



ANZAAB *Aspects of Book Collecting*

Collecting Mary Grant Bruce

Books on Dean

Background: Mary (born Minnie) Grant Bruce was one of the most popular writers of Australian fiction for children and young adults in the period from the turn of the 19th century to the middle of World War II.

Range: Mrs Bruce wrote a total of 38 major works, beginning with *A Little Bush Maid* in 1910 and ending with *Billabong Riders* in 1942. All were published by Ward Lock & Co of London. Although it included others, the centrepiece of her main body of work was the immensely popular *Billabong* series, in which there were fifteen novels. Reviewers praised the clean, healthy, wholesome, pleasant and purely Australian character of the saga of the Linton family of Billabong Station.

Availability: Because of her great (and continuing) popularity Mary Grant Bruce's books are not hard to find in secondhand and antiquarian bookshops. At the same time, Bruce's total output (as compared to that of other popular children's authors such as Enid Blyton) was not huge and if one confines the quest—to the *Billabong* series, for instance—it is quite manageable. Copies of early editions in excellent condition are becoming increasingly scarce. Most have been treasured and handed down within families and, as with many children's books, have been well used. For the true aficionado, there is also a range of other material produced by Mrs Bruce in the course of her early life as a working journalist.

Price Range: Early editions in fine or better condition are scarce and command prices upwards of \$300. Prices for worn or later copies are much less. 1950s editions with unclipped dust wrappers, in fine condition or better, are not uncommon and may generally be had for \$40-\$80. The aim should always be to obtain the earliest available edition in the best possible condition.

Footnote: There are a number of excellent biographies of Mary Grant Bruce: two which include bibliographies are Brenda Niall's *Seven Little Billabongs. The World of Ethel Turner and Mary Grant Bruce* (Melbourne University Press, 1979) and Alison Alexander's *Billabong's Author: The Life of Mary Grant Bruce* (Angus & Robertson, 1979). Reference could also be made to H. M. Saxby's *A History of Australian Children's Literature, Vol I, 1841-1941* (Wentworth Books, 1969). It should be noted that most of the early Ward Lock editions carry no publication date and these must be identified by other indicia, which any good bibliography will list. One such is *A Bruce Bibliography—A Guide to Identification and Value of the Books Written by Mary Grant Bruce (1878-1958)* compiled by Ross Burnet of Burnet's Books (Uralla, N.S.W.) and available from him.