

Christmas – A Time for Retro?

By **Mark Taha** - Dec 20, 2015



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This is the time of year when we tend to look back with nostalgia and wish for the way things were; rose-tinted glasses or not, but the evidence is clear that the annuals of days gone by were a lot better than today's. The *Schoolboys' Annuals* and old *Eagle Annuals* from the 1960s tried to entertain and "raise up"; today's seem out to dumb down even more.

People of my generation will no doubt share my memories of Billy Bunter, Jennings, William, the *Chalet School*, *Enid Blyton et al*, and want to pass them on to today's generation. The thing is, how do you find them? Most of them are either long out of print or available only in bowdlerised editions to please the PC crowd. How children can be encouraged to read about homosexuality and drugs but will be apparently traumatised by the phrase "a good spanking" rather than "a good telling-off" beggars belief.

For the *Chalet School* crowd and indeed other children's story writers like Monica Edwards of *Punchbowl Farm* and *Romney Marsh* fame and more obscure ones like Violet Needham and Clare Mallory, check out the website of *Girls Gone By* publications and take it from there. You can get the original unabridged edition with added features like forewords and historical explanations. You may not share some of the writer's attitudes, but Elinor Brent-Dyer wrote some excellent stories. There have also been quite a few *Chalet School* stories and books by other writers, some better than others.

Enid Blyton is still in both print and paperback; some of her series have been continued by other writers like Pamela Cox and Anne Digby, but they inevitably lack the "Blyton touch". As their books are stocked alongside her originals, look closely before buying, although they stand on their own merit.

For the rest – Bunter, Jennings, William – all appear to have been out of print for years. Frank Richards was the most prolific writer of all time (according to *The Guinness Book Of Records*), but Bunter books were last published in the 1990s. There are, however, societies for their enthusiasts: the *Old Boys' Book Club* and *Friars' Club* in his case, Jennings and William societies in the other. To buy the books, check out Ebay or Amazon; to read them, your local library should have or be able to obtain at least some of them.

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