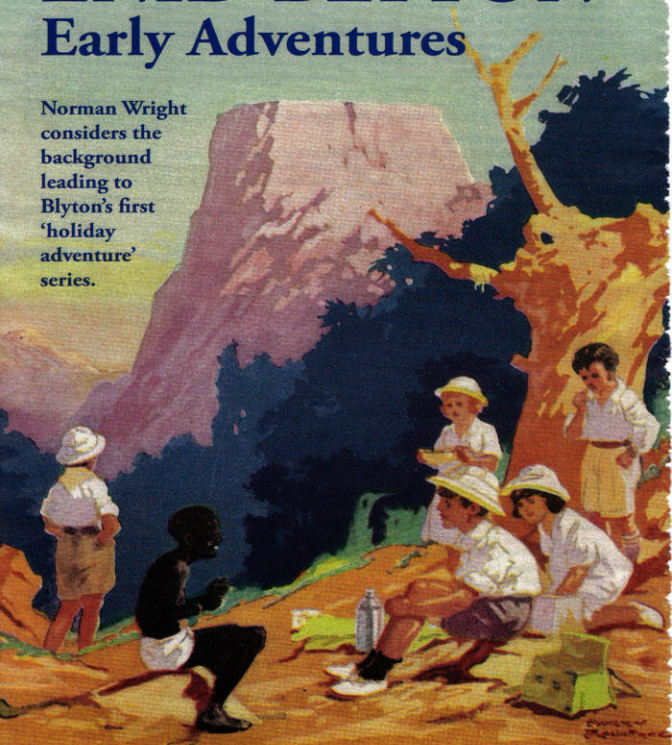


# ENID BLYTON

## Early Adventures

Norman Wright considers the background leading to Blyton's first 'holiday adventure' series.



**I**t may come as something of a surprise to those only familiar with Enid Blyton's large output of 'series' books – such as 'The Famous Five' (BMC 192), 'The Secret Seven' (BMC 227), the 'Adventure Series', (BMC 275) and the 'Find-Outers Series' (BMC 286) – to learn that, for the first decade and a half of her working life, her output consisted almost entirely of short stories, and that few of these were 'adventure'-based.

In 1922, the year her first book, 'Child Whispers', was published, she began writing a regular 'Enid Blyton's Children's Page' for *Teachers World* magazine. This usually consisted of a mix of factual items, often with natural history themes, together with a short story designed to be read to children as a classroom treat last thing of a Friday afternoon.

A few years later, in 1926, Enid took on the not inconsiderable task of writing the entire content for *Sunny Stories for Little Folks*, a fortnightly magazine of thirty two pages plus covers, aimed at younger readers and published by George Newnes. Initially many issues comprised her retellings of myths, legends and well-known classics. Issue No. 3, for example, was entitled 'Robin Hood and His Merry Men' and consisted of four inter-linked adventures of the Sherwood outlaw. 'Gulliver in Lilliput' formed No. 4, and six adventures of 'Hiawatha' filled No. 8. 'Brer Rabbit', who made his debut in No. 2 with seven short adventures, would go on to become an Enid regular over many years.

Initially the magazine had a two-colour cover and was priced at 2d. With issue No. 18, however, the price was increased to 3d and the cover printed in full colour. This format ran until October 1928. The following month, with issue No. 57, the magazine reverted to a two-colour cover with a distinctive red border. The price dropped back to the more affordable

2d and, for the rest of its run under its original title, the content became wholly short story in nature with no further issues devoted solely to any single character. This was considered to be the format that best suited readers, offering stories that could either be read to children or by children at a single sitting.

It should be pointed out here that Blyton was very astute at making the most of her writing and nearly all of the stories written for *Sunny Stories for Little Folks* (and its successor, *Enid Blyton's Sunny Stories*) were subsequently collected in book form. These collections account for a large proportion of Blyton's legendary number of published books.

Between the magazine's inception and the early '30s, very little in the way of contemporary adventure stories were featured. Possibly such themes were considered unsuitable for the young readership at which *Sunny Stories for Little Folks* was aimed. One of the few stories in the genre that did feature was "The Secret Cave" in issue No. 61, published in January 1929. This story concerns a group of young children who discover a secret passage that leads to a cave where treasure is concealed. The recovery of the hoard allows the owner of the house, who was on the point of selling the property due to lack of funds, to pay for its upkeep and thus continue living there. While far more juvenile in construction and characterisation than most of Blyton's later adventure novels it does contain the embryonic blueprint for one of her favourite and most used themes: secret passages leading to hidden treasure. The story was collected in 'Chimney Corner Stories' (*National Magazine* 1946) and recently made more widely available in 'Enid Blyton's Adventure Treasury' (Hodder 1999) compiled by the present writer together with Mary Cadogan.

Readers of that issue of *Sunny Stories for Little Folks* were probably unaware of the fact that Enid had used the basic plot of "The

# SUNNY STORIES

For **LITTLE FOLKS**

## GULLIVER IN LILLIPUT



2<sup>d</sup>

ERNEST  
NO. 4

EDITED BY ENID BLYTON

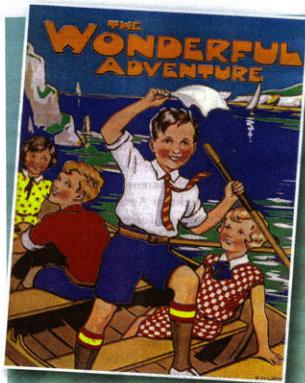
Secret Cave" in an expanded form two years earlier in "The Wonderful Adventure", an obscure little book put out by Birn Brothers, a publisher that specialised in cheaply produced – and cheaply sold – books and annuals.

"The Wonderful Adventure" is a large format, picture-board covered book of 62 pages. Birn Brothers books are notoriously thin on the ground and only two copies of this 1927 title are known to survive. Its existence was brought to the attention of the present writer some years ago by a *Book and Magazine Collector* reader whose copy of the scarce book was eventually purchased for the Enid Blyton Society (BMC 210).

The story, concerning a search for a lost treasure that will save a family from financial ruin, contains many elements that later became an integral part of Blyton's various adventure and mystery series. There are secret passages, smuggler's caves and the obligatory treasure-filled chests. While rather naively written and lacking much of the excitement and tension that became an integral part of her later novels, as the earliest 'long' Blyton adventure so far discovered "The Wonderful Adventure" is of significance in tracing the chronology of her story-telling technique. It is an attractive production with full-colour covers and numerous red and black internal illustrations by K.M. Waterson. It is also, incidentally, one of only a couple of Blyton's stories told in the first person. Because of the book's rarity and importance to collectors the Enid Blyton Company kindly allowed the Enid Blyton Society to reprint the book, in half-size facsimile form, limited to 200 copies, as part of the programme booklet for the 1999 Enid Blyton Day.

*Sunny Stories for Little Folks* continued virtually unchanged until the end of 1936. In January 1937 the magazine was re-vamped, becoming a weekly with its title changed to *Enid Blyton's Sunny Stories*. Enid now had

more control over the type of content the magazine would include. She also began each issue with an introductory 'letter' that chatted about the stories therein and talked about her own children, pets and other aspects of her personal life. This feature had originally been introduced into *Sunny Stories for Little Folks* in November 1928 but at that time only ran for 30 issues. Every issue of *Enid Blyton's Sunny Stories* contained a 'letter' and over the years this became a powerful tool that Enid often used to promote her own books. Another significant change was the introduction of a serial story. The first was "Adventures of the Wishing Chair" that began in No. 1 and continued for thirty-six issues. This was Blyton at her fairy story fantasy best and the serial was an instant hit with readers. Its runaway success may have prompted her





## THE SECRET ISLAND

### 15.

# JACK NEARLY GETS CAUGHT



to try something a little different as a follow up and when, in issue No. 36, "Adventures of the Wishing Chair" came to an end, she told her readers that the following week they could read the first instalment of a new serial called "The Secret Island".

The premise of "The Secret Island" is very simple. After their parents, both aviators, go missing on a flight to Australia, Mike, Peggy and Nora Arnold are forced to live on a farm run by their Aunt Harriet and Uncle Henry. The story opens two years after their parents' disappearance and by then it seems unlikely that Captain and Mrs Arnold will ever return. The children are having a miserable life with their mean-spirited relatives who now, with apparently little chance of the children's parents returning, see them as a financial burden. Mike, Peggy and Nora have little to eat, are constantly beaten and are used as cheap labour on the farm. Their only moments of

joy are when they are out in the fields with their friend, Jack, a farm boy of indeterminate age who lives on his grandfather's farm.

Like the three Arnold children, Jack is also used as cheap farm labour but he goes about his work with a cheerful, undaunted spirit. From Jack the Arnold children learn many country skills: fishing and snaring rabbits, and the ways of the creatures that inhabit the woods and fields. He seems to have an unlimited fund of knowledge and resourcefulness, all of which he shares with his three friends. He also knows of a 'secret' island on a large, wood-edged lake and promises to show it to them by using an old boat that he has found and repaired.

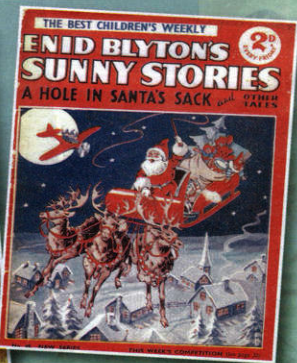
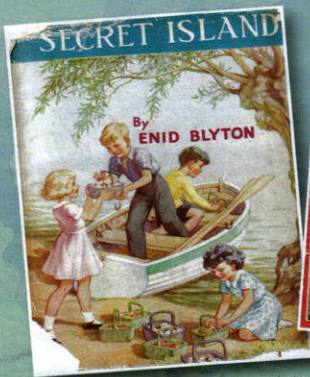
The island is idyllic, with freshwater streams, willow trees, blackberry and raspberry bushes and sheltering caves. It is not long before the four children decide to run away from their lives of toil and live in secret on the island.

Taking with them as many useful items as they can lay their hands on – including seeds to grow there and the odd hen – they carry out their plan and escape to begin their new life.

The appeal of the story was immediate with young readers who relished the carefree life that Blyton depicted the four children leading on their Crusoe Island. "It is a most exciting tale about four children who run away to a secret island they know, and the story will tell you how they live there alone," ran Blyton's enthusiastic introduction in her 'letter' at the start of issue No. 37. It was a story that gave her plenty of scope to bring her own love of the natural world into play and she introduced many tit-bits of countryside knowledge into the story as the children planted various crops and used all sorts of natural resources to make their lives more comfortable. They even managed to take a cow to the island to

provide them with milk and cream. Later, when they were well established in their new home, the four harvested some of the island's natural produce and Jack, who was quickly established as leader of the group, rowed to a town at the far end of the lake to sell some of this at market, using the cash raised to buy much needed supplies to last them through the coming winter.

Throughout the story Blyton scattered moments of tension as the children avoid being discovered and run the gauntlet of 'trippers' visiting the island and Jack narrowly escaping 'capture' on one of his visits to the market. It was on his final trip to the town that Jack learns of the reappearance of Captain and Mrs Arnold, which results in the children being reunited with their parents. In true Blyton style the Arnolds buy the Secret Island, adopt Jack as their own son, and then promptly send all four children off to boarding school!



THE BEST CHILDREN'S WEEKLY

2<sup>D</sup>  
EVERY FRIDAY

# ENID BLYTON'S SUNNY STORIES

THE SECRET OF SPIGGY HOLES *and* OTHER TALES



No. 143. NEW SERIES

THIS V

## The SECRET of SPIGGY HOLES



"The Secret Island" ran in *Enid Blyton's Sunny Stories* from issue No. 37 (24<sup>th</sup> September 1937) to issue No. 57 (11<sup>th</sup> February 1938), each episode copiously illustrated by E.H. Davie. With the exception of the chapter title illustrations used at the start of each serial episode, and a few tailpiece drawings, these illustrations were used when the story was published in book form. In her 'letter' the week the final episode appeared Blyton wrote: "I know you want all the "Secret Island" in a big book to itself, just as you had "The Adventures of the Wishing Chair" – and I will tell you when the book is ready, so that you may get it if you badly want it."

They did not have long to wait. "The Secret Island" was published in book form by Basil Blackwell in September 1938. The first edition, bound in blue cloth, sported a splendid jacket with the front illustration depicting the children loading up the boat ready for their departure to the island. The front title lettering is beige against a green background. The spine of the first edition jacket carries an illustration depicting the children carrying out various chores on the island.

In March 1939 the first cheap edition was published. This was bound in red cloth, had a colour picture onlay and a glassine wrapper. Later Blackwell editions had jackets that retained the original first edition front illustration but bore white, pictureless spines with blue lettering. The front lettering on reprints was white on a blue ground.

The first edition of "The Secret Island" in a jacket is a book of legendary scarcity – I know of only three copies. If you can find one for sale the price will be in the region of eight hundred to a thousand pounds. A VG first without a jacket sells for around £80-£100. Fortunately the Basil Blackwell reprints contain all the Davie illustrations and are attractive volumes. A reprint of "The Secret Island" from the 1940s or '50s, with a jacket,

can still be found for less than fifty pounds.

"The Secret Island" was a huge success and pointed the direction Blyton's writing would take over the ensuing two decades. She would continue turning out short stories for magazines and collections but a large part of her future output would be devoted to novel length stories. Her readers, it seemed, had an almost insatiable appetite for tales of mystery and adventure of the kind that Blyton was proving so adept at writing.

There was a short break from novel length serials in *Enid Blyton's Sunny Stories* before she started off in a new direction in April 1938 with a circus adventure: "Mr Galliano's Circus". This was followed by a fantasy, "The Enchanted Wood", in October 1938 and a further circus story, "Hurrah For the Circus", that began in May 1939. Then, in October 1939 (No. 143), Mike, Nora, Peggy and Jack made a welcome return to the pages of *Enid Blyton's Sunny Stories* in an adventure entitled "The Secret of Spiggy Holes". This was a seaside mystery set in Cornwall at the village of Spiggy Holes, which, we are told, was "about forty miles" from the lake where the Secret Island was situated. The cover of *Enid Blyton's Sunny Stories* containing the opening episode bore a suitably evocative illustration by E.H. Davie depicting the children approaching their destination in a horse drawn wagonette with the sea and cliffs to their left.

Having disposed of the children at boarding school during term-time, Captain and Mrs Arnold are avoiding much contact with them during the holiday by conveniently travelling to Ireland to lecture on their flying adventures.

While at Spiggy Holes the children stay in a quaint old building named 'Spy-Hole', under the care of Miss Dimity, a resourceful elderly lady who they quickly nickname 'Dimmy'. 'Spy-Hole' has its own tower and, from their rooms in this vantage point, the children are



able to see the tower of 'Old House' and thus begins their adventure.

With towers, caves and secret passages, Blyton – and her readers – were in their element. The adventure introduced the final permanent member of the group, Paul, a prince of the kingdom of Baronia, whom the four children rescue from kidnappers and hide on their Secret Island.

"The Secret of Spiggy Holes" ran in *Enid Blyton's Sunny Stories* until 15<sup>th</sup> March 1940 (No. 166). In her 'letter' accompanying the final instalment Enid wrote: "You can buy their adventures in one big book now – "The Secret of Spiggy Holes", published by Blackwell's at 4s. 6d., with plenty of pictures. I know that most of you long to get your favourite stories put into a big book, so I do this for you as soon as ever I can." We hope that Blyton was thinking solely of her readers' well-being when she enthused thus!

There does, however, seem to have been a slight delay with the publication this time, possibly due to wartime paper shortages, for "The English Catalogue of Books" lists the first edition as appearing in May 1940, with a cheap reprint following in July of that year. Later reprints of the book list July 1940 as the first edition date.

Whichever month it actually appeared, the first edition of "The Secret of Spiggy Holes" was published by Blackwell, bound in red cloth and containing internal illustrations by E.H. Davie, taken from the *Enid Blyton's Sunny Stories* serialisation. The jacket illustration was by Harry Rountree and, as with "The Secret Island", the first edition jacket bore an illustration on its spine, in this case depicting the children in a boat looking back towards the tower of 'Old House'. The first cheap edition was bound in blue with a colour picture onlay and a glassine wrapper. Later editions were published with wrappers and, although these bore the Rountree front

jacket illustration, they had non-illustrated white spines, bearing only title lettering, author credit and publisher.

No further books in the 'Secret' series were serialised in *Enid Blyton's Sunny Stories* but the popularity of the characters ensured that Blyton did not neglect them for long and the third book, "The Secret Mountain", was published by Blackwell in September 1941. This is perhaps the weakest book of the series. The plot involves the children, their ranks now swollen to five with the inclusion of Prince Paul, searching Africa for Captain and Mrs Arnold who have, once again, gone missing in their aeroplane! While totally at home describing the English rural scene, Blyton seems out of her depth in the jungle and mountains of Africa and the plotline grates at times.

Collectors may find some confusion in recognising the first edition of this title, as a reprint, bearing the same first edition date, was published shortly afterwards. The true first is a chunky volume, a full inch and a quarter thick, while the 'rogue' reprint is less than an inch across. The cover art and internal black and white illustrations were all by Harry Rountree. As with its predecessors, the first edition jacket of "The Secret Mountain" has a pictorial spine that is not present on any of the ensuing reprints.

Between publication of "The Secret Mountain" and the next book in the series, Enid Blyton created what were to become her most popular and enduring characters, The Famous Five, and by the time the fourth 'Secret' book was published the second Famous Five title was already in the shops and the success of 'The Five' would soon eclipse the earlier series.

"The Secret of Killimooiin", published by Blackwell in October 1943, was another overseas adventure. This time it was set in Baronia, the homeland of Prince Paul, and

READY SHORTLY

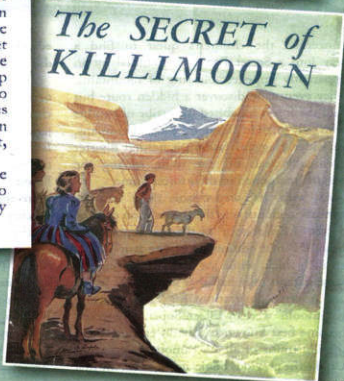
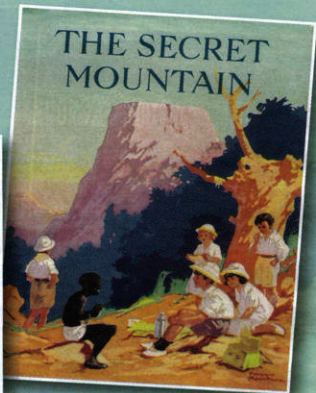
## THE SECRET FOREST

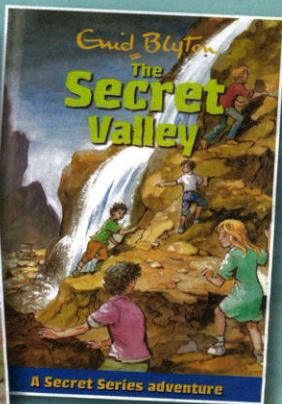
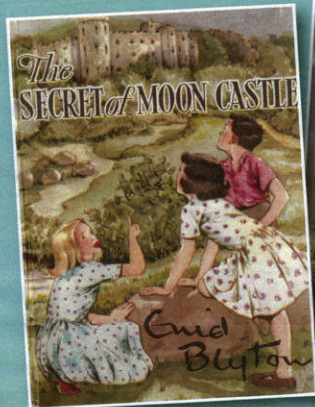
by  
*Enid Blyton*

This is the fourth book of the exciting adventures of the children who have appeared in those three popular books, "The Secret Island," "The Secret of Spiggy Holes," and "The Secret Mountain."

Mike, Jack, Peggy, Nora, and their friend, the little Prince Paul of Baronia, are here again—this time in the wild country of Baronia, Prince Paul's own country. The Secret Forest is a mysterious place set in the heart of an impassable ring of steep mountains. How the children get to it, and the extraordinary adventures they have in the strange Killimooin Mountains and the dark Secret Forest, make a most exciting book.

It is an Enid Blyton Book, and one of her best—one more to be added to the long list of well-loved tales by this popular children's writer.





concerned the children's quest to find a way into a Secret Forest surrounded by an apparently impenetrable ring of mountains. They eventually discover a hidden route but find the forest inhabited by a tribe of bandits who sally forth to plunder the local Baronians. In Rider Haggard fashion a natural disaster eventually seals off the route leaving the bandits marooned in their forest home.

As with its predecessor there can be confusion identifying the first edition of "The Secret of Killimooiin" as the first reprint also bears the first edition date. The true first is an inch thick, while the reprint, bearing the same date, is only half that width. The jacket and internal illustrations for "The Secret of Killimooiin" were by Eileen Soper, who would become best known to Blyton enthusiasts as the illustrator of all 21 Famous Five novels. Unlike the previous books in the series the first

edition jacket of "The Secret of Killimooiin" did not have a pictorial spine.

There is some speculation as to whether or not the title of this book was editorially changed at the last moment. On the front jacket flap of the 1943 reprint of "The Secret Island" is a 'ready shortly' advert heralding the fourth book in the series as "The Secret Forest", a title that would seem to have far more appeal to young readers than the rather obscure 'Killimooiin'. Award Publications Limited, the current publishers of the 'Secret' series, recently changed the title back to "The Secret Forest" and report that sales have subsequently increased.

With the success of the Famous Five and Blyton's commitment to a number of other new mystery and adventure series begun during the 1940s, she rather ignored the 'Secret' series and readers had to wait a decade

for the fifth and final book to appear. This was "The Secret of Moon Castle", published by Basil Blackwell in 1953. With this title Enid was back on familiar territory, creating the kind of atmosphere and situations in an English landscape that her readers expected and loved.

The five children and 'Dimmy' are staying at Moon Castle, rented on behalf of the King and Queen of Baronia as a holiday home for their family and staff. With the Baronians due to arrive at the castle in a week the children have just enough time beforehand to discover secret passages and uncover a dastardly gang of foreigners up to no good in the neighbourhood! Despite leaving a mass of loose ends the story was a typically satisfying Blyton adventure yarn of the type she had become so accomplished at writing during the late 1940s and early '50s.

The illustrations for "The Secret of Moon Castle" were by Dorothy Hall who also painted the attractive wrap-around jacket illustration. Her fine depiction of the five children, with the castle in the background, was also used for the back and front endpapers.

The 'Secret' series remains popular with young readers and is still in print, published by Award. In 2009 a 'new' title, "The Secret Valley", was added to the series. This 'continuation' novel was written by Trevor Bolton, a Blyton enthusiast, who went to great pains to keep the story true to Enid Blyton's

originals and included many references to past adventures that the children had shared. To coincide with this addition to the series Award commissioned renowned illustrator Val Biro to paint new covers for all six books.

The five books that make up the original 'Secret' series form a microcosm of Blyton's novel length output, spanning, as they do, her three most productive decades. We have the nineteen thirties charm of "The Secret Island" that, for all its naivety, brims with enthusiasm and draws the reader irresistibly into the story. The more experimental plots of "The Secret Mountain" and "The Secret of Killimoooin" reflect something of the decade in which they were written. The final book in the series, "The Secret of Moon Castle", is from a period when Blyton's writing, despite being more formalistic in structure, is totally assured. Anyone seeking to understand the development of Blyton's writing and her continuing appeal to children could do no better than read through this series. Copies of the Basil Blackwell hardback editions also make a very attractive display on the bookshelf.

*Thanks to Tony Summerfield of the Enid Blyton Society ([tony@enidblytonsociety.co.uk](mailto:tony@enidblytonsociety.co.uk)) for assistance, especially with scans of the first edition jackets of the first three 'Secret Series' books.*

## The 'Secret' series and other books discussed in this article.

### Prices for first edition books in VG condition without (and with) dustjackets

THE WONDERFUL ADVENTURE (illustrations by K.M. Waterson) (Birn Brothers [1927]) .....	£800-£1000 (N/A)
THE SECRET ISLAND (illustrated by E.H. Davie) (Basil Blackwell 1938) .....	£80-£100 (£800-£1000)
THE SECRET OF SPIGGY HOLES (illustrated by E.H. Davie) (Basil Blackwell 1940) .....	£50-£60 (£400-£500)
THE SECRET OF MOUNTAIN (illustrated by Harry Rountree) (Basil Blackwell 1941) .....	£20-£35 (£250-£400)
THE SECRET OF KILLIMOONIN (illustrated by Eileen Soper) (Basil Blackwell 1943) .....	£20-£30 (£150-£250)
THE SECRET OF MOON CASTLE (illustrated by Dorothy Hall) (Basil Blackwell 1953) .....	£15-£25 (£60-£80)