





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## Barry Ono Collection of Penny Dreadfuls

[History and Scope of the Collection](#)  
[Cataloguing and Access](#)  
[Further Reading](#)

## History and Scope of the Collection

Barry Ono, whose collection of penny dreadfuls was bequeathed to the British (Museum) Library in 1941, was one of the Library's most colourful benefactors. Born Frederick Valentine Harrison in 1876, he was an exuberant, pugnacious character who combined a moderately successful career in the music hall with a passion for the popular penny stories and magazines of the Victorian age. Throughout his life he collected and traded in these bloodthirsty tales of crime and adventure, always eager to share his knowledge and enthusiasm; he even gave lectures in Selfridge's Oxford Street store during a Hobbies Exhibition in 1936, and appeared in a Pathé Pictorial film on his collection.



Barry Ono surrounded by examples from his collection, 1936. Reproduced from *Penny dreadfuls and boys' adventures*, E James and HR Smith (1998).  
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The 700 books and magazines, which make up the collection, complement and considerably extend the Library's Copyright deposit holdings of similar material. They represent the development of the penny dreadful, from the chapbooks of the early 19th century to the boys' periodicals and imitations of American dime novels of the 1880s and 1890s. The collection is particularly rich in the penny fiction of the 1840s and 1850s, especially the works of prolific authors such as Thomas Prest and James Rymer, and in Ono's personal favourites, the later adventure stories of Edwin Harcourt Burrage.

The plots, which were often inspired by the melodramas of the day, tend to be predictable and extremely diffuse. Highwaymen and notorious criminals were popular characters, and the collection includes many fictionalised accounts of Dick Turpin, Jack Rann, Jack Sheppard, and Sweeney Todd, the demon barber of Fleet Street. A large number of these works were produced by a few major firms - Edward Lloyd, G. Purkess, John Dicks, Edwin Brett or the Hogarth House - but many small publishers and obscure printers are also represented. It was a competitive market, and the collection contains many rare examples of the various selling devices used to attract purchasers, such as free coloured plates, prize draw tickets, toy theatre sheets, even scraps of tinsel for decorating character portraits, and posters.

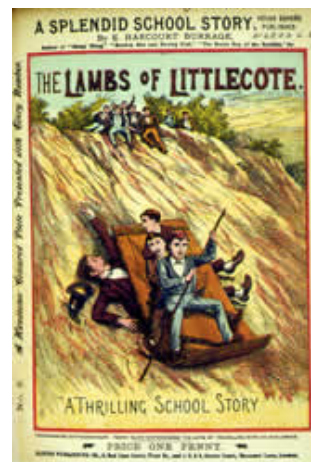


From *Ela the outcast; or The gipsy of Rosemary Dell* by TP Prest (Lloyd, 1841), shelfmark: C.140.aa.39.  
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## Cataloguing and Access

The collection is fully catalogued in *Penny dreadfuls and boys' adventures: the Barry Ono collection of Victorian popular literature in the British Library*, by Elizabeth James and Helen R Smith (London: British Library, 1998). Copies of this work are widely available; there are copies in the British Library London Reading Rooms at shelfmarks RAR823.8 and HLR823.8. Brief entries also appear in the [Integrated Catalogue](#) over the internet.

The collection is shelved in the sequence C.140.a.1 to C.140.e.53.(2.). The original volumes have been restricted from general reading room use due to their fragility. Preservation microfilms are available for consultation through the Rare Books and Music Reading Room (shelfmarks: Mic.C.920 - Mic.C.12487). The volumes have also been re-published in the microfilm series *Popular literature in eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain: Units 3-10, The Barry Ono Collection of bloods and penny dreadfuls from the British Library* (Woodbridge, Conn, Research Publications, 1991-93).



*The Lambs of Littlecote* by EH Berridge  
(Aldine Publishing Co., 1895),  
shelfmark: C.140.b.48.  
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## Further Reading


- *Penny dreadfuls and other Victorian horrors* / M Anglo (London, 1977).
- *Fiction for the working man, 1830-1850* / L James (London, 1957).
- *Bibliography of the penny bloods of Edward Lloyd* / J Medcraft (Dundee, 1945).
- *New light on Sweeney Todd, Thomas Peckett Prest, JM Rymer and Elizabeth Caroline Grey* / HR Smith (London, 2002).
- 'Boys of Bircham School' / J Springhall. *History of Education*, vol. 20, no. 2 (1991).
- *Boys will be boys* / ES Turner. 3rd ed. (London, 1975).

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