

Girls' story papers, comics & annuals

With story papers and comics for boys dominating the marketplace it would be easy to believe that there was little in the way of girls' papers to interest the collector. This could not be further from the truth, according to Norman Wright and David Ashford

No. 1 OF A GRAND SCHOOL STORY PAPER!

THE
SCHOOL FRIEND

Every **1st** Thursday

No. 1. Vol. 1.

Three-Halfpence.

Week Ending May 17th, 1919.



VAL OF BESSIE BUNTER!

Can you guess from "The Girl of the Year" Name? Complete in this issue.

THE SCHOOLGIRLS' FAVOURITE.

The **SCHOOL FRIEND**



A delightful school story, complete in this issue, featuring a charming heroine.



MOIRA
The **MAGNIFICENT!**

By
EILEEN McKEAY.

Week Ending June 27th, 1920.

No. 17 (New Series). Vol. 1.

The first issue of *School Friend*, from May, 1919, and a later edition from 1925, when flappers were all the rage!

Girls And Boys Penny Magazine, published by Strange between 1832 and 1833, may not have been the first weekly aimed at a young female audience but it certainly gives some indication that, almost from the beginning of the era of cheap mass publishing, entrepreneurs were quick to see the potential market. By the 1890s there was a plethora of periodicals with such titles as: *Girls Best Friend* (1898), *Girls Favourite* (1899), *Girls Friend* (1899) and *Girls Realm* (1898). One of the most successful and long-lived girls' publications inaugurated during this period was *Girls Own Paper*, first published by the Religious Tract Society in January 1880, as a companion to their *Boys Own Paper*, launched the previous year. Early issues of *GOP* were aimed more at young women than girls but as time passed the target readership age group was lowered.

Particularly sought after issues from the early decades of the paper's history are two containing the earliest known stories by Richmal Crompton. The first of these, entitled "Thomas", appeared in the issue for January 1918 and pre-dated her first 'Just

85

serials to the paper: "Patch and a Pawn" in volume 60 and "Peggy and the Brotherhood" in volume 57. This latter volume is particularly sought after as it contains "The Robins Make Good" by Elinor Brent-Dyer, the only story she contributed to GOP.

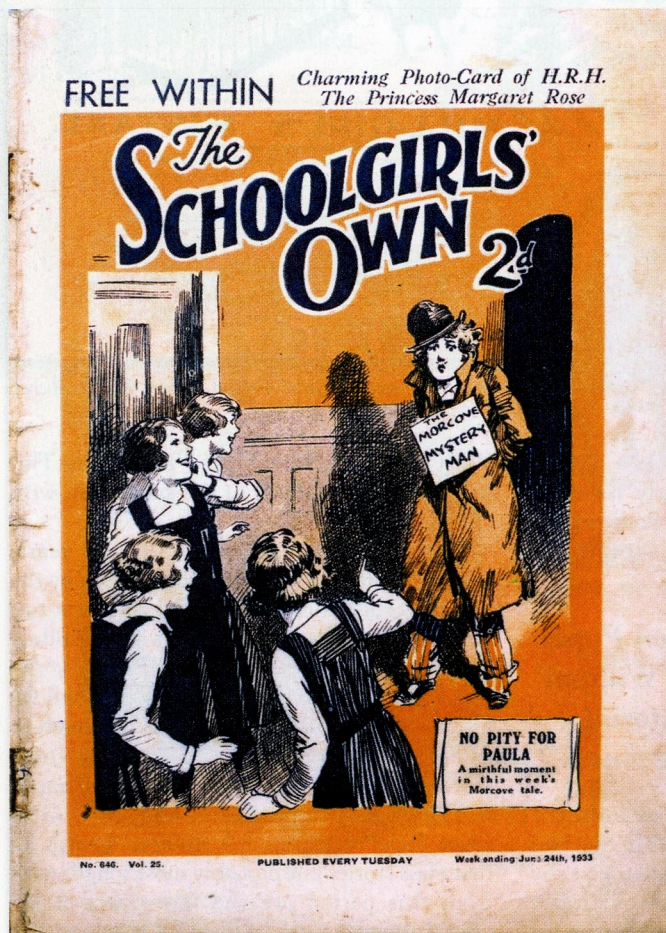
From a slightly later period but equally collectable are the issues containing the exploits of Worrals, W.E. Johns' no-nonsense WAAF, who made her debut in the pages of *Girls' Own Paper* in October 1940 (volume 62), in the first episode of "Worrals of the WAAFS". This volume is particularly collectable as it also contains "The Ravensdale

Mystery", a wartime school story of fifth-column activity written by W.E. Johns under his William Earle by-line.

The success of "Worrals of the WAAFS" led to a second serial, "Worrals Carries On", beginning in October 1941, immediately after the culmination of the first adventure. The 'hat trick' was made when "Worrals Flies Again" began serialisation from October 1942, the month after "Flies Again" came to an end. Two further Worrals serials ("Worrals in the Wilds" 1945-6, and "Worrals Down Under" 1946-7) and one short story ("Worrals Works it Out" September 1947) were also published in GOP.

The first collectable Amalgamated Press weekly was The School Friend

While *Girls Own Paper* was aimed primarily at a middle and upper class readership, the Amalgamated Press, publishers of a mass of cheap weeklies for all types of readership, offered a large selection of titles for the less affluent reader. From the Edwardian era many Amalgamated Press girls' titles offered a mix of very varied fiction, often contrasting the downright hilarious with the ultra-melodramatic. Stories bore such titles as: "Fed Up With the Mill", "On Her Wedding Day" and "At School Together". Editors evidently believed that these tales, frequently with 'rags to riches' themes, appealed to their readers. The Christmas 1919 issue of *Girls Friend*, for example, begins with "A Mill-Girl's Mistake", continues with "My Lady Nobody", has a humorous

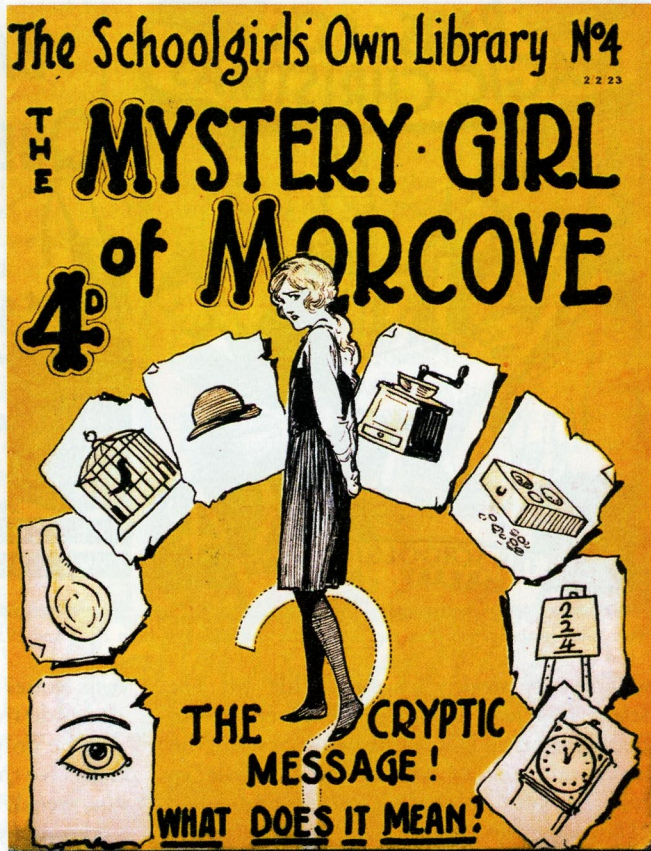


Schoolgirls Own, with a splendid Leonard Shields cover from June 1933.

school story entitled "Chums at School", becomes more dramatic with "A Ruined Life" and rounds off with "A Boxer's Sweetheart". Viewed today these stories offer a fascinating glimpse into a bygone age yet, as we shall point out later on in this feature, forty years on little had changed in many girls' comics – save for the length of the skirts and the fact that the stories were in picture strip form. Stories of mill girls and unrequited love continued but a new breed of female readers, growing up after the Great War, demanded more adventurous fare and editors began to realise that, like their brothers, many girl readers had a predilection for the delights of the school story.

The first really collectable Amalgamated Press school-story weekly for girls was *The School Friend*, launched in May 1919. The title story, "The Girls of Cliff House School", featured Marjorie Hazeldene, Bessie Bunter and the other Cliff House girls. It appeared under the by-line of Hilda Richards but was, in fact, the work of Charles Hamilton, better known as Frank Richards, creator of Billy Bunter, Harry Wharton and the other boys of Greyfriars School. Despite his unique talent as a writer of stories for boys, Hamilton did not quite ring the bell with female readers and after a few issues the writing chores in *The School Friend* were taken over by other hands, most notably Horace Phillips, Reginald Kirkham and John Wheway.

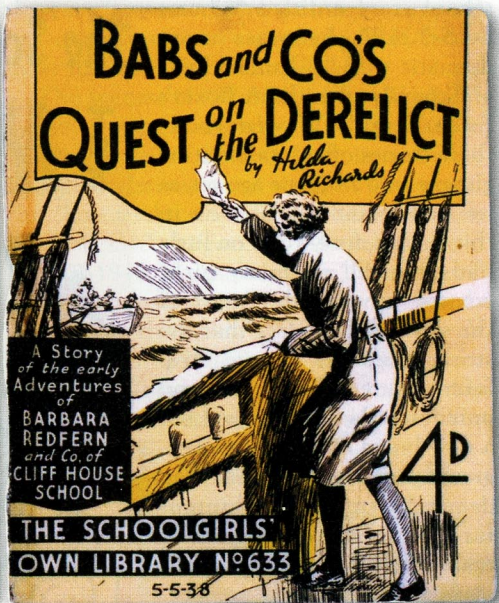
The first series of *School Friend* ran until February 1925, when it was replaced by the slightly smaller format 'new series'. Throughout its run of 532 issues most of the artwork for the Cliff House stories was provided by



The first Morcove issue of the very collectable *Schoolgirls' Own Library* from February 1923.

George M. Dodshon. While not the world's greatest artist, he did bring a feeling of continuity to the stories. The costumes changed – from a near-Edwardian look in the first issue to a rather 'flapperish' depiction during the 1920s – but the characters remained essentially the same and his illustrations are fondly remembered by readers. The 'new series' of *School Friend* lasted until 1929 when it was remodelled and became *The Schoolgirl*. Slightly shorter exploits of Bessie Bunter & Co. continued in the newly titled weekly until that paper came to an end in May 1940.

The success of *School Friend* prompted the Amalgamated Press to launch another



Two 'Cliff House' issues from the 'Schoolgirls Own Library' from 1935 and 1938 respectively.

school-story weekly for girls. This was *The Schoolgirls Own*, featuring the adventures of Betty Barton and Co. of Morcove School, the inaugural issue of which went on sale in February 1921. According to Lofts and Adley (*The Men Behind Boys' Fiction*, Howard Baker 1970) every one of the Morcove stories in *Schoolgirls Own* – all of which appeared under the Marjorie Stanton byline – was written by Horace Phillips, a prolific writer, and editor of several Amalgamated Press publications.

The stories were immensely popular and Schoolgirls' Own ran for almost 800 issues

The stories were immensely popular and *Schoolgirls Own* ran for almost 800 issues. Resplendent in its orange and blue wraps, the paper owed more than a little of its appeal to the classy Leonard Shields artwork that graced many of its covers. In 1936 *Schoolgirls Own* was swallowed up by *The Schoolgirl*, where for a few

years stories of Morcove school were published alongside those featuring Cliff House.

The only Amalgamated Press girls' paper to survive the War was *Girls' Crystal*, a mixed-story weekly started in 1935. Its range of stories – school, mysteries, romances, eastern adventures, etc. – appealed to a broad audience that kept it popular with readers throughout the 1930s, '40s and into the '50s when it was given a facelift and updated to include picture strips as well as text stories. It is interesting to note that in the 'swinging sixties' the plot content of many of the strips harked back to the pre-war themes of rags to riches, girls bringing up families after the mother dies or goes into hospital. Whatever the age, it seems that readers' tastes in escapist literature changed very little over the decades.

While individual stories in *Schoolgirls Own* and *School Friend* could be read and enjoyed by the casual reader, for the most part they were written in 'series' with the stories in perhaps seven or eight issues forming a complete adventure, typically featuring the girls on holiday or the introduction of myste-

rious new girls/schoolteachers. Runs of both weeklies are hard to find and this makes it difficult for collectors to build up complete series of stories. For this reason a publication that is extremely popular with aficionados is *The Schoolgirls Own Library*. This was one of the series of pocket-sized publications issued by the Amalgamated Press that reprinted series of stories from many of their weekly story papers. *The Schoolgirls Own Library* began tentatively in November 1922, with one number being issued a month. However, the publisher's caution was unfounded and, by February 1923, circulation was strong enough to warrant two titles per month. Two years later the monthly quota rose to three issues and, in 1929, to four issues per month.

The Schoolgirls Own Library regularly reprinted Morcove stories from *Schoolgirls Own Weekly*, thus making it possible to read an entire series without the necessity of struggling to build up a run of the weeklies. The 'library' also reprinted series from *School Friend*, *Girls' Crystal* and *The Schoolgirl*.

The first series of *The Schoolgirls Own Library*, issues with distinctive mustard-yellow covers, fell victim to wartime paper shortages in June 1940. Copies are now very collectable, with issues featuring Morcove and Cliff House fetching between £9 and £10 each. *The Schoolgirls Own Library* was one of only a handful of Amalgamated Press 'libraries' to resume publication after the war. The 'second series' began in October 1946 and ran for a healthy 410 issues, finally coming to an end in September 1963. Morcove or Cliff House were not featured in the second series, which is consequently far less collectable than its pre-war predecessor. An informative index to

both series of *The Schoolgirls Own Library* was compiled by Dennis Bird, Ray Hopkins and Arthur Southway in 1992. A new edition of this 44-page index was published in 2001 and is still in print.

Far easier to find than *The Schoolgirl Own Library* are copies of the various girls' annuals issued by the Amalgamated Press during the 1920s and '30s. One of the earliest of these was *The Schoolgirls Own Annual*, first published in 1923 as a quality production printed on art paper stock with full colour covers. Within its packed pages were stories, features on Morcove and its characters, as well as a mix of historical and adventure tales. The annual was always superbly illustrated with a selection of colour plates and many full-page half tones. The large print-runs that this publication

Girls' Fun

Christmas at Mistletoe Hall
A HOLIDAY STORY OF ST. BRENDA'S
by Anne Saunders

VOL. II NO. 19
3d. MONTHLY
DEC. 1st, 1947

A Very Happy Christmas To All Our Readers!

Girls' Fun was one of the few new papers for girls published during the 1940s.



School Friend No. 1 (May 1950) together with a 'dummy' design for its original title: 'Schoolgirl'. Issue No. 1 contained the first appearance of 'The Silent Three' and came with this free Radio Stars Album.

enjoyed has resulted in copies being fairly plentiful. Early issues of the annual – those for 1923 to 1929 inclusive – are sought after not only by school story enthusiasts but also by Rupert aficionados, for the cover artwork was provided by the great Alfred Bestall. *The Schoolgirls Own Annual* ran until 1943.

The 1940s were fairly barren years as far as girls' papers were concerned

One of the longest-lived of all Amalgamated Press annuals was *The School Friend Annual*, running for over fifty years, from 1927 until 1981. Similarly long-lived was *Girls' Crystal Annual*, which enjoyed a run of almost forty years from 1940 until 1976. With both of these annuals the most difficult issues

to find are those published during the early 1940s, when print-runs were often extremely short. Indeed, so elusive are some issues that we cannot say with total certainty whether they were actually published every single year during the war years.

The 1940s were fairly barren years as far as girls' papers were concerned. *Girls' Own Paper* soldiered on in a smaller format and *Girls Crystal* continued in a painfully thin format. One of the few new comics published during the period was *Girls' Fun*, issued by the small firm of Gerald Swan. It began late in 1946 and continued – with a number of short breaks – until 1954. Like so much of Swan's output it had a cheap and cheerful look. Despite this it offered its readers a mix of school and adventure stories with the odd short cartoon strip. Worth looking out for are the four 'bumper' issues: *Girls Fun Bumper Number*, *Girls Fun Special Number*, *Girls Fun Book* and *Girls Fun*

Special. These were quite innovative for the time and were something of a precursor of the 'summer specials' that would later become regular features of both the Amalgamated Press and D.C. Thomson.

The post-war years saw a blossoming of many new weekly comics for girls but within the scope of this short article it is only possible to highlight some of the most collectable titles. One of the best remembered and certainly one of the most collected comics was *School Friend*, re-launched in May 1950 with just over half of its pages given over to picture strip adventures. The cover of the first issue introduced a group of characters that quickly became favourites with generations of girls: 'The Silent Three at St. Kits'. The masked, robed and cowed three were not the first group of schoolgirl 'avengers' to feature in story papers but, through the lively artwork of Evelyn Flinders who drew the strip for almost a decade, they were certainly the best loved. The writers of this article can reveal that originally the new *School Friend* was to have been titled *Schoolgirl* and the 'Silent Three' were to have been 'The Silent SIX of St. Kits'. Evelyn Flinders actually produced the full colour artwork for the first instalment used for the dummy of the new comic. It must have quickly become apparent that six hooded characters were three too many to squeeze into a frame and the group was consequently trimmed down!

The inaugural issue offered a feast of other good picture strips including the first episode of a superbly drawn historical strip, "The Gay Cavalier"; a desert adventure: "Denise and the Scarab Ring"; a desert island adventure: "Jill Crusoe" and the first strip featuring a long-

running character, "Terry Brent – Detective". Text stories were not forgotten with two stories and two serial episodes.

The new *School Friend* enjoyed a run of almost fifteen years. Success led to an increase in the page count and a wider variety of strips and stories. 'Bessie Bunter', a stalwart of the pre-war *School Friend* returned to the comic, this time in picture strip form, and readers were invited to join the *School Friend* 'Birthday Club' and send their shilling for the enamel badge. *School Friend* merged into *June*, in January 1965. Despite being one of the most popular girls comics of the '50s, runs are exceedingly difficult to find.

One of the most collected Amalgamated Press comics of the 1950s and '60s is the



Girl No. 1, from November 1951, was very much Eagle for girls.

No. 1—JANUARY 18th, 1958.

BUNTY January 18, 1958

BUNTY

EVERY TUESDAY. Price 4d



NO. 1

OF A



GREAT NEW PICTURE PAPER for GIRLS

Ladybird Ring



FREE Inside!

Bunty No 1 from January 1958. The first issue of what became a hugely successful title for D.C. Thomson.

Schoolgirls Picture Library. Like its pre-war counterpart, *The Schoolgirls Own Library*, this was mainly a vehicle for reprinting strips from the weekly comics. Within its pages adventure strips of all kinds could be found. Particularly sought-after are issues containing adventures of 'The Silent Three'. *Schoolgirls Picture Library* ran from 1957 until 1965, when it became *June* and *School Friend Picture Library*.

Probably the most influential of all girls' comics of the post-war era was Hulton's large format *Girl*, launched in November 1951.

A stable-mate of *Eagle*, its content, style and layout was almost a carbon copy: "Kitty Hawke and her all-girl Crew" on the front and inside page had very much of a 'Dan Dare' feel about it, and the back cover feature: "The Story of Miriam", drawn by the excellent John Worsley, mirrored the religious biographical strips found on *Eagle's* back page. Inside a parentally approved mix of strips, stories and features entertained and educated.

Over the years a host of memorable characters such as "Belle of the Ballet", "Claudia of the Circus", "Lettice Leafe", "The Three Jays", "Angela Air Hostess" became firm favourites. Printed on better quality paper than its rival girls' comics, copies of *Girl* were reasonably durable making them now easier to find than many other comics of the period.

D.C. Thomson were rather slower than the Amalgamated Press in coming up with a really popular girls' comic but in January 1958 they launched *Bunty*, a comic that was to

entertain readers for many decades. In format the comic resembled *The Beano* and several artists who worked for Thomson's range of successful boys' comics contributed strips. Printed predominantly in black and white with just a few internal two-tone pages and coloured covers, *Bunty*, compared to the likes of *Girl*, had a rather old-fashioned look. However, it certainly offered a wide mix of strips: everything from school, circus and dancing adventures to the story of Pocahontas and an adaptation of "Uncle Tom's Cabin". By the mid 1960s it had moved up to date with strips

such as "Danger Girl" – a sort of female James Bond, "The Invisible Schoolgirl" and "I'll Make you Miss World". *Bunty* continued to be published until 2001, an incredible run of over forty years.

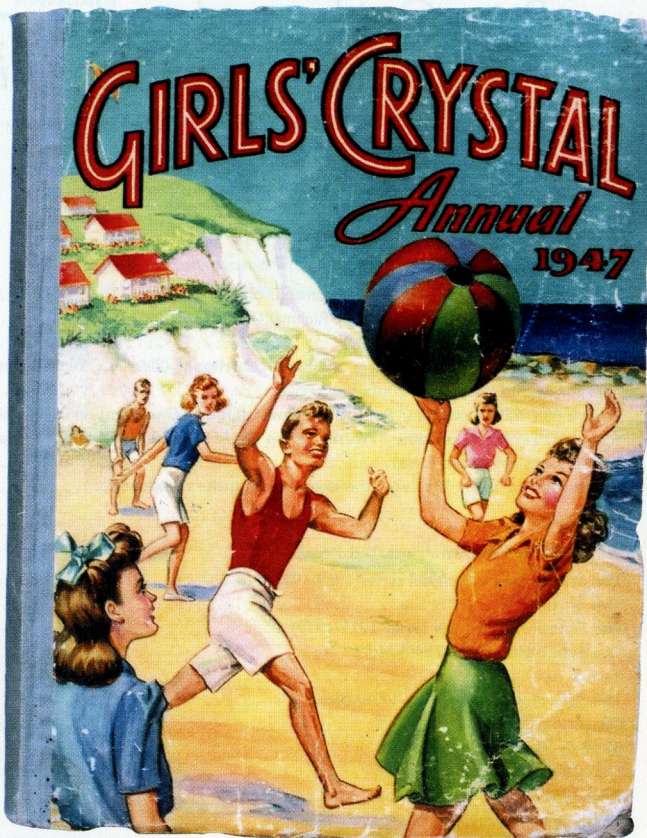
When considering girls' comics from the post-war era we must not forget the pop/romance group, put out by both of the main publishers. Such titles as *Cherie*, *Romeo* and *Valentine* had large followings, the latter two titles both ran for seventeen years. Copies of these weeklies offer a fascinating insight into the world of young teenagers at the time – or, at any rate, that world as imagined by the editors!

Accompanying most comics was the yearly annual and the post war years offer a huge range of these to the collector. In addition to annuals related to the comics already mentioned there are many others well worth seeking out. *June*, first published by the Amalgamated Press for 1962 offered a particularly well-balanced mix of fact, fiction and strips. The first issue is noteworthy for containing an uncollected 'Five Find-Outers' mystery by Enid Blyton.

D.C. Thomson were not slow in extending their range of girls' annuals, with *Judy for Girls* annual, first published in the autumn of 1963, and *Diana For Girls*, published the following year. The former was a bright, colourful volume with its focus firmly on dancing, ballet, skating and such-like, while *Diana For Girls* offered a slightly different mix with school strips rubbing shoulders with historical adventures, dancing tales and various factual features. Both annuals were printed throughout in either full colour or two-tone and, unlike the Amalgamated Press annuals of

the time, these two Thomson titles both sported jackets. Copies retaining their jackets are now surprisingly difficult to find.

In this feature we have only just managed to scratch the surface of the huge range of story papers, comics and annuals published for girls over the last century. While several of the pre-war items mentioned are already becoming quite expensive, many post-war titles can still be bought for a few pounds – when copies can be found. A vast number of girls' comics remain un-catalogued and the present writers believe that a wealth of excellent strip artwork awaits discovery as copies come to light and their contents are freshly examined.



Scarce schoolgirls' annuals are very collectable. *Schoolgirls' Own Annual* (see overleaf) enjoyed a particularly long run.



Three pop/romance titles: *Valentine*, *Cherie* and *Romeo*.
The first and last of these both ran for 17 years. (Right)
Four issues from the *Schoolgirls' Picture Library*.

Price Guide to selected story papers, comics and annuals mentioned in this feature

Prices are for VG copies. Dustjackets only where indicated

STORY PAPERS

Published by Religious Tract Society then by Lutterworth
Girls Own Paper 1880–1950

Issued by the publisher as yearly bound volumes 1880–1941.

Collectable issues

January 1918 contains "Thomas" by Richmal Crompton single issue	£25-£30
April 1918 contains "Mrs. Tempest" by Richmal Crompton.	single issue £25-£30
Bound volume containing same	£30-£40
Volume 57 (1935/6) contains "Peggy and the Brotherhood" (Elsie H. Oxenham) and "The Robins Make Good" (Elinor Brent-Dyer) issues containing serials	each £15-£20 volume £40-£50.
Volume 60 (1938/9) contains "Patch and a Pawn" (Elsie H. Oxenham) issues containing serials	each £15-£20 volume £40-£50
Volume 62 (1940/41) contains "Worrals of the WAAFS" (W.E. Johns) and "The Ravensdale Mystery" (W.E. Johns as William Earle)	single issues £15-£20 volume £60-£70
Bound volumes 1880- 1941 with the exception of those mentioned.	£20-£40

Published by The Amalgamated Press

<i>The School Friend</i> (original series 1919-1925) No. 1.	£30-£40
Rest of run:	£4-£6
<i>The School Friend</i> (new series 1925-1929)	each: £3.50-£4.50
<i>The Schoolgirl</i> (1929–1940) No. 1	£20-£25
Rest of run	each: £3.50-£4.50
<i>The Schoolgirls Own</i> (1921-1936) No. 1.	£30-£40
Rest of run	each: £4-£6
<i>Girls' Crystal</i> (1935-1963) No. 1	£20-£25
1935-1940	each: £3.50-£4.50
1940-1953	each: £3-£4
1953-1963	each: £3.50-£4.50
<i>The Schoolgirls Own Library</i> . Pre-war series (1922–1940) Morcove and Cliff House issues	each £9–£10
other issues	each: £6-£8
<i>The Schoolgirls Own Library</i> Second series (1946-1963)	each: £4-£5

School Friend (1950–1965) No. 1	£30-£40
1950-1960 issues	each: £3.50-£4.50
1961-1965 issues	each: £3-£4.
Schoolgirls Picture Library (1957- 1965)	
Silent Three issues	each £8-£10
Other issues	each £5-£6

Published by Hulton Press/Longacre/IPC

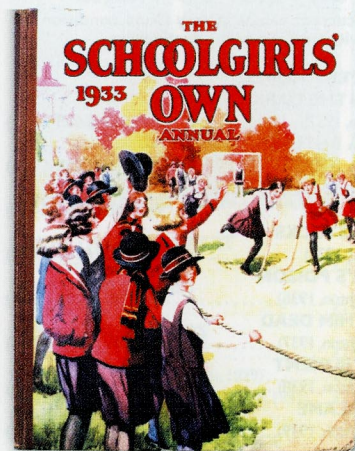
Girl (1951-1964) No. 1	£40-£50
Rest of run	each: £3-£4

Published by D.C.Thomson

Bunty (1958–2001) No. 1	£40-£60
1958-1965	each: £3-£4
1966-1970	each: £2-£3
1970-2001	each: £1-£2

Published by Gerald Swan

Girls' Fun (1946-1954 some gaps) 1946-1948	each: £3-£4
1949-1951	each: £2.50-£3.50
1952-1954	each: £2.50-£3



ANNUALS

Published by The Amalgamated Press

The Schoolgirls Own Annual (1923-1943)

Note: issued with a clear tissue jacket overprinted with the title date etc. Copies retaining this add 50% premium)

1923-1929 (Alfred Bestall cover artwork)	each: £15-£25
1930-1937	each: £12-£15
1938-1943	each: £20-£30

The School Friend Annual (1927-1981)

Note: pre-war editions issued with a clear tissue wrapper overprinted with the title date etc. Copies retaining this add 50% premium)

1927-1937	each: £12-£15
1938-1943	each: £20-£30
1944-1949	each: £15-£20
1950-1960	each: £14-£16
1961-1968	each: £12-£14
1969-1981	each: £4-£5

Girls' Crystal Annual (1940–1976)

1940-1943	each: £20-£30
1944-1949	each: £14-£16
1950-1960	each: £14-£16
1961-1969	each: £12-£14
1969-1976	each: £4-£5

June (collectable 1960s issues) 1962-1969	each: £10-£12
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Published by D.C.Thomson

Judy for Girls (collectable 1960s issues) 1964-1969	each: £4-£5 (£10-£12)
Diana For Girls (collectable 1960s issues) 1965-1969	each: £4-£6 (£10-£12)
Bunty For Girls (collectable 1950s/60s issues) 1959-1963	each: £4-£6 (£12-£15)
1964-1969 each: £4-£5 (£10-£12)	

FURTHER READING

The Schoolgirls Own Library, An Index by Dennis Bird, Ray Hopkins and Arthur Southway. A new edition (2001) is in print £5 post free in the UK. (Published by N.Wright 60 Eastbury Rd, Watford WD19 4JL).