

Foreword

by Sir Tim Rice

It is almost impossible to exaggerate the importance of the *Eagle* comic to boys of my generation, i.e. those born in the forties. In April 1950, when I was just five years old, my father, Hugh, brought home the first issue of this mould-breaking publication. Hugh, then aged 32, had the foresight to spot that *Eagle* was no ordinary comic and made sure that the clumsy hands of his offspring never damaged any copy. He kept every issue in pristine condition and as a result I now have every one of the first fifteen years of *Eagle* in my study today. The influence of *Eagle* upon almost every British boy (and plenty of girls) growing up in the 1950s cannot be underestimated – it was truly a remarkable enterprise, a creation of genius, the genius being the Reverend Marcus Morris.

I still derive enormous pleasure from re-reading the adventures of Dan Dare, PC49, Harris Tweed and, indeed, of real life characters such as the back page stars St Paul and St Patrick. On more than one occasion those *Eagles* have helped me in my story-telling efforts through musicals many years on. Readers of *Eagle* learned, sometimes without realising it, about the joys of science, art, humour and social conscience (the “Mug of the Month” was a brave concept, never as powerful when the selfless deeds of readers were honoured by the title “Silver Eagler of the Month”.)

At last a biography of Marcus Morris. I met the great man once when my brother Jonathan and I interviewed him for Capital Radio in the early 1970s and I found it hard to believe that this apparently diffident man had been the fount of such a cultural impact, as significant in Britain as the Beatles’ was to be a decade or so later. Marcus’s mission was to educate through entertainment, at which he was phenomenally successful.

I had no idea that he was a churchman until *Eagle* had ceased to be an important part of my life – and *Eagle* only slipped from a crucial position in my day to day existence after Marcus left the editor’s chair. Yet somehow *Eagle*, during the Morris years, made Christianity make sense within a turmoil of distractions – which I am glad to learn through this wonderful biography, often claimed Marcus’s attention. He was the most modern of men and the most British of men in that no-one really knew, until now, what enabled him to capture the hearts and minds of a generation. He lived life to the full; he had his share of human frailties. Yet he always hoped that wisdom and morality would improve the lives of those who would inherit the religious and social order, and thus the establishment itself.

The thrill of winning a five-shilling postal order for having a letter published in *Eagle* in 1957 is matched by the honour of being asked to write a foreword for this biography. I now know that Marcus Morris had other eagles in his life besides the one that so profoundly affected mine – and also know that millions of other middle-aged Eaglers will be fascinated to discover how this extraordinary man served them all so well.