

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN BULL

AUTHOR OF *THE NIGHT THEY BLITZED THE RITZ* AND *THE SMILE ON THE FACE OF THE PIG*



How did you get your first job in journalism?

I was still at school and I wrote to my local newspaper offering to cover local football games on Saturdays. They paid me 7s 6d (38p) a time. When a vacancy for a cub reporter came up, they suggested I went for an interview.

In your new book, *The Smile on the Face of the Pig*, you are writing about being a reporter in the 1950s. What was it about that era that made it special?

It was a very lively era - most people, weary of war, wanted a new deal. It was a time when life was great if you had the guts to live it.

Is journalism very different today?

I'll say. Newspapers are more scrappy, and this includes the so-called 'posh papers'.

You went on to work in Fleet Street. Was that a big shock after working on provincial newspapers?

No. The essentials are exactly the same - just the scale is different.

What has been the reaction to your book *The Night They Blitzed The Ritz*?

It's sold very well and I've been amazed at how many people want to read it, or give it as a present.

Do you think everyone who was a child in the war had an experience that was similar to yours?

Indeed, and many people have contacted me since the book came out, telling me about their own memories of the Blitz. Life was the same for all, but not every city or town was bombed: because of the Royal Naval Dockyard just across the harbour in Portsmouth, my hometown of Gosport was heavily hit.

What do you say to people who ask what the title, *The Smile on the Face of the Pig*, means?

The title is supposed to be intriguing, and I'm not going to give away the secret - you can only find out by reading the book.

Where did the newsboy illustration that you've used in the book come from?

It's a Victorian drawing of a boy selling the *Portsmouth Evening News* and is by my children's great-grandfather, W.H. Snape, the Gosport R.A.

Have you always wanted to be a writer?

I don't think I could do anything else.

Do you have a writing routine?

I like to write in longhand initially: I scribble everything down in no particular order, then polish it up later when I transfer it to the computer. Every year I spend a few weeks in Sliema, Malta, which gives me good 'thinking time' for planning a new book.

What's your next project?

My memoirs of working in Fleet Street and on the *News of the World*.

YOU CAN BUY JOHN BULL'S BOOKS, *THE NIGHT THEY BLITZED THE RITZ* AND *THE SMILE ON THE FACE OF THE PIG* FROM ANY GOOD BOOKSHOP, MAJOR INTERNET RETAILERS INCLUDING AMAZON, OR DIRECT FROM THE PUBLISHERS www.chaplinbooks.co.uk