



Living With Eagles: Marcus Morris, Priest and Publisher

T. Rice, James Morris, J. Hallwood

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Eagles seemed to dominate Marcus Morris's life. As a clergyman's son, he grew up with the eagle of the church lectern; as a priest himself he had his own lecterns. A brass inkwell topped by a flying eagle became the symbol of the most famous eagle of all - the children's magazine that influenced a generation. Eagle and its sister papers *Girl*, *Swift* and *Robin* were read by millions throughout the 1950s and '60s. They offered excitement in the adventures of Dan Dare, Pilot of the Future, brilliantly drawn by Frank Hampson; of PC49, Riders of the Range, Tommy Walls, Luck of the Legion, Harris Tweed and Captain Pugwash. Small boys were fascinated by the cutaway drawings of modern wonders like the first jet airliner, by features on science, history and nature, and by the adventures of a roving Special Investigator. The religious and moral framework was strong, though not overstated, with Bible stories and lives of missionaries and saints featured regularly, and young readers were encouraged to become good citizens. David Hockney and Gerald Scarfe had their teenage drawings published in *Eagle* (the first published work for Scarfe), and many of the original illustrators of the magazine are well-known today - some have contributed cartoons drawn especially for this book. Each issue of *Eagle* had an Editor's Letter, signed by Marcus Morris, a name as widely known to his young readers as any modern pop idol. The fascinating story of this extraordinary man is now told for the first time. Morris was a radical priest, continually at odds with the Church establishment. His desire to spread the word of Christianity led him into journalism, and his Lancashire parish magazine was read throughout Britain and as far afield as Australia. This magazine was a commercial failure, but its literary success made Morris determined to spread its ethos to children. *Eagle* was the immensely successful outcome. Morris was a man of contrasts. His clerical status did not prevent him, or his beautiful and successful actress wife, from indulging in extramarital affairs. The success of *Eagle* and his other magazines brought him no substantial wealth, and his way of life was funded by a generous expense account. After arguments with new masters in Fleet Street he left the company and spent the rest of his working life with the fourth eagle in his life, the symbol of the National Magazine Company which he made one of the most successful publishers in Britain. Though he became disillusioned with the Church, he remained a priest, and in spite of being happily married until his death, he continued to enjoy liaisons with beautiful women. Although a legendary drinker and lover of good living, he was greatly respected, loved, and mourned by employees, parishioners, and his many friends. Prof Stephen Hawking, when asked what influence Dan Dare had on him: 'Why am I in cosmology?' Kenny Everett, on *Eagle*: 'Marcus made my childhood a lot easier to bear. Every week this divine colour magazine came through the letter box with lots of fab colour adventures; it was glossy and other worldly ... You don't know what this magazine meant to me. It saved me.  Read the Foreword by Sir Tim Rice here.

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