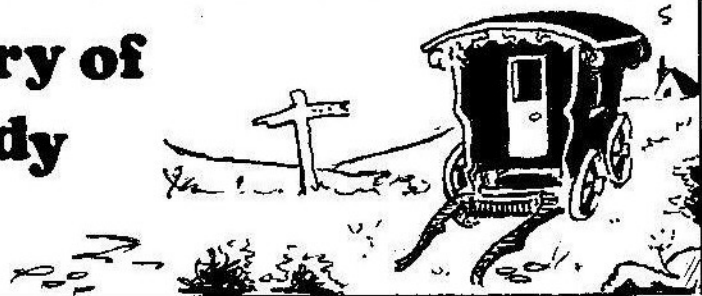


# The Mystery of Jack Nobody

By Derek Adley



Similarities have often been suggested between Charles Dickens and Charles Hamilton, one example being that they both left behind an unfinished work which offered no clues to the conclusion. Dickens left his *Mystery of Edwin Drood* and Hamilton his *Jack of All Trades*.

There were three *Jack of All Trades* books, each with a cliff-hanger ending, and with a somewhat remarkable publishing history. The saga of these books started in 1950 with the issue of *Jack of All Trades* by Mandeville Publications.

The story commences with Jack, called Jack Nobody, endeavouring to avoid yet another session of bullying at the hands of Bill Hatchett. For years he has accompanied the rascal Hatchett around the country, pushing Hatchett's pedlar's cart and always at his beck and call. Jack dearly wants to gain some education for himself and get away from his life with this boozy, dishonest, bullying scoundrel. At every opportunity Jack mugs up on any book that he can get hold of, even including a Latin Dictionary. This of course does nothing for his relationship with Hatchett.

This latest beating is the last straw and, after a skirmish, Jack takes off for good. On his way he comes into contact with Lord Cortolvin who is obviously startled at Jack's resemblance to his son, the Hon. Cecil Cortolvin. The mystery deepens when, shortly after, there is a meeting, previously arranged, between his lordship and Bill Hatchett. It transpires that the former has an arrangement with Hatchett to keep Jack under his control and out of the way. Lord Cortolvin is furious at the boy's escape and orders Hatchett to go after him and get him back. Meanwhile Jack is fortunate to meet up with the Misses Hilda Brown and Elizabeth Hunt who are on a caravan tour. He is engaged to assist them with odd jobs during their travels.

At this time Denvers, Lord Cortolvin's ex-secretary is on the run after stealing £1000 of his lordship's money. He too on meeting Jack is struck by the boy's likeness to Cecil Cortolvin. After holding Jack a prisoner, Denvers is finally overpowered and captured by the boy, with the assistance of the two ladies. Lord Cortolvin makes it known that as a reward to Jack he will have him educated at a good school when he takes his leave of the caravanners. In fact, his real intention is to return him to Bill Hatchett once he has parted company with his new friends.

Jack has two further meetings, first with Augustus Brown, Hilda's nephew and a pupil of Coombe School, who proves himself a thoroughly nasty piece of work, and then with Cecil Cortolvin, a fellow pupil of Brown's and a really nice chap. The two boys are amazed to find they look like twins, but apparently that's as far as it goes. Lord Cortolvin eventually sends his valet Jervis to collect Jack and supposedly take him to one of his lordship's country seats and then on to a public school. The story ends with the train taking Jack and Jervis to their destination. It is worth noting at this stage that the year is 1950!

## BOOK 2. *Jack's the Lad.*

The year is now 1955, drawing to a close, with Jack and Jarvis still on the train! This is not meant to be facetious, but simply looking at the situation from the readers' point of view because by this time many will have put juvenile reading behind them.

When they leave the train, Jervis delivers Jack straight into the hands of Bill Hatchett and once again he reverts to being something of a ragged urchin and Bill's lackey. It is at this point at last that Jack realises there must be a very good reason for Bill wanting to keep him under his wing, and that Lord Cortolvin is somehow at the back of this. Escaping

**JACK  
OF ALL  
TRADES**

by  
**FRANK  
RICHARDS**



# JACK OF ALL TRADES

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Author of "BILLY BUNTER"



MANDEVILLE

from Bill's clutches yet again, he joins up with Pippers Travelling Circus and is befriended by the circus clown, Montmorency Cyril Chipmonk, and other circus performers. But he also makes an enemy in Dick Kenney, the ring rider who is the circus main attraction. Kenney hates Jack because of his ability in the ring and his skill with horses. Many adventures follow, concerning Jack's efforts to keep clear of Bill Hatchett.

Jack is subsequently confronted by Jervis who claims he has been misunderstood and wishes to take him to meet the Lord, but Jack, who now has a deep distrust for him, declines. In the closing stages of this book Jervis is pondering on other ways of luring Jack away.

### **BOOK 3. *Jack of the Circus.***

Jack, who now calls himself Jack Free, is still with Pippers Circus, and as the title suggests the entire book has this circus setting. Interestingly the narrative of the book slips back to Jack Nobody at one stage.

Jervis enlists the help of Jack's enemy, Dick Kenney, known as the Handsome Man, in order to trap him and restore Hatchett's control over him. There are a number of attempts to disgrace Jack at the circus and get him thrown out, all of which fail, thanks to the friends he has made. When the circus is booked to appear at the London Hippodrome Jack is eventually lured to a house in Shepherds Bush, London, and kidnapped.

*Jack of the Circus* concludes with the kidnapped youth aboard a Dutch ship heading out to sea and bound for an unknown destination.

And there we have it! There was no Book 4 and we still do not know why Lord Cortolvin wanted Jack kept out of sight, nor what was the reason for his twin-like resemblance to the Hon. Cecil. Charles Hamilton must have envisaged the conclusion to the story, but was there a script? It is a fact that in the late 1940s Hamilton was desperately trying out new characters and stories to augment his flagging income. He had experimented with a number of new schools, but none appealed like Greyfriars and St. Jim's. "All they want is Bunter" he once lamented, but he was forbidden to write of him by the Amalgamated Press until Charles Skilton came on the scene.

With Jack of All Trades there were seemingly obvious drawbacks. As long as there was a mystery surrounding Jack's origins, the tales could be successful, but once this became resolved then he would have no story. It seemed as if Hamilton would have been able to go on indefinitely with this mysterious origins theme. On the other hand, was Hamilton going to try a 'Rags to Riches' theme, with Jack revealed as a long lost heir, and set up at a brand new school? Could this overworked motif from his golden years be brought to life again with a whole new generation of readers?

If he had planned a quartet of books and sold these to Mandeville (who published just the first) possibly the series was not successful. After all, they had ample time to publish the others before Spring Books took over (see Bibliography below). When the latter company did commence publishing the Hamilton books they possibly had the scripts of the next two books in hand, purchased from Mandeville. By publishing the Jack Stories alongside the Tom Merry books they were probably optimistic that they would sell, as they were under the Frank Richards by-line. Perhaps they *did* sell, but Spring Books could have been more keen to issue Tom Merry books. Or again, they could have proved non-viable. Whatever the answer it still left an Edwin Drood situation to which we will never know the answer. Who really was Jack, and what his relationship to Lord Cortolvin and, of course, the Hon. Cecil? Surely he couldn't have been the latter's twin, but could he have been the true heir to the estate, kept out of the way - possibly the son of a very close relative?

Charles Hamilton also wrote a number of short stories featuring Jack of All Trades which were published in Tom Merry and Billy Bunter Annuals, and there is a likelihood that these were published out of sequence. The reappearance in 1961 of the character in a short story in *Billy Bunter's Own Annual*, over 10 years after his debut, would seem to suggest that there was no chance that we would ever read the solution to this mystery.

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(EDITOR'S NOTE: Like Derek Adley and many other Hamilton enthusiasts, I have often felt frustrated at the irresolution of Jack's problematic situation. After reading this article I consulted Hamilton's niece and literary executor, Mrs. Una Hamilton Wright, whose answer is most interesting. She says:

'I have looked up the 'Jack of All Trades' typescripts; there are five of them as follows:

- No. 4. Jack on his Own.
- No. 5. Jack goes South!
- No. 6. Jack in Africa.
- No. 7. Jack in Danger.
- No. 8. Jack on the Treasure Trail.'

It is good news that Jack was not left to the dismal fate which the end of the third book suggested, and certainly the last of these titles holds the promise that Jack finds prosperity in the end. Let us hope that some enterprising publisher may decide to publish these books so that everything in Jack's saga can be revealed.)

# JACK and the CARAVANNERS



by **FRANK RICHARDS**