

Armchair Crosswords by Afrit

While A F Ritchie was working as the energetic headmaster of the Wells Cathedral School he was also making a name for himself compiling crosswords. He loved solving and the puzzles that he set for The Listener were extremely difficult. However, he also compiled some easier puzzles for The Sketch under his pseudonym of Afrit. In 1949 he published 40 of these in a collection that he called Armchair Crosswords.

With the first crossword only appearing in the UK in 1929 with definition clues and it was only in the forties that the first attempts were made to write cryptic clues. Afrit revelled in the cryptic clue and was among the first to develop the sort of clue that we accept today.

What made Afrit's little book an important step in the history of the crossword was the introduction. For the first time ever, someone had written down some ideas about the rules of writing clues. Here we have the first explanation of the types of clues that we still recognize today. Afrit's emphasis was on fairness and his ideas were later enlarged by Ximenes in his Art of the Crossword, which was published almost twenty years later.

The book became extremely rare. Most crossword books are discarded once the grids have been filled. In 1975, in his book The ABC of Crosswords, Alec Robins said, "(Armchair Crosswords) is unfortunately out of print and virtually unobtainable. In that book's introduction he laid down rigid standards of fairness and accuracy for setters; and it was his very scrupulousness in applying them to himself that set so many of his successors on the twin paths of idealism and self-discipline." I think that there may be less than a dozen of the original books remaining. The book is now re-published and hopefully the wit and ingenuity of A F Ritchie will reach a wider audience.

To order a copy of *Armchair Crosswords by Afrit* for £8 (plus £2 postage and package) fill in this form and send to

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