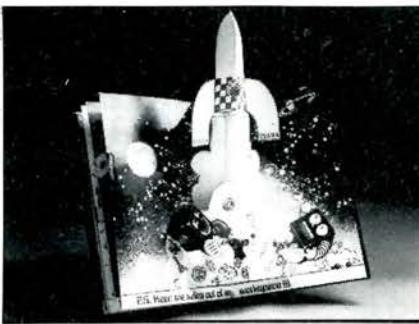
We have lots of wild ideas and then Helen pares and prunes and puts them into economical good, plain English.' They also worked together on a strip cartoon which appeared regularly in *The Egg*, the magazine of the Junior Puffin Club. Helen Nicoll lives in Wiltshire and they used to meet halfway in the restaurant of Membury Services on the M4 to work out the next bit. 'It's a good place to work. You're completely cut off so no one disturbs you.' Their book *Quest for the Gloop* came out of that collaboration.

Things don't always go smoothly but Jan is a great believer in 'the power of the accident.'

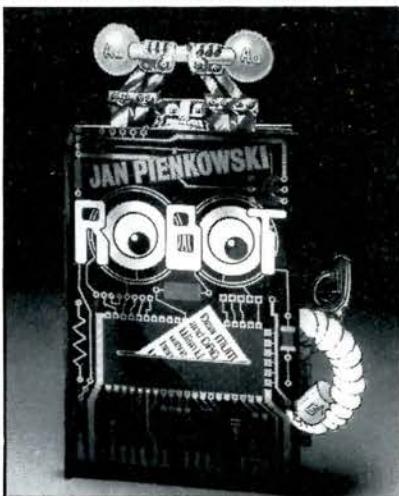
'An accident is a good idea in disguise. There really are no accidents; just your subconscious pushing you into doing things you wouldn't normally dare to do.'

The pop-up books seem to have been more accident prone than most. Look again at your copy of *Haunted House*. The creepy 'Spanish Moss' which drips off the trees in the portrait of La Gioconda was the result of less than complete masking while they sprayed the wall paper in the picture to give it a mouldy look. The green trees 'ran'. Spanish moss was the answer. The faded, peeling paint effect around the keyhole on the front door cover is the result of Judith Elliot's hot hands as she handed the books round the publishers in New York. Judith is Jan's editor at Heinemann.

Why did a promising and successful graphic designer choose to go into books? 'When I got the chance to do one I jumped at it. I think they are the most permanent things I could do. I get more satisfaction out of books. It's important to me that the result of my effort is likely to be there in a few years. And although it's such a solitary activity and you only get one chance to get it right, there is a continuous stream of something coming back from the readers which goes on for a long time. That's very satisfying; it's



The final lift-off from *Robot*, Jan Pieńkowski's latest pop-up, Heinemann, £5.95



buses, themselves and each other with body paints); they have made books and masks, covered a wall with graffiti (not so much fun when it's allowed) and decorated a mobile infant library. At the moment he is planning a robot building session and working out how to paint a gasometer.

But being a successful creator of books hasn't made him any more confident or secure about each new project.

'I went to America to see Wally Hunt at Intervisual Communications about *Robot*. We were all round this huge table and I sat there with my hands shaking demonstrating this dummy book made out of grotty white cardboard. I'd not even finished when Wally just got up and walked out. I was shattered. Later I managed to ask him why he had left. "Oh" he said "I didn't need to see any more."

'I think all creative people need reassurance. When you show what you've done every single thing you've got is there. And if you've had a little success it gets worse because there's more at stake. When the first books came out I thought I was lucky to be published at all. I still do.'

But it isn't all luck as this story shows. Jan owns a third share in a horse which he likes to ride in Richmond Park. Not long ago he was thrown and pulled along by the horse. 'It was my own fault. I wouldn't let go. It's part of my nature.'



Portrait, with Spanish moss, from *Haunted House*, Heinemann.

HOW TO...START A FAMILY READING GROUP

Family reading groups are gradually increasing throughout the country. A group may originate in a public library or in a school but the aim is the same: to provide an opportunity for parents, teachers, librarians and children to get together and talk about books they have read.

Shirley Bush, a school librarian in a middle school in Buckinghamshire, describes how her group operates.



Drawing by Alec Davis

What is a family reading group? Basically it is a group which meets on a regular basis to choose, read and discuss books which are supplied by the library. It is made up of children at a school, their parents, brothers and sisters, as well as any interested teachers and sometimes librarians from the local library.

How did I start my group? First I went to the local library who gave me all the support, guidance and help I required. The school library service agreed to supply the books for the venture. I also contacted the United Kingdom Reading Association who have produced a leaflet about starting a group.

The initial spade work completed, I then, with my headmaster's support, sent out a letter to all parents of our school. The letter explained what family reading groups were, said we hoped to form one and described how it would benefit the children. The response, though not overwhelming, was sufficient for an inaugural meeting to be arranged.

At the initial meeting, we (by now my headmaster, some colleagues and a librarian friend who had experience of working with this age group were all involved) talked of our aims and discussed the practicalities of the venture. A very important decision was how often to meet. The group decided on the first Thursday evening of each month. We felt a regular time was important and would aid regular attendance. After question-time and over coffee, families chose the books they hoped to read during the month before the next meeting. They could choose from twelve titles of which we had multiple copies. The reading levels varied from picture books to young teenage. There was also time to browse amongst a display we had mounted of newly published books which we hoped would whet appetites for the months to come.

A month later, the group reassembled with the books they had read. For discussion we divided the group into smaller units where we felt everyone was more likely to contribute. Each group had a leader who quickly found out which of the twelve titles had been read by the group and they got the discussion going.

Group leaders had previously talked together about the way to handle this and the sort of questions to raise in order to get ideas flowing. For example, who liked the book, which was their favourite character, did the book have a good ending, why had the family decided to take the book originally — was it because of its title, dust-jacket, pictures, a favourite author or subject? We agreed that after talking about the books it would be a good idea to have a more general discussion about what people thought of the group, ideas for improvements, how children felt about their parents reading the books, etc. All this would help us plan future meetings.

Discussions were followed by refreshments and a time to return books and to select new ones. So emerged our way of working over the months which were to follow. The selection of new books gradually moved to before the meeting and families would arrive early to enable them to have the best selection. With each month which passed I discovered the children were gaining confidence in discussing books they had read, both parents and children were more selective about books which were chosen and certainly everyone was better acquainted with current children's literature. The informal coffee time proved very worthwhile as we all got to know each other better and book-centred discussions often continued amongst groups of parents and groups of children.

Some meetings were completely different. A visit from a local author, a film by the United Kingdom Reading Association, parties for our birthday, and Christmas at which we had a fancy dress parade of book characters: all were popular.

After each meeting I compile a list of books we have just read and their details and circulate it to group members. In this way families can follow up any books they have become interested in through the discussions or feel they would like to buy for themselves. I return the used collection to the library and under guidance select a new one. I try to read all the books from the current collection; this is a huge task but it is a useful way of keeping abreast of new material and old favourites. It means that when I have money to spend for the school library I only have to open my file on family reading books to get details of those favourites to buy.

One disappointment about the group was that the number of Dads attending declined, although we always had a few faithfuls. At the start of each school year the group was advertised to the new intake and we always gained new members. Often, those who had left in the previous July continued to come to meetings for the first year of their secondary education.

Among all the things I have done as a librarian, this group has been the most rewarding. It has given me a great deal of pleasure and an insight into the responses of children — and their parents — which has been invaluable. I'd recommend anyone to try it. ●

The UKRA leaflet *How to Run Family Reading Groups* by Cecilia Oberst (1978) is available from Mrs Clark, United Kingdom Reading Association, Edge Hill College of Higher Education, St Helens Road, Ormskirk, Lancashire (Tel: 0695 77505), price 45p including postage.

AWARDS

The Other Award 1981

The Other Award was inaugurated in 1975 by Rosemary Stones and Andrew Mann of the Children's Rights Workshop. It arose from a concern with the narrow range of attitudes presented in children's literature and seeks to draw attention to those writers and illustrators who are making available to children a wider and more accurate representation of human experience and situation, in particular those whose work accords their rightful place in the books children read to those who are in general ignored, patronised or misrepresented.

The commended books for 1981 are:

A Strong and Willing Girl

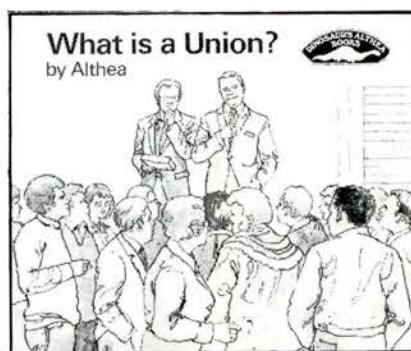
Dorothy Edwards, Methuen, 0 416 88630 2, £4.25

These nine vigorously told stories for younger readers set in Victorian times tell of a ten-year-old working class girl, Nan, who goes into service to help support her family. Based on her own family history told to her as a child, Dorothy Edwards has given us in **A Strong and Willing Girl** a lively and detailed account of the life of a young servant at the turn of the century, within the accessible framework of the adventures and experiences of the impetuous and high-spirited Nan. Finely illustrated with Robert Micklewright's sensitive, historically accurate drawings.

What is a Union?

Althea, Dinosaur, 0 85122 269 2, £1.85 hb and 0 85122 256 0, 70p pb

A simply written, well illustrated (by Chris Evans) information book for junior school age readers about trades unions — why they came into being and how they work today, explaining on the way the role of the shop steward, why workers go on strike and media attitudes to unions. Never before has trades unionism been so clearly and fairly presented to young readers.



Have You Started Yet?

Ruth Thomson, Heinemann, 0 434 96600 2, £3.50

This admirably laid out and clearly written information book about periods (body changes, towels and tampons, the menstrual cycle, etc.) deals in a friendly, straightforward and practical way with menstruation and with the attitudes that surround it. A glossary and index are usefully included as are teenagers' own comments about their experience of periods. (The Other Award Panel did not extend its commendation to the Piccolo edition which replaces the book's index with an advertisement for Kotex sanitary towels.)

The Terraced House Books: Set D

Peter Heaslip, photos. by Anne Griffiths, Methuen Educational, 0 423 90080 3, £2.50 non-net

This outstanding set of the **Terraced House** beginner readers with their simple, repetitive texts which focus on everyday happenings for the urban child, are sympathetically illustrated with compelling photographs which reflect unselfconsciously the multi-racial composition of British inner cities (**The New Baby**, **The Clinic**) and the extended family (**My Aunty**), as well as presenting women and men in non-stereotypical roles (**The Market**, **The New Baby**).

The panel gave a special commendation to **Young World Books**. Sponsored by Liberation (formerly the Movement for Colonial Freedom), a new children's book imprint, Young World Books, was launched in 1980 to publish children's books from the 'decolonised' nations which present 'without apology, or nostalgia, an anti-imperialist attitude'. The first two titles — the folk tale collection **Tales of Mozambique**, 0 905405 04 8, £2.00 (see BfK 6), and **Pepetela's Ngunga's Adventures**, 0 905405 03 X, £1.50 — are a most impressive beginning to this important new imprint for young readers.

Whitbread Award

The Children's Book section of this year's £3,000 Whitbread Literary Award goes to Jane Gardam for **The Hollow Land** (Julia MacRae). Also shortlisted were **The Witches and the Grinnygog** by Dorothy Edwards (Faber) and Diana Wynne Jones' **The Homeward Bounders** (Macmillan). The judge for the children's section was Penelope Lively. (For our review of **The Hollow Land** see page 9.)

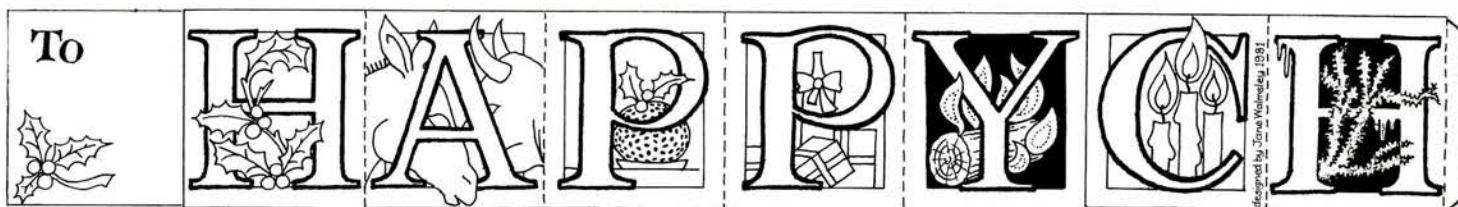


The Hollow Land



JANE GARDAM
JM

Jane Gardam



To: **BOOKS FOR KEEPS** From: *Jane Walmsley*

A talented young designer and illustrator invites you to share her pleasure in making miniature books.

In 1973 Jane Walmsley was in the final year of a course in textile and theatre design at the Central School. At a party, thrown by her Polish tutor, she met Jan Pieńkowski who by one of those lucky accidents happened to be looking for people to work with him. Six months later Jane, thinking she was going to be one of several, found she was the *only* assistant.

Being assistant to Pieńkowski is, Jane says, something of a wide brief. The job entails most things from providing cups of tea and smoothing the appointments path, to coping with crises and being thoroughly involved in the whole creative process which a man like Pieńkowski generates through, it seems, most of the waking hours. She started by being allowed to fill in the black bits in some of the early Meg and Mog books and slowly over two years became Jan Pieńkowski's right-hand lady.

One of the things that Jane has become especially noted for in the book world is the superb hand-lettering which is so often a feature of Pieńkowski-designed books. She doesn't know quite how it came about, but somehow Pieńkowski had got it firmly fixed in his head that hand-lettering was one of Jane's specialities — 'Actually I did lettering very badly, but managed to disguise this by lots of decoration.' The first project she was asked to do was a 'fearfully complicated' Festival poster and for six weeks with Pieńkowski standing over her she grappled to imitate many different kinds of type-faces. At the end of this, even she admits, she'd become a fair copier. From this Jane went on to do lots of 'illuminated stuff' — Gallery Five Christmas cards, carol cards and so on. The next big project was the lettering of *The Fairy Tale Library* (Heinemann) which occupied the whole of 1976. Each of these little books is about 2,000 words long and by the time Jane had finished she'd hand-lettered in beautiful script well over 12,000 individual words. She agreed that by then she'd become very good at it. She went on to work with Pieńkowski on a variety of Meg and Moggs, friezes, the concept books and the Joan Aiken Tales of a One Way Street.

One of the books she's most proud to be associated with is *Ghosts and Boggles*, (a collection of stories by Dinah Starkey). If you haven't come across this book it's a must next time you go to your local bookshop. Jane said that when it was published everybody complained that it had been printed on toilet paper (the kind of thing you get on Italian camp sites) when in fact she and Jan had gone to extraordinary lengths to obtain the thick recycled, creamy coloured paper, which they felt was just right for this excitingly designed and illustrated book.

For *Haunted House* Jane did a 'bit of everything' — helping to work out some of the concepts, doing some of the drawings, colouring in and taking part in the creative arguments which inevitably are part and parcel of that kind of enterprise. The book was started in 1978 and was twelve months in the making. No-one who worked on it had any idea that pop-ups were going to be such big business or that Pieńkowski's book would lead the field.

In 1980 Pieńkowski, with Jane's help, started *Robot*. Nearly two years later it has just reached the shops with its shiny metallic cover and its even more staggeringly inventive mechanics.

Since *Robot* Jane has been freelance and works with Jan only one or two days a week. One of the first books she tackled on her own was *Ghosts and Shadows* by Dorothy Edwards (Lutterworth). She was quietly delighted to see it selected for Children's Books of the Year. Her most original and individual venture so far is to become her own publisher of miniature books.

She began playing around with miniatures about four years ago, making blank books for dolls' houses, which she sold to toy shops. It was a natural development from this to go on to illustrating and lettering these exquisite little books.

She draws each page twice-up (twice the size of the finished book). These pages are printed on to sheets and then reduced. All the colour work is hand-done with felt tip pens. The pages are cut out by Jane with a scalpel, collated and then stapled together. The covers, which are just like those on hardback books, on a tiny scale, are made separately.

Jane is fascinated by miniature things and finds hand-colouring the tiny illustrations very relaxing. She has sold her books to about a dozen shops, mostly in London, but she is wary of going into large-scale production. 'I wouldn't want to do it if I didn't enjoy it, and having to make books would rob it of the pleasure.'

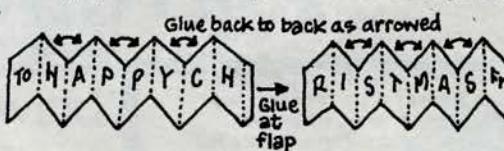


Jane Walmsley

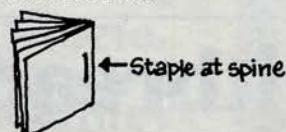
To give you a taste of that pleasure Jane has designed a **Happy Christmas** book for you to make. It is a **Books for Keeps** original. Another way to share the pleasure is to take advantage of our special offer and get some of Jane's hand-made originals for your family and friends. But take our tip. If you are buying them for presents, make sure you get one for yourself. You won't be able to bear to give them all away.

To make your 'Happy Christmas' book

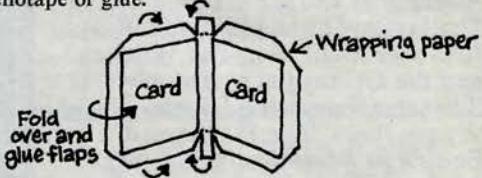
1. Cut out the letters across the top of these pages and join tab 'A' to 'B' to make a continuous strip.
2. Colour the letters if you wish.
3. Fold the pages concertina-style and stick them together as shown here.



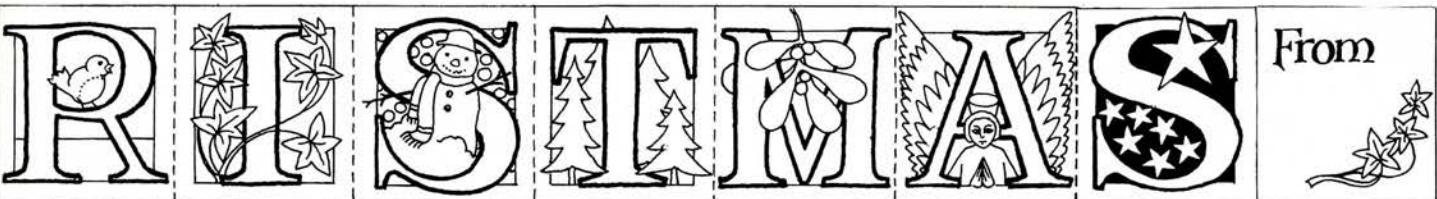
4. Staple the pages into book form.



5. You can make a cover from two pieces of card covered in scraps of wrapping paper. Stick it to the 'To' and 'From' endpapers with double-sided sellotape or glue.



Jane Walmsley has given permission for readers of **Books for Keeps** to reproduce her original design if they wish to make more copies of the books with children.



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Please mark clearly the number of copies you wish to order in the appropriate column. One column is for ordering books in black and white (80p each), the other for hand-coloured (£1.50 each).

School of the Year '81

Results of the second School of the Year competition sponsored by Lloyds Bank were announced in Children's Book Week. This year the theme was 'Books in Our Community' and over forty schools submitted projects — in book form.

The first prize (£500 for the library fund and the School of the Year trophy) was won by Wellsway School in Keynsham, Avon. The project was masterminded by a team of four from the first-year sixth of this 11-18 comprehensive school. Catherine Bass, the Editor, estimates that at least 200 other pupils were involved in some part of the book. The judges commented on the very high standard of presentation and on the comprehensive and imaginative coverage of the theme. We will be reporting on the project in detail in **Books for Keeps** soon.

Second prize (£250) went to The Littlehampton School in Sussex and third prize (£100) to Warwick Junior School in Warwick. ●

Headmaster John Neary and editor Catherine Bass proudly display the giant-sized winning book, complete with pop-up, and the Lloyd's Bank trophy for the School of the Year.



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SOUND & VISION

A new presenter for The Book Tower

The Book Tower, Yorkshire TV's award-winning programme about children's books, is back for a fourth series at the end of December. Tom Baker, who seems to be fleeing from children's programmes like a determined lemming, has retired as presenter and in his place comes Stephen Moore, an actor perhaps better known to adults than to children. He has the personality to make the part his own — and the sort of face that looks as if it might at any minute do something quite unexpected. Useful if you want to keep 'em watching.

Watchers' Guides and Posters are available while stocks last. Apply to The Book Tower, Yorkshire TV, TV Centre, Leeds LS3 1JS.

Watch Out

At Christmas — for a Frank and Polly Muir programme based on Big Dipper, their jolly miscellany of stories, poems, jokes, cartoons and pictures.

In the New Year — for The Treasure Seekers, a series in six episodes of one of the best-loved E. Nesbit stories. It's scheduled to start on BBC on 6th January at 5.00 p.m.

Puffin are reissuing the book with a new cover. If you've ever wondered what 1 Effingham Road, Lee was like, look closely at that cover — it was photographed in Richard and Angie's back garden. Lee, you may remember, is not so far from Eltham which is real E. Nesbit country.



Photo by Mike Leale from Puffin's *The Wouldbegoods*.

A Timely Re-run

David Attenborough's *Life on Earth* returned to the TV screen on 4th November for a thirteen-week re-run, almost exactly coincidentally with the publication of *Discovering Life on Earth*, the new version for younger readers of the now famous book of the series. In July's Books for Keeps we featured an interview with David Attenborough about communicating ideas and information. Talking about the new version, he showed us some of the 550 new full-colour pictures. Apart from being visually stunning they were very carefully chosen to be easy for children to read. The research to find the right ones had quite clearly been extensive and exhaustive. If a new young audience for this series emerges they will be well served by this particular spin-off.

Discovering Life on Earth, Collins, 0 00 195147 5, £6.95 hb and 0 00 195148 3, £4.95 pb.

Theatre Box

Theatre Box, a series of six single plays for 8-12 year olds, began transmission at the beginning of November. It aims to introduce children to drama and encourage them to attempt to mount their own productions.

Thames-Methuen is publishing acting editions of all six plays to coincide with each transmission, followed by an anthology. This will include television scripts adapted for the stage, plus full instructions on every aspect of production from the read-through to performance. The anthology is edited with introductions by children's theatre producer, Jonathan Dudley.

The four half-hour plays include Marmalade Atkins in Space by Andrew Davies about an unpleasant little girl who defies all reasonable attempts to improve her manners (Blackie are also publishing a version in novel form) and The Prince and the Demons based on an extract from the Ramayana.

On Monday 7th December at 4.15 p.m. you can see the first of the one-hour plays, School for Clowns, translated from Waechter's original German by Ken Campbell, who appears as the 'Master', Professor Molereasons, whose job it is to instil in his four pupils the basic techniques of clowning. The cast also includes award-winning actor Jonathan Pryce, and the play is directed by Ian McNaughton.

The last play goes out on Christmas Eve. You Must Believe All This is an hour-long musical play by Adrian Mitchell, based on stories by Charles Dickens, with music by Andrew Dickson and Nick Bacat.



Postman Pat, as pictured by Celia Berridge

A New Hero for the Under-fives

Postman Pat and his black and white cat have made lots of small friends since they first appeared earlier this autumn on See-Saw (BBC's replacement for Watch with Mother).

The television series was created by Ivor Wood (who also did *The Wombles*) but the two books so far from the series have been illustrated by Celia Berridge. I'm a great admirer of Ivor Wood but I don't believe he could have improved on these bright lively pictures so full of good humour. Skilfully, Celia Berridge has made them sufficiently Ivor Wood-like not to confuse young viewers but

they are still very much her own. John Cunliffe (well-known for his 'Farmer Barnes' books) wrote the stories. They are simple cumulative tales and Pat's journeys around the Dales in the mail van keep things moving nicely from one familiar character to another. Just right. It's a pity the type is so small and close-packed — the language is well-suited to early reading. There are thirteen more episodes of *Postman Pat* scheduled for next Spring.

Postman Pat and the Mystery Thief, John Cunliffe, Deutsch, 0 233 97417 2, £1.95

Postman Pat's Treasure Hunt, John Cunliffe, Deutsch, 0 233 97418 0, £1.95



Puff (David Beames), Pimple (Liz Brailsford), Weasel (Emil Wolk) and Drippens (Jonathan Pryce) in *School for Clowns*, to be transmitted in December.

Set in Victorian London, it uses the 'play-within-a-play' technique. Robin, William, Alice and Nettie, sent to bed after being too honest to teachers and their parents at their baby brother's christening, decide to educate adults about how children should be treated, through a magazine entitled You Must Believe All This. 'You don't have to believe the stories really happen, but you must believe what the stories say.' The children act out The Magic Wishbone, The Dangers of Captain Boldheart, and The School for Parents — all of which offer lessons still applicable to adults today.

(For more about drama for children, see The Play's the Thing — or is it?, page 26)

Barriers

Earlier this year a new drama serial for teenagers from Tyne Tees caused quite a stir. Audiences were large (8-9 million); critical acclaim and awards abounded. *Barriers* won the 1981 Gold Medal for Children's Drama at the Television Festival of New York. William Corlett who wrote the script won the Pye Colour Television Award for the Best Children's Television Writer of 1981.

In November and December seven more episodes are on our screens and Judy Allen's novel, adapted from the series, is in the shops.

Barriers

Judy Allen, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 10718 0, £5.25



THE STORY OF CHRISTMAS

Neville Kirby on choosing books to help celebrate a Christian festival

Each year teachers and parents are faced with a new flood of titles in what most publishers must hope will be a lucrative market. How to choose between the offerings; how to sort the gold from the dross in the Christmas bran tub? These become urgent questions.

The first step is to recognise that the books fall roughly into three categories:

those which try to tell, or retell, the traditional New Testament stories.

those which tell fictional stories which, though they are related to the New Testament stories, are not attempts to retell those stories themselves. Such tales may or may not be set in first-century Palestine.

those which deal with customs associated with Christmas. These may be about such things as trees, cards, carols, Santa Claus and so on. They often suggest activities for children.

The first category produces the most failures because it presents the greatest problems. And also because many writers and publishers have the popular but quite mistaken idea that the biblical material itself is story written for children; that it is some kind of simple narrative of events. The task of representation is not impossible but it does require a good understanding of the Jewish roots of this particular kind of story and also a clear grasp of the post-crucifixion and post-resurrection perspective from which the stories appeared in their present form. To explain the Jewish connection would require an article to itself but on the Christian issue it may be sufficient here to draw attention to the obvious religious nature of the stories; that the home of the stories is in the Christian tradition and that their meanings lie not wholly within these particular stories but within the total Christian worldview; furthermore that the meanings can only be properly understood from within the Christian community. Ask, for instance, 'How does the Christmas story end?' and the answer must be 'With the Crucifixion, the Resurrection and what followed'. Unfortunately it seems that only rarely (or perhaps by accident) do attempts at representation of the stories meet these conditions. All too frequently they reduce the stories and their

meanings to either a sentimental other-worldly fairy tale or a platitudinous this-worldly mediocrity, either of which begs to be rejected by a child as he grows in experience and thoughtfulness.

In the second category there are from time to time some notable successes. Stories are written which are not only good reading or telling in themselves but which also convey something of the Biblical meaning. (Two well-known examples are Dickens' *Christmas Carol* and Dr. Seuss' *The Grinch who stole Christmas*.) Fortunately too, unlike the multitude of unsuccessful rehashes of the biblical stories, when they are slender on meaning they do not run the same risk of impairing children's potential for understanding by encouraging them to throw out the baby along with the tinsel wrapping.

In the third category there is altogether far less risk and the choice between books can rest on more everyday judgements about accuracy, aesthetic quality, clarity, appropriateness and the like. These books can make a substantial contribution to children's understanding of the nature of the Christmas stories and indeed of all key religious stories by helping them to see them in the context where they really belong, that of celebration.

A simple rule of thumb then for assessing Christmas books is:

If it is a version of the New Testament story/stories, be very circumspect. If it is fiction with a Christmas flavour, judge it as you would any other story and also, if you wish, judge it on the extent to which it carries Christian meaning. Finally, Christmas custom books should be judged on their accuracy and their appropriateness for the children in mind.

● Books in the first category

The Nativity
Borje Svensson (illus.), Kestrel, 0 7226 5764 1, £4.50

An even more ingenious pop-up book which reproduces via water colours the eighteenth-century Neapolitan Crèche now in the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art. Unfortunately the reproduction of the original three-dimensional terracotta heads in two-dimensional cut-outs in no way matches the impact of the original. One should also ask whether the eighteenth-century style is appropriate to children today.

The Story of Christmas

Felix Hoffmann, Dent, 0 460 06778 8, £3.25

This is a collection of delightful, atmospheric pictures which, despite the coolie hats worn by Joseph and Mary (are they meant to suggest halos?), are reasonably true to the nature of the stories. The text however, is another matter! It is inaccurate and it is confused as to intended reading age. Inaccurate, for example, in that the shepherds are said to disbelieve the angels but believe when they see the baby and then go on to spread the news far and wide — compare this with the text of the Gospel according to St Luke. As to reading age, spasmodic attempts are made to simplify the language though these attempts sometimes achieve the reverse effect to that intended. For example the title 'Saviour' is substituted for the original's 'King'; at other points obvious archaisms which could easily have been simplified are left untouched: 'swaddling clothes' and 'sore afraid'. Even a well-known mistranslation '... goodwill towards all men' remains uncorrected. This is a possible book for the non-reader. In other situations the liberal use of snowpake on the text is advised.

Jesus of Nazareth — The Christmas Story
Collins, 0 00 107178 5, £1.00

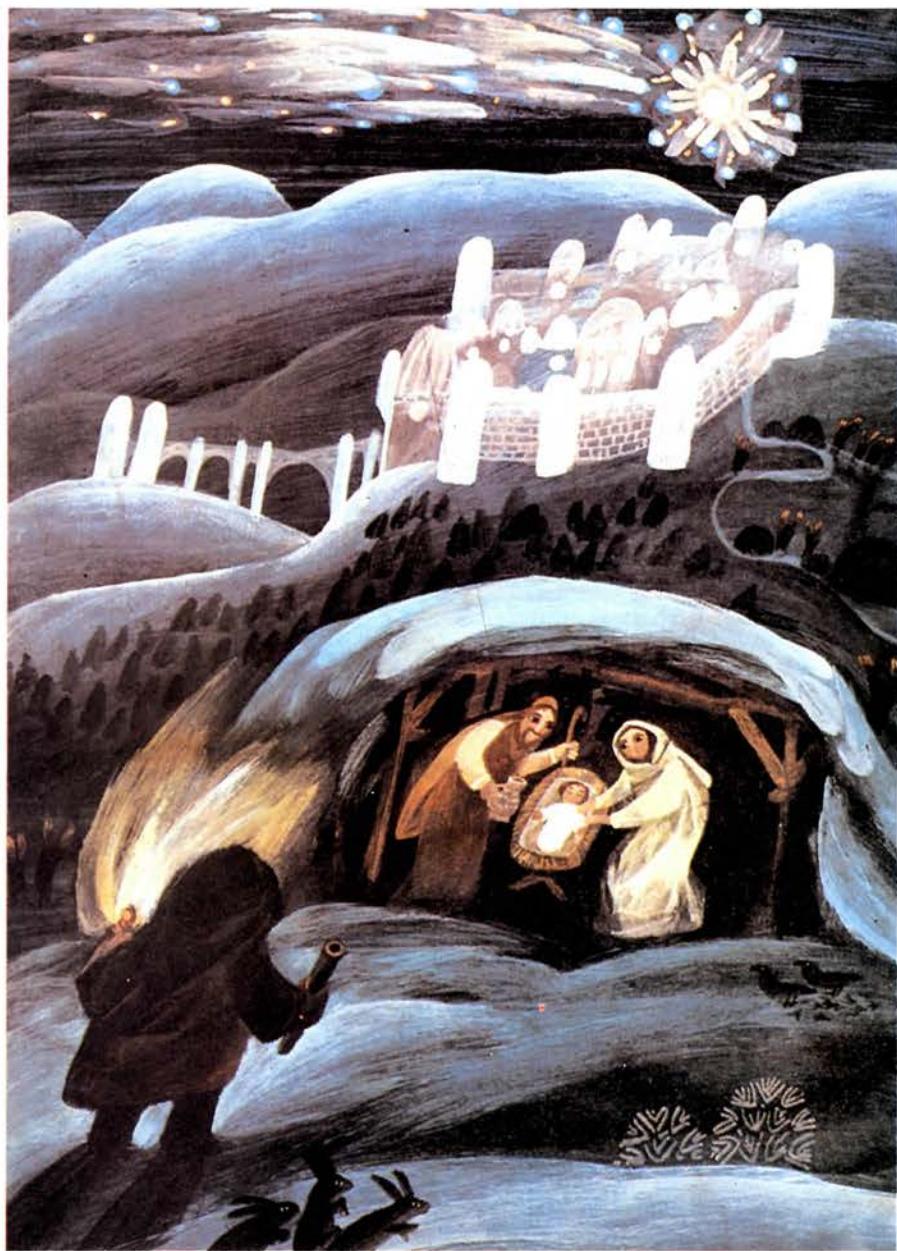
Compiled, as the cover says, from the text of the Good News Bible and with illustrations from the Lew Grade/Zefirelli film, this inexpensive soft-cover book reprints a scholarly text and, although it shifts back and forth from the Matthew and Luke accounts, clearly identifies chapter and verse. The film which provides the pictures went so far in avoiding the excesses of the supernatural typified by Cecil B. deMille, as to lose all sense of that other-worldliness which is an essential part of the stories.

The Christmas Book
Dick Bruna, Methuen, 0 416 24170 0, £2.95

Here is a lively text admirably suited to infants and with the familiar Dick Bruna colourful line drawings. There is an appropriate touch of 'this world' and 'that world' and a compelling final page. Experience tells that this is a much-loved book.

The Children's Picture Bible — The Childhood of Jesus
Christopher Lawson and R.H. Lloyd, Usborne, 0 86020 517 7, £2.99

This is one of a series published together as 'The Story of Jesus', a strongly didactic work with prep. school connections and bearing the imprimatur of the Bishop of Westminster. Two-thirds of the first volume deals with the Christmas stories in a restrained strip-story format. The double column per page text is a little confusing at first but the plethora of illustrations by Victor Ambrus keeps the interest alive. The stories are filled out with reliable background information (this is a great step forward from the more frequently found fictional additions; we learn about Jewish weddings, grinding corn, the Mezuzah and much else). In an otherwise scholarly work, though, it is disappointing to find stories collected together without regard to their New Testament context. Equally disappointing is the illustrator's evident inability to deal with the supernatural elements of the stories — his angels would hardly overawe anyone. Given the shortage of sound books in this field, some at least of the separate volumes would fill a gap.



'Is this the King grandfather told me about?' thought the boy. One of Stephen Zavrel's illustrations for *The Shepherd's Tune*.

hint of anything extraordinary is a star over the stable, otherwise this is nothing more than a story of a birth which happened somewhere far away at the first Christmas long ago. Here is an example of 'platitudinous worldliness'.

Books in the second category

Why a Donkey was Chosen
Christopher Gregorowski, Ernest Benn,
0 510 09505 4, £3.25

A donkey called Reuben reflects on his own insignificance and unimportance only to find himself chosen to carry Mary and the unborn Messiah to Bethlehem. A slender, well-told and well-illustrated (by Caroline Browne) tale which has much to commend it, not least for its implicit and unspoken reference to the biblical donkey ride — through palms to Jerusalem and thus to the Crucifixion.

The Shepherd's Tune
Max Bolliger, Macdonald, 0 354 08134 9,
£4.25

This is a rare gem. An old shepherd passes on his hopes of a Messiah to his grandson who then imagines the story to come and practises at his flute to prepare a special tune with which to greet the king. Doubts afflict the grandfather and disbelief the boy

when he sees the manger. Beautifully told, superbly illustrated — the device of 'imagining the story' gives the artist Stepan Zavrel opportunity to handle the 'other-worldly' element in a thoroughly convincing way.

Books in the third category

Countdown to Christmas
Lesley Cox and Leslie Foster, Macmillan Ed., 0 333 29136 0, £2.95

A book full of information, ideas and things to do which seems uncertain about the age and role of its intended reader. Here and there are inaccuracies and guesses presented as fact: mistletoe is actually a saprophyte not a parasite (p50); 'religious' is not the opposite to 'feast' and 'ceremony', despite Oliver Cromwell (p16/17); no one knows that the Wise Men came from Babylon (p7); the Church of England is not the whole of the Church as implied by a reference to Advent (p19). These examples indicate that although the book would provide teachers with many ideas for use in class it nevertheless does not have the factual reliability one might expect. Teachers seem the obvious users even though the text is directed at (junior/middle?) children: 'Go and find a recording of Bach's Christmas Oratorio.' You wouldn't want set. Perhaps one in the library?

The Christmas Book
Susan Baker, Macdonald, 0 356 05914 6,
£2.95

Addressed directly to children, this has stories, information, games and other activities. Its sentimental version of the first Christmas is best passed over but the rest offers useful celebration material for a young family.

The Oxford Christmas Book for Children
Roderick Hunt, OUP, 0 19 278104 9,
£5.95

This is a book very much about celebration. It is packed with information, stories and ideas. But what a pity that the compiler wasn't better served by the designer. Inside the covers it looks old-fashioned, stuffy and, well, boring. Granted that cost is a factor it is nevertheless the case that celebration must include extravagance and a mere 16 colour pages out of 160 is hardly that. A good choice for older children (if you can persuade them past the outward show) and for teachers.

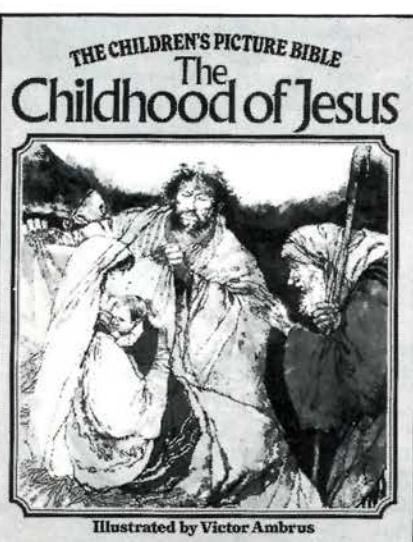
Christmas is Coming
Diana Groves, Macdonald Ed.,
0 356 07540 0, £2.95

Intended for a small child, this offering has cut-outs, songs, an Advent calendar. It's doubtful whether this could live up to its claim to occupy children during the busy weeks before Christmas. The seven-inch record of children singing which is included is a curiosity — enough to bring tears to the eyes of any musician!

Follow the Star
Mala Powers, Hodder & Stoughton,
0 340 26696 1, £4.95

If you are not immediately put off by the artwork you may find your eyes glistening with tears of joy and gratitude as you wade through the 24 infusions of the essence of love and joy topped with creamy angels. Then again you may not! Such a book from the States could explain why many Americans want to continue the ban on Religious Education in State schools. Fortunately RE does not have to be like this. ●

The Rev. Neville Kirby is involved full-time in teacher education and is an adviser and consultant on Religious Education in schools.



Christmas in the Stable
Astrid Lindgren, Hodder & Stoughton,
0 340 03266 9, £3.50

This author side-steps charges of inaccuracy by retelling a Christmas story as told to a little girl by her grandmother. The text is set opposite full-page impressionistic pictures and is pleasingly spaced. The only vague

THE PLAY'S THE THING — OR IS IT?

Chris Powling considers three books which encourage children to 'put on a play' in the light of developing views on the role of drama in education.

Curtain Up!

John Inman, Heinemann,
0 434 94380 0, £4.50

Let's Make a Play!

Monika Laimgruber, Julia MacRae,
0 86203 082 X, £3.95

Make Your Own Theatre

Peter K. Alfaenger, Blackie,
0 216 91085 4, £5.95

Let's start with a story.

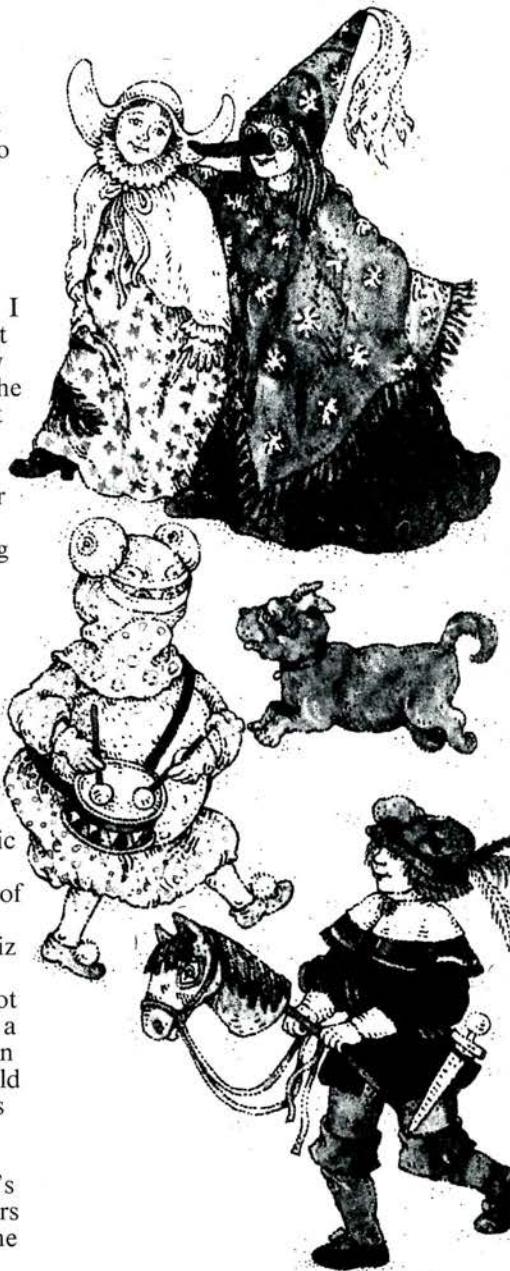
Once upon a time when the modern curriculum was very young, there was an extra and special activity called The School Play. This tended to win friends and influence people by spreading light amongst the performers and sweetness throughout the catchment area. In short, it was a Good Thing. Then came Child Drama. Thanks to Peter Slade, Brian Way, Dorothy Heathcote et al we began to realise not merely that the Play wasn't in fact the Thing, it wasn't even Good. On the contrary, it made enemies and repelled people by spreading sourness throughout the catchment area and darkness amongst the performers. Overnight — give or take a decade or two — Theatre was *out* and Therapy was *in*. And we all began to live happily ever after.

Of course, in thus summarising the origins and advance of Educational Drama I'm exaggerating... slightly. What's certain is that without the luminous pioneers I've mentioned it wouldn't have dawned on us that far from being 'extra' this special activity might even be *central* to the curriculum. So far, so very much better. Yet there was one small, unresolved problem.

Whatever the tactical need for playing it down (or downing the play) it wasn't possible to ignore completely the new unmentionable Theatre. What was to happen to the dramatic arts? How should they take their place alongside, say, the writerly arts or painterly arts or musical arts? Amidst all the *doing* of Drama wasn't there bound to be an element of *showing*, too? Hence arose a second wave of reformers — Christopher Parry, John Hodgson, Gavin Bolton — who started, painstakingly, to re-establish severed connections.

This is still going on today, a development I enthusiastically support. Which will explain why I hate John Inman's *Curtain Up!* so much. It turns an activity I love into something Amazingly Boring. Worse, it puts back the clock by feeding every prejudice about Theatre that's likely to afflict the wary Therapist. Yes, John Inman, I agree *Curtain Up!* makes no great claims for itself — a sort of family amusement first-aid kit for when the telly breaks down. I recognise that you pull off the difficult trick of talking directly to junior-age children without once looking over your shoulder to check out the grown-ups. I'll even admit to being charmed a bit by the same wry personality you project on screen. But what's it all in aid of, may I ask? True, no great harm will be done by your front-room concert-party and funfair and circus — or even your Cinderella with its woefully flat script. The point is that no great effort is required either. Kids will come away from the book with the notion that magic can be made with a few tricks of the trade and a certain breeziness of manner (kindly tell that to your next producer). Successful Showbiz — let alone Theatre — surely demands deeper roots than this, not to mention greater risk-taking and a more sustained commitment. As an introduction to 'the wonderful world of entertainment' *Curtain Up!* has all the profundity, poise and penetration of a motto in a Christmas cracker. Fortunately, it's so drably produced most youngsters will remember it for about the same length of time.

Much more haunting is Monika Laimgruber's *Let's Make a Play!* Though she's no more of a child-drama expert than John Inman, she hedges her bets shrewdly by presenting, story-style, a group of children working up their own version of Briar Rose. Narrative is kept to a minimum. The thrust of the book lies in the pictures — full page for the most part, and often double-spread — which lead us from the first idea of a show, through the details of preparation and rehearsal, to the final triumphant performance. No advice is given, no problems are solved. But what does come across strongly



'Come and see our play!' Some of the characters from *Let's Make a Play!*

in these busy, distinctive, colourful illustrations is a feeling of real children at play, rather than at a Play. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, there's also a rich sense of theatrical tradition made accessible even to the youngest reader.

The same sense pervades *Make Your Own Theatre*, written and illustrated by Peter K. Alfaenger. At first sight his brisk, tuppence-coloured cartoonery looks

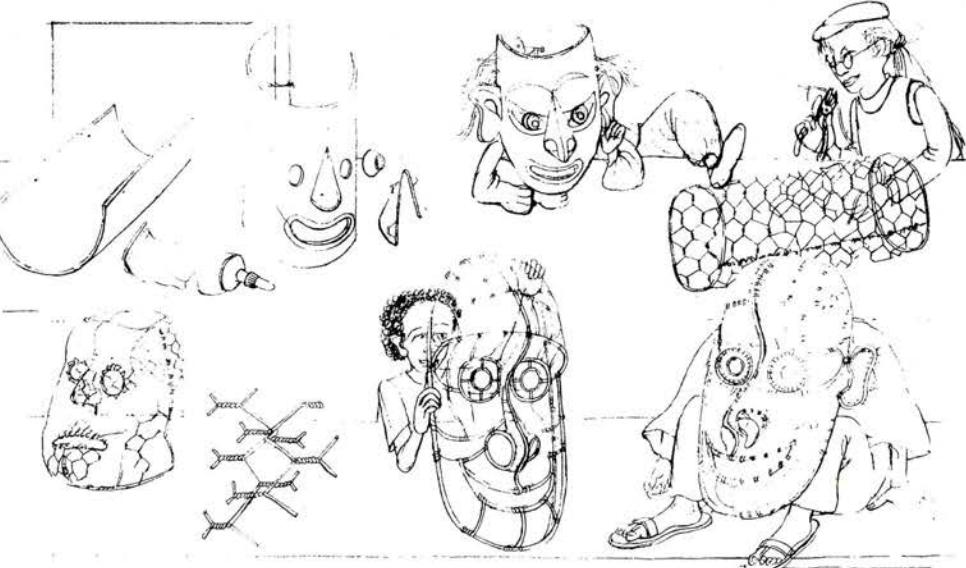
lightweight . . . until the sharpness of his observation is noticed and the craftiness of his diagrams. Take page 24, for example, which offers an instant, wordless insight into the rigging-system for stage curtains. Or the line drawings at the head of pages 30 and 31 — almost all you need to know about making masks conveyed in six, quick sketches. His text, moreover, even in translation, gives impressive support. Here, too, his aim is brevity and clarity:

'Costume is not necessarily a means of improving an actor. It is extra information for the audience.'

— a remark that's obvious once it's been said. He's equally adept at cutting philosophical cackle:

'The theatre isn't natural . . . The theatre isn't reality. A natural effect in the theatre has to be re-created so it's a new reality.'

— equally obvious, and equally beyond the ken of many a Method-monger and psycho-dramatist. Alfaenger's thumbnail accounts of lighting and design, language and movement are enough to stage-strike any tyro of middle-school age yet always he keeps instinctive faith with Child Drama principles: the games, routines, experiments and improvisations he suggests are the



Almost all you need to know about making masks from *Make Your Own Theatre*.

kind to be found in any good studio or classroom. For him it's as if the split between Theatre and Therapy had never occurred. He provides bright and lively evidence that Drama, when operating at its highest level of achievement, is composed of those elements that are common to both children's play and to theatre. What a relief to find such joyous seriousness after the superficiality of the unspeakable *Curtain Up!*

Don't ring us, John Inman, we'll ring you. ●

The Play's the Thing — or is it?

These reviews are a curtain-raiser to an occasional series on Children and Theatre which will appear in Books for Keeps next year. We will be looking at what Theatre has to offer children and young people, discussing different ways of approaching it, hearing from people who work in and write for the theatre, reviewing and recommending books and plays.

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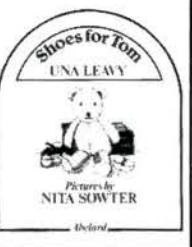
TOM'S GARDEN Una Leavy

Illustrated by Nita Sowter
The enchanting story of Tom's discovery that seeds don't simply turn into flowers overnight. £3.50



SHOES FOR TOM

Tom hates shoes . . . but when it snows and his feet begin to turn blue, the prospect of having some shiny red boots to wear is very tempting. £3.50



SEASONAL STORIES

As Christmas approaches and excitement mounts in homes and classrooms, there seems to be a particular need for stories set at this very special festival. It's a time for sharing old favourites in well-established rituals; but there's a place for new friends too. This year there is a plentiful supply on offer. Most are picture books but their appeal is across a wide age range.

We've picked some we think you might like to consider inviting to your story-time this Christmas.

Clement Moore, an American, wrote *The Night Before Christmas* for his children in 1822. The poem, originally called *A Visit from St Nicholas*, was published in a newspaper the following year and was largely responsible for creating our picture of Father Christmas as a jolly, fat old man with a white beard and dressed in furs. It has been a traditional part of American Christmases ever since and this year there seems to be a determined effort to make it part of ours too. There are at least three different versions on offer.

One, illustrated by Michael Hague, Benn, 0 510 00120 3, £3.95, is a pop-up.

This has some spectacular paper sculpture effects of 'St Nick', reindeer and sleigh on the housetop or soaring above snow clouds. Unfortunately, because parts of these are printed on only one side, each set piece can be viewed satisfactorily from only one angle — look from the side or back and the illusion is shattered by lots of plain white card.

This may keep the price down but it makes the book less attractive for using with a group of children who might otherwise be dazzled. There are also bits that move. Some tab-pulling makes Santa's 'little round belly' shake 'when he laughed like a bowl full of jelly'. Very entertaining. Unintentionally entertaining is another moveable where Santa zooms up the chimney but — at least in my copy — leaves his boots clearly visible in the fireplace. Children's reactions to that one vary from innocently awkward questions to facetious remarks about the length of Santa's legs. If I could borrow a copy, I'd use it in displays for its 3-D appeal; but for year after year durability I'd pick the version which appears on our cover.

The Night Before Christmas

Tomie de Paola, Oxford, 0 19 279758 1, £3.95

Apart from its richly unusual colours, beautiful design and decorated borders based on designs from New England quilts, what appeals to me most about this book is the way the pictures subtly but clearly establish a link between Santa Claus and the parents in the poem who witness his visit. Together, it is implied, they join in the magic conspiracy of Christmas present giving. Not an implication to be laboured or made explicit among those who share this lovely book; but an impression to leave lying in the mind.

In its third version the poem appears on tape as part of

Here Comes Christmas!

Macdonald Educational, 0 356 07541 9, £2.75 (inc. VAT)

This cassette tape runs for fifteen minutes (approx.) each side. Side One has an original story by Clive King (he wrote *Stig of the Dump*) called *Bells for Christmas*, with songs to fit written by Robert Pell and sung by children. It is about how Mr McCann the toy shop man, Sandra Twirl the checkout girl, Red-headed Roy the butcher's boy, Amelia Fife the farmer's wife, Mr Proctor who drives the 'copter and A. N. Other (guess who?) manage to get through the snow to ring the six bell peal which will wake the village for Christmas. Side Two is an anthology of Christmas poems (including *The Night Before Christmas*), songs and carols.



'When he had visited all the houses the Teddy Bear Postman opened the pillar box.' One of the delightful pages from Phoebe & Selby Worthington's **Teddy Bear Postman**, Warne.

Quality and presentation could have been improved in places, but as original material in a medium which doesn't offer a rich choice it's worth considering. Good potential for listening, joining in, acting out; or as a model for do-it-yourself.

Teddy Bear Postman

Phoebe and Selby Worthington, Warne, 0 7232 2768 3, £2.95

Teddy Bear Coalman is a book of enormous charm which has delighted children for years. No matter that he delivers the coal by horse and cart and is paid in pennies — such anachronisms are meaningless beside the comfortingly predictable story with its exciting and noisily repeated BANG, BANG, BANG as the sacks of coal are delivered. The same qualities are found in two new stories about the famous teddy bear. Last year he appeared as **Teddy Bear Baker**, and this year he's back as **Teddy Bear Postman**, still deliberately and delightfully out of step with modern technological innovation.

Teddy Bear Postman won't do much to develop the young child's concept of the Post Office at Christmas (any more than **Teddy Bear Coalman** or **Teddy Bear Baker** did for those industries). He's a one-bear operation again: wearing a holly-decked hat, he collects, postmarks, delivers, repacks (all by hand) in a world where people and teddy bears live and work side by side. It's a world where people are grateful for a job well done and a tired bear can hang up his Christmas stocking at the end of a satisfyingly well-ordered day. Old-fashioned? Perhaps on one level. But as food for the imagination it's warm and reassuring. Teach them about the Post Office some other time.

Also for the youngest

How Brown Mouse Kept Christmas
Clyde Watson, ill. Wendy Watson, Hamish Hamilton, 0 241 10505 6, £3.95

The awe and magic of Christmas are evoked in this unpretentious little book. A young

mouse leaves his attic home and ventures down to the 'people part of the house' to partake of the seasonal delights on the night before Christmas; he scurries from room to room nibbling and exploring, and returns safely to the mousehole before the sleeping household awakes in the morning. Soft, glowing colour-washed pictures complement a story that is a pleasure to share with the very young.

and

Lucy and Tom's Christmas

Shirley Hughes, Gollancz, 0 575 02970 6, £3.95

Two old friends make a most welcome return in an enchanting Christmas story which captures the warmth and excitement (not to mention the occasional tears) of the festive season; the sequence showing baby Elizabeth receiving, unwrapping and playing with everything but the contents of her present, and finally falling asleep with the effort, is simply beautiful. I'd like to think that the sharing of this book will become part and parcel of every young child's Christmas.



'Elizabeth only likes the wrapping paper on her present.' **Lucy & Tom's Christmas**.



'They all came down around the table to eat roast turkey, Christmas pudding and lots of other delicious things.' A warm family Christmas as seen by Shirley Hughes in *Lucy & Tom's Christmas* (Gollancz).

The Christmas Tomten

Viktor Rydberg, illustrated by Harald Wiberg (English adaptation by Linda M. Jennings), Hodder and Stoughton, 0 340 27065 9, £3.50

Another Christmas Eve story, this time drawing on Swedish folklore with its trolls and the Christmas Tomten who delivers Christmas gifts. Harald Wiberg's pictures, especially those of the snowy, tree-filled Swedish landscape, are a beautiful complement to the story of Little Vigg who travels with the Tomten to cottages, farms, grand houses, even the King's castle, and finds out more than just what everyone is getting for Christmas. A moral tale but told with humour and insight. And it ends with 'goodness, joy and light'. What could be more appropriate for Christmas? All ages.

Fair's Fair

Leon Garfield, pictures by Margaret Chamberlain, Macdonald, 0 354 08126 8, £3.25

'Jackson was thin, small and ugly, and stank like a drain.' So begins Leon Garfield's first picture book, a story set in a snowy Victorian London in the week before Christmas. Jackson has no mother, no father, no shoes worth mentioning. But he does have a moral philosophy, summed up in the title of the book, and a number of other qualities which lead him to share his hot pie with an enormous black dog. That is the beginning of a strange adventure which reaches its climax on Christmas Eve. A hugely satisfying tale of virtue tested and rewarded. Vividly told and just asking to be read aloud. Don't miss it.

Quincy

Tommy Steele, illustrated by Peter Wingham, Heinemann, 0 434 96455 7, £3.95

Another 'Celebrity Snare'? Not really, though it will undoubtedly sell more than it would if it had been written by Joe Bloggs. The plot isn't particularly original. On the night before Christmas Eve — the one night of the year that toys come alive — Quincy, the boy doll, sets out on a hazardous journey from the basement to the top floor of a huge toyshop to enlist the help of Santa Claus in saving him and all the other reject toys from the furnace. It's episodic, with some good set pieces.

Imagine the sort of story Tommy Steele would write for children — this is it, raised above the level of cliché by a cheerful warmth and directness in the telling. Read it to lower juniors in the week before the end of term and I'll bet a good time is had by all.

What-a-Mess and the Cat-next-door

Frank Muir, illustrated by Joseph Wright, Benn, 0 510 00107 6, £3.95

Christmas Eve, and What-a-Mess, the



Afghan puppy, is once again trying to do the right thing. This time he's helping out by dragging that old fir tree from the living room. Part of the appeal of these books lies in the miniature world of people and creatures which Joseph Wright creates, alongside the main story, in the pictures. He's as crazily inventive as ever. Read it and leave it around for the children to pore over at leisure.

A Day to Remember

words by Bernard Stone, illustration by Anton Pieck, Benn, 0 510 00113 0, £3.95

Anton Pieck, a Dutch artist, was born in 1895. His pictures show the Holland of his childhood or even earlier and are loving recreations of buildings, shops and, above all, people going about their everyday lives. Here, twenty-seven pictures are linked by a simple commentary. It is the feast of St Nicholas, nearly Christmas. Plump geese hang in the poulterers, the river freezes, everyone goes skating, St Nicholas arrives in procession, dressed as a bishop and accompanied by his assistant, Black Peter the sweep whose job is to punish all the bad children (although the commentary won't tell you that), the carol singers tour the city. The book seems to be an attempt to emulate *Our Home and Our Farm*, the turn-of-the-century Swedish classics by Carl Larsson (Methuen). It isn't as successful in that it lacks the unifying focus of a single family. Bernard Stone's words provide only a tenuous narrative thread. Nevertheless the pictures are endlessly fascinating and rich in opportunities for speculation and story-making with older children. ●

QUINCY

TOMMY STEELE

A Story for Children by
Illustrated by Peter Wingham

Reviews by Jill Bennett and Pat Triggs.

50 Years of Babar

Laurent de Brunhoff talked to Tony Bradman about his association with the famous elephant.

In 1931 Jean de Brunhoff was persuaded by his uncles — who were publishers — to publish a book he'd made from a story his wife had told their two sons. More Babar books followed, and popularity in France was succeeded by popularity elsewhere, including Britain, where the *Daily Sketch* serialised *Babar's Family* and *Babar and Father Christmas*.

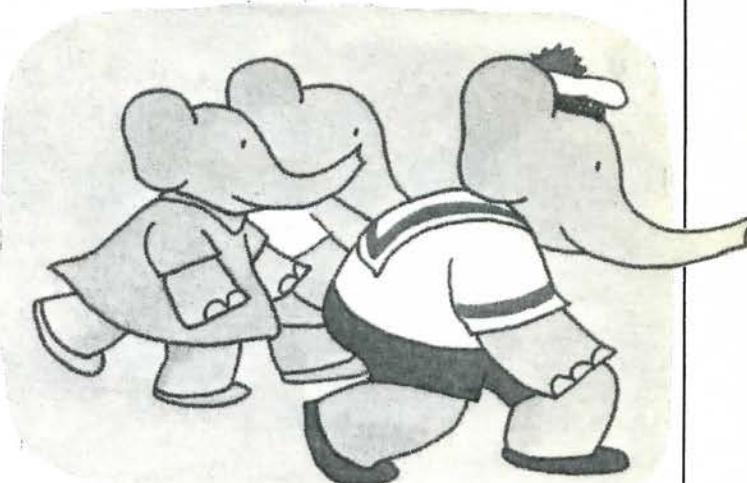
Sadly, Jean de Brunhoff died of tuberculosis in 1937, at the age of 36. Laurent, the eldest of the de Brunhoff's three children, and one of the original two Babar converts, helped to prepare the two last stories for publication in book form by doing some colouring. That, it seemed, was the end of Babar.

Laurent wanted to be a painter. Once the war was over, he went to live and paint in Paris. His father had been an impressionist painter as well as the creator of Babar, but Laurent was more interested in abstract art, and exhibited some work.

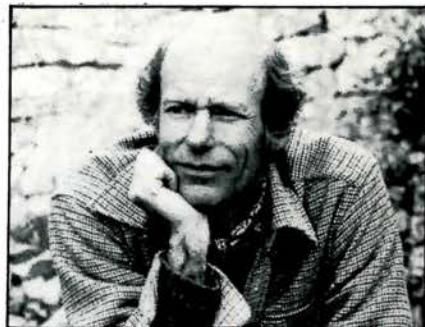
'One day I got to thinking that it was sad that there would be no more Babar stories. So I thought why not do one myself, and I started with cousin Arthur, who was almost a teenage character. After all, I was only 23 myself at the time.'

Babar and that Rascal Arthur was well received. Laurent says that many people didn't notice the difference between it and the original Babar stories. 'They thought that the Babar stories hadn't appeared for such a long time because of the war. Mind you, looking at it now I think it's far from perfect graphically.'

Now Laurent is 56, older than his father ever was and he has done more Babar stories than his father. He's had his problems. 'There



'Let's go,' said Flora, and they all crept silently out to the hallway. From *Babar and the Ghost*.



Laurent de Brunhoff

began to be a conflict between what I wanted to do as an artist and keeping faith with my father. I did try to stamp my personality on my books. I think now that the burden of my father has been lifted.' Some people say Laurent's books are not as good as his father's. 'I'm not being big-headed, but I do think some of my books are equal to my father's. I think that old criticism is just people being funny.'

More recently the Babar books have been strongly attacked for their attitudes and values. Some of them, critics say, display distinctly colonialist ideas, which are unacceptable today. Babar's relationship with the 'primitive' elephants of the tribe, and the results of his kingship present impressionable young children with unhelpful, even damaging, ideas.

'It's true that in the original Babar books he went to "civilised" countries and took back "civilisation" to his own country. Obviously we're more aware of these things nowadays, and if my father was alive today he wouldn't do such a story. I don't think it's particularly important anyway. Children won't be led into thinking along "colonialist" lines. I don't think a work of imagination will instil racial prejudice into children and I believe it's wrong to over-criticise books for this.'

This dismissal of the power of words and pictures to influence comes strangely from 'an artist'. Be that as it may, Laurent did take steps to have one of his books taken out of print in France and the United States. 'I had written a "black savage" into one book, and after it was finished I found it disturbing and worrying. So I had the book dropped.'

Criticism hasn't prevented the Babar books from being enormously popular. The stories have been adapted into cartoons and for the theatre and appear in many different languages.

What's the secret of all that success? Laurent puts it down to the de Brunhoff family temperament. After the initial invention by Madame de Brunhoff, de Brunhoff père never 'test-marketed' a story on his sons.

'I don't do that either. If you have to keep asking, then you can't write for children. I think that, like my father, I'm a sort of a dreamer, almost like a child. I like to travel in an imaginary world which is a mixture of reality and dream. And that's a children's world.' ●

Babar books are published by Methuen. The latest, published in September, is *Babar and the Ghost*, 0 416 21480 0, £3.95.

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NEWS



Jigsaw presenters Adrian Hedley and Janet Ellis with Pterry.



Knight takes on BBC titles

BBC Publications spent some time looking for the ideal publishing partner to take on their children's list. They finally decided to settle down with Knight Books and the first BBC/Knight titles came into the shops in October: Johnny Briggs and the Great Razzle Dazzle in the Jackanory series and Clive Doig's Second Book of Jigsaw Puzzles, a tie-in with the popular Jigsaw programmes now back on screen.

Let's hope that the new imprint keeps the quality of the old BBC list while managing to make the books more widely available at a more manageable price.

New Badges from Hertfordshire

The ever inventive librarians in Hertfordshire have come up with three super new badges. Orders up to 1000 — 11p each plus carriage and VAT. Contact Martin P Dudley, Assistant County Librarian, County Headquarters, Hertford SG13 8EJ. Tel. Hertford 54242, Ext. 5488.

- (a) Fox: Black outline, orange body with white muzzle and tip of tail, also ears. Black lettering. White book. White background.
- (b) Sheep: White, black outline with grey faces. Lettering orange. Bright green background.
- (c) Snake: Black outline and patches, also yellow. Black lettering. White book. Beige Background.

Read On!

The organisers of the mail order Bookworm Club — E.J. Arnold and Heffers — have launched a new paperback club for the over-twelves. The selection of books in their first Read On! Bulletin is varied and interesting and the presentation, in full colour, is certainly attractive and grown-up looking. For details of the scheme contact Read On!, Napier Place, Cumbernauld, Glasgow, G68 0DN.

South East Arts Shows the Way

Lucky you if you live in the south east, South East Arts has introduced a new scheme to help anyone who promotes a literary event which involves a visit from a recognised writer (children's writers included!).

The Writer in Person scheme ensures that organisers receive up to 70 per cent subsidy towards the fees and expenses of 'visiting prose writers'. (Poetry is looked after under another scheme.) This is in effect a comforting guarantee against loss and an encouragement to go ahead and plan. Other regions please take note.

Browse in Comfort

If you live in or near Sevenoaks, St Albans, Birmingham, Nottingham, Leeds or Manchester, the School Library Books Consortium will bring a display of recent titles from the publishers it represents (Faber & Faber, André Deutsch, Hamish Hamilton, Wayland and Blandford Press) to your school. The display is for exhibition only — you order through your normal supplier — but SLBC leave a list behind with all the ISBNs. The range is from picture books for infants to secondary fiction and reference books. You can also arrange a display for parents' evenings. For bookings in those areas until next May, contact Mo Heard or Helen Alexander, 3 Queen Square, London WC1 (Tel. 01-278 6881).

Centre for Children's Books

The Arts Council has given the National Book League a grant of £15,000 to help set up a reference centre for children's books at Book House in Wandsworth. As well as the existing reference library (which houses copies of all children's books published in the current twelve months) it will include the Signal Collection of In Print Poetry for Children and the Hans Christian Andersen Collection belonging to the International Board on Books for Young People. There will also be a comprehensive range of periodicals and information files. The Centre will be run by Beverley Mathias, the NBL's Children's Books Officer. Just call in office hours. Newly available from the NBL is *The Authors' and Illustrators' List* (£1.50 inc. postage) which lists over 200 authors, poets and illustrators who will take part in book events.

Children's Book Week — Bigger and Better

Judging from the number of exhausted but pleased-looking teachers I bumped into in the second week of October, CBW was a success. Over a thousand events around the country and a lot of coverage by the media nationally and locally must mean that there are a lot of children (and adults) who, however briefly, have been made conscious of books, perhaps in quite a new way. Building on that is the difficult bit and where school bookshops with their regular habit-forming presence have a big job to do.



Michelle Oberman

The many who contacted Michelle Oberman about CBW will be interested to know that she has moved from the BMC to take over Children's Publicity at Hamish Hamilton. So for help with Bogey Bonanzas, Gentleman Jim Read-ins in your local Public Convenience or Ramona Rave-ups in Reception classes — you know who to ask.



Puffins 1941-1981

Forty years ago *Worzel Gummidge* by Barbara Euphan Todd appeared in paperback. It was, as it turned out, an historic event: the first of a long line of distinguished Puffins. To celebrate forty years of Puffin publishing a special facsimile edition of *Puffin No. 1* is appearing. The original is now a collector's item — so if you've got one hang on to it.