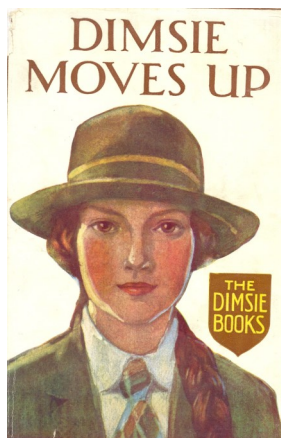


Ripping Reads No 33 May 2020



The School Stories of Dorita Fairlie Bruce - Part 1 by Susan Merskey

Dorita Fairlie Bruce (DFB) was born in 1885 and died in 1970. For much of her life she lived in Ealing, West London, but her early childhood and many holidays throughout her life were spent with relations in Scotland, especially in the area around Largs. Most of her school stories were written between 1920 and 1944, in the midst of the “golden age” of the girls’ school story. The Sally books, however, were written considerably later, between 1956 and 1961.

Unlike Elsie J Oxenham and Elinor Brent-Dyer who each wrote longer series of books, DFB wrote several short series. Each of her three main series, Dimsie, Nancy and Springdale, are fairly typical of the school story genre, centred on the experiences of one or two girls, but there is an equal focus on the girls as part of a group who progress together through the school in question. The Toby and Sally series are, I feel, less typical, but no less interesting.

“Jane’s is a jolly fine school You can tell it by the old girls, if no other way. They’re all doing something to be proud of.” (*Dimsie Moves Up Again*, Chapter 23) Dimsie (Daphne Isabel Maitland) may be the main character in the series, but her group of friends: Erica Innes, Pamela Hughes, Mabs Hunter, Jean Gordon, Rosamund Garth, their adventures, and the relationships between them all are equally important. We follow their fortunes from Dimsie’s first day at the Jane Willard Foundation School until her last; as the later books reveal, their friendships endure into adulthood.

It could be claimed that Nancy Caird’s adventures fall into two short series. However, the St. Bride’s books ‘bookend’ her time at Maudsley Grammar

