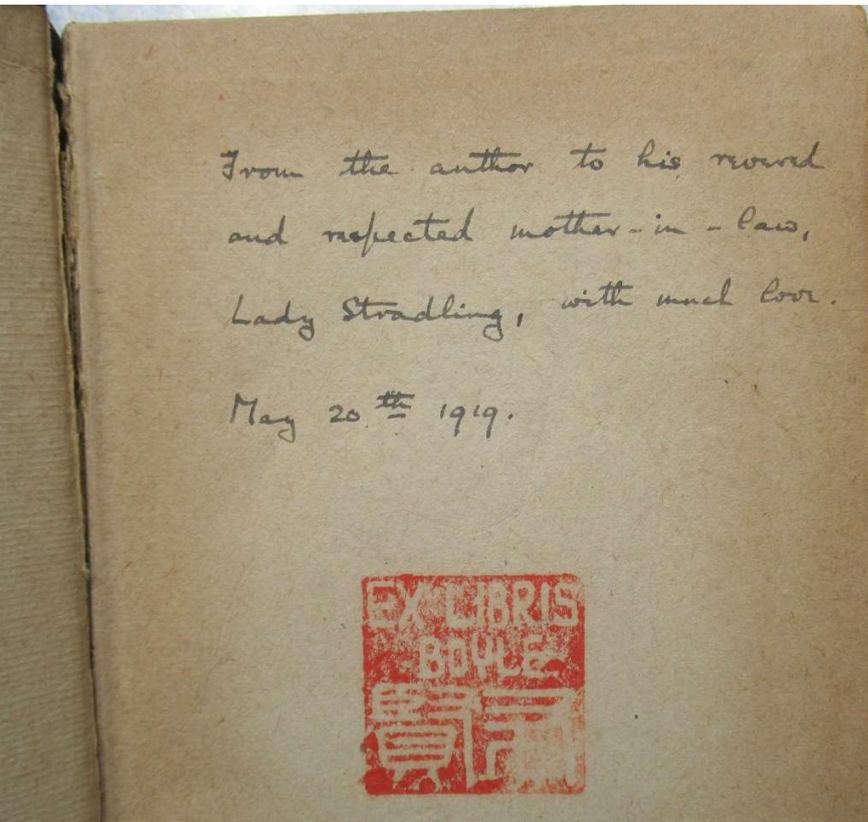


Despite a long and illustrious career as a theatre critic, 'Alf's Button' probably remains W. (William) A. (Aubrey) Darlington's greatest success. It first appeared in issues of *The Passing Show*, was published in book form in 1919, filmed in 1920, adapted for theatre in 1924 and again for film in 1930, the success also inspiring Darlington to write two less successful sequels. The following is material from the Darlington family, including inscribed copies of the Alf books, theatre programmes and episodes from what would become 'Alf's Carpet' which first appeared in *The New Magazine*, hand edited by Darlington. But perhaps the most interesting items are the substantial groups of stills from the 1920 silent film, only the last reel of which seems to have survived. The whole is being sold as a collection but there are detailed descriptions in loosely chronological order below.

£3800



1. Darlington, W. A. Alf's Button.

London: Herbert Jenkins Limited, 1919.

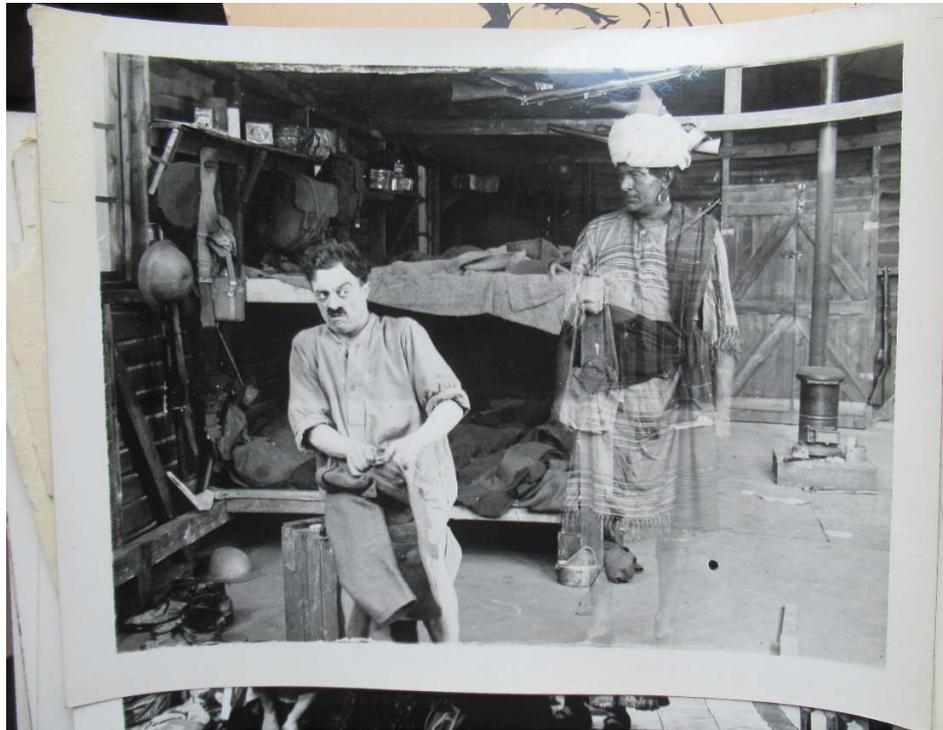
First edition. Inscribed by Darlington to the front endpaper: "From the author to his revered and respected mother-in-law, Lady Stradling, with much love. May 20th 1919.". William Aubrey Darlington married Marjorie in 1918, whose father was apparently Signey Muntz Sheppard, which according to "online sources" would make Lady Stradling Mary Sheppard (née Lock). Below the inscription is the later ownership stamp of Darlington's son-in-law. The book is bound in the publisher's blue cloth lettered and bordered in darker blue, the cloth is stained and rubbed, the

hinges are weak with tears to the cloth and the corners are bumped. The text block itself is reasonably firm but the gutters are cracked, the pages are slightly toned and foxed with minor marks. A well-read family owned first edition of the novel that began Alf's Button's unstoppable popular rise in post-war Britain's collective consciousness. This was partly due to the desire for escapism, but it was also regarded as one of the most accurate depictions of the everyday tedium and horror of trench warfare. This description of No-Man's-Land being a

prime example: “It was as though the earth had been some stricken monster, which had stiffened into death in the very midst of the maddened writhings of its last agony. For the most part it was a land without landmarks – a land featureless, but torn and tortured, poisoned and pulverised, where the eye could find no certain resting place and the mind no relief.”.

2. 43 large stills of the 1920 silent film Alf's Button, 2 signed by Director Cecil Hepworth.

The stills are approximately 25.5cm by 20cm and were probably produced for promotional or press purposes, looking at one time to have been bound together, with residual signs of this to the left of each as well as a few missing corners. Two of the stills are inscribed to the reverse by the film's director and one of the most important figures of the early British film industry, Cecil Hepworth. In the inscriptions he notes the actors who feature in the image and signs his name below. The stills are all quite uniformly curled at their edges and slightly toned and marked, but in general the images remain sharp. I believe only the final reel of the film still exists, so these and the smaller photos below may well constitute the best surviving record of the adaptation.



3. Hepworth, Cecil (Director). 35 small photographs from the 1920 silent film, Alf's Button.

The photographs are approximately 15cm by 10cm, all are a little toned and rubbed with curling at their edges, a few are lightly marked. Seemingly some of the original set of photographs which were blown up for promotional use. These are more sepia-toned than the larger images, with some silvering or mirroring to be seen on the surface of a few.





4. An Alf's Button cartoon on card by W. K. (William Kerridge) Haselden, with inscription..

A (printed?) cartoon by Haselden on card, approximately 27cm by 16.5cm, inscribed in pencil to the corner: "I do hope this will do. Hastily yours W. K. H.". The card has pinholes and shows signs of having been mounted. It has various working notes to the back in

different hands, one identifying it as "Alf's Button" and another signed "Mrs Darlington", presumably W. A. Darlington's wife. Haselden was a prolific cartoonist, particularly for Punch magazine, but whether this cartoon was originally intended for one of his regular publications, or a specific commission to help promote perhaps the mid-1920s theatrical adaptation of Alf's Button is unclear. It is hard to tell whether it is printed or an actual cartoon, running a finger over the ink it is slightly raised in places, suggesting even if it was printed that it has been at least partly gone over again by hand afterwards.

5. 8 Theatre Programmes for Alf's Button 1924 – 1939, and 'Alf's Album'.

The earliest programme is dated 25th August 1924 for a performance at Portsmouth Theatre Royal, which I believe is the first performance of the play or certainly a very early one. There are others from 1925 up to December of that year showing what a long initial run it had, then one from 1934 (The Musical) and finally "an entirely new production" from 1939 starring Wally Patch, Mavis Clair and Ian McKenzie. They are all quite foxed, grubby and creased, some with closed tears to the edges, some showing signs of having been folded and pocketed. With these is 'Alf's Album' "Edited by Martin Henry", the first producer of the play, a 4 page pamphlet which looks to have been distributed free either with one of the programmes or as an advertising supplement in a newspaper, with photographs of performers, newspaper reviews, commentary and an announcement of a prize of £100 for the member of the audience who came up with "the cleverest or wittiest" wish based on one rub of Alf's button.



To Marjorie from

Bill.

March 1925



6. Darlington, W. A. *Alf's Button An Extravaganza in Three Acts.*

London: Herbert Jenkins Limited, 1925.

First edition. The dedication copy, inscribed to the front endpaper: "To Marjorie from Bill March 1925", with below that the later ownership stamp of Darlington's son-in-law. The recipient of the inscription, and of the longer printed dedication a few pages later, was Darlington's wife. The book is firmly bound in lightly rubbed and marked blue cloth lettered in black and blind, the spine is

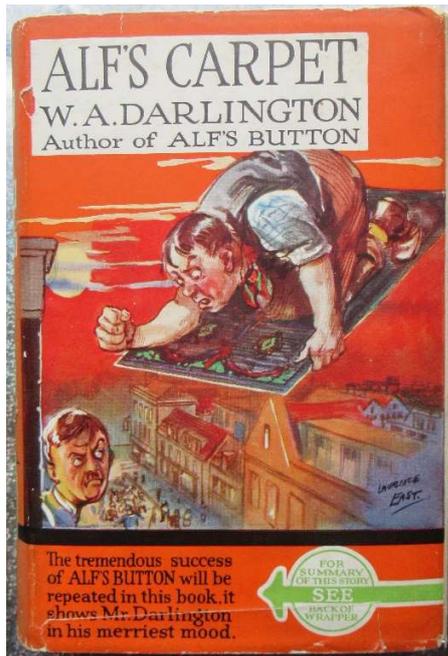
slightly darkened and the extremities a little bumped. The text block is slightly age toned, dusty and marked. The published version of the theatrical adaptation that had begun its long run in British theatres the previous summer. Given the overall popularity of *Alf's Button* this slim first edition of the play is surprisingly uncommon.

7. 6 issues of *The New Magazine* (Publ. Cassells) Dec. 1926 – May 1927 containing W. A. Darlington's 'Alf, Bill – and a Carpet', with authorial alterations.

The six issues, complete, of the magazine in which Darlington, capitalising on the success of *Alf's Button*, introduced the idea of *Alf* with a magic carpet. The story appeared in greatly expanded and slightly altered form as the episodic novel 'Alf's Carpet' in 1928. These issues of the magazine contain alterations and annotations to the text in Darlington's hand, with some passages crossed out, probably during the initial phase of working the stories up into book form.

The magazines are all firmly bound in the original illustrated wraps, which are somewhat rubbed, foxed and creased with loss at the spine ends. The text blocks are toned, stained and slightly dusty. Issues of the magazine from the period are uncommon.





8. Darlington, W. A. Alf's Carpet.

London: Herbert Jenkins, 1928.

First edition. Inscribed to the front endpaper: "From the Author to his mother, with all his love, October 12th 1928". Below this is the later ownership stamp of Darlington's son-in-law, and Darlington has also signed his name to the title page. The book is firmly bound in lightly rubbed and marked orange cloth lettered and bordered in black, the extremities are slightly bumped. The text block is slightly foxed and toned with light dusty marks. Loosely inserted is the October 1928 issue of 'The Herbert Jenkins' Wireless' with a long segment of 'Alf's Carpet' to the front cover. The Laurence East designed dust jacket is the original, the issue of the Herbert Jenkins' Wireless notes it as being published at 7/6 but this jacket

has one of Jenkins' green over-pricing labels reducing that to 3/6, it has a small amount of paper loss to the bottom of the spine and there are other more minor chips as well as several closed tears, some repaired with tape to the reverse, along the edges, it is slightly grubby and rubbed. The sequel to Alf's Button, containing more magical and fantastical adventures, expanded from the stories which appeared in six issues of The New Magazine as 'Alf, Bill – and a Carpet' in 1926/27.

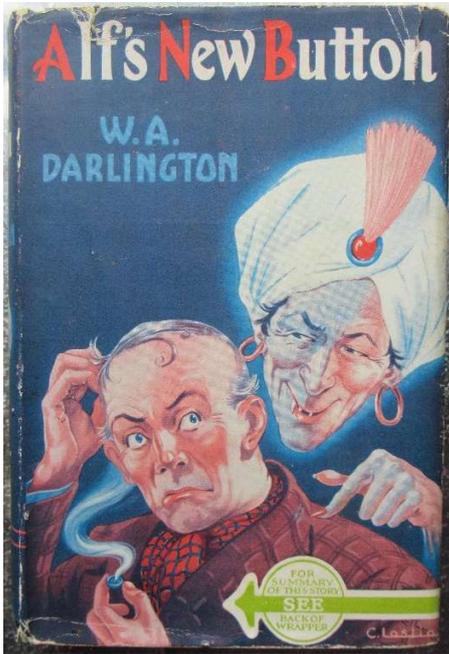
9. Kellino, W. P. (Director). A set of 8 film stills or lobby cards for the 1930 film adaptation of Alf's Button, one of the first British "talkies".

A set of 8 conforming to the standard 8" x 10" format usually used for cinema lobby cards. They are lightly toned and marked and all curled at the edges. The film was one of the first British films to use sound and also included a colour sequence. The British Film Institute seems to indicate that it holds a copy, but whether it is in viewable condition is unclear, and even lobby cards such as these showing stills from the film are scarce.



10. **Darlington, W. A. Alf's New Button.**

London: Herbert Jenkins Limited, 1940.

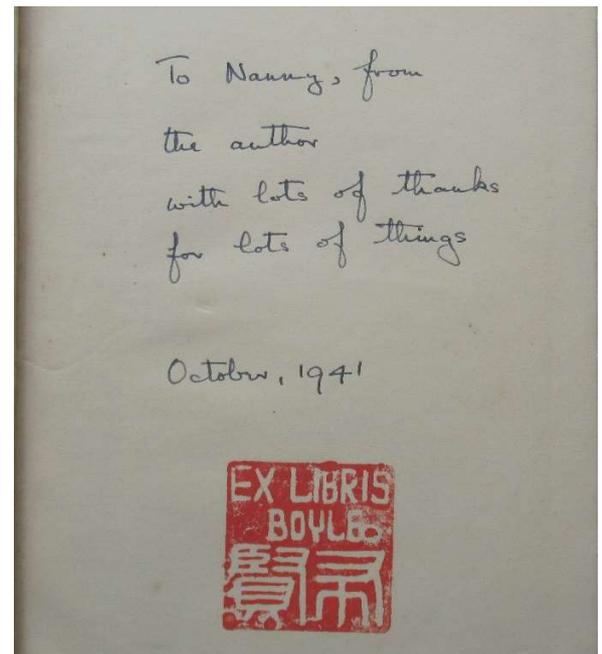


First edition. Inscribed to the front endpaper: "From the author to his mother, with much love. November 22nd, 1940". Below the inscription is the ownership stamp of Darlington's son-in-law, and Darlington has additionally signed his name to the title page. The book is firmly bound in lightly marked and rubbed green cloth lettered in black, the extremities are a little bumped. The text block is slightly toned, foxed and dusty. The C. Leslie designed dust jacket is the original, it is slightly rubbed and marked with minor fading to the spine, there are small chips and a few short closed tears to the edges. Alf's final fantastical outing sees him at the start of WW2 on the home front, with a new button that grants wishes and ambitions to use the magic to help win the war.

11. **Darlington, W. A. Alf's New Button.**

London: Herbert Jenkins Limited, 1941.

Second printing. Inscribed to the front endpaper: "To Nanny, from the author with lots of thanks for lots of things October 1941". Below this is the ownership stamp of Darlington's son-in-law, and Darlington has additionally signed his name to the title page. Whether Nanny is a relation or not I am unsure! The book is reasonably firmly bound in somewhat stained, rubbed and bumped orange cloth lettered in black. The text block is slightly foxed and toned with minor marks and cracking at a few points.



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