

## A short history of the British Daily Tit-Bits

Tit-Bits was launched by George Newnes (1881-1984) and established a model of rewriting material from many sources, using cheap newsprint and selling in volume. It was quite open about this. The masthead proclaimed "From all the most interesting books, periodicals and contributors in the world." It was the first popular paper to sell 1 million copies a week and its circulation peaked in 1955 at 1.1 million. The magazine was a mass circulation commercial publication which reached sales of between 400,000 and 600,000.

Contributors included Alfred Harmsworth (later Lord Northcliffe) and Winston Churchill. Tit-bits ran a contest in the first world war for a song that could be sung by soldiers at the front: Ivor Novello won it with "Keep the Home Fires Burning." Short stories and full-length fiction were also featured, including works by authors such as Rider Haggard, Isaac Asimov plus three very early stories by Christopher Priest. The first humorous article by P. G. Wodehouse "Men Who Missed Their Own Weddings", appeared in Tit-Bits in November 1900.

Reference to the magazine is also made in James Joyce's Ulysses, George Orwell's Animal Farm, James Hilton's Lost Horizon, Virginia Woolf's Moments of Being, and H. G. Wells' The First Men in the Moon. Wells also mentioned it in his book Experiment in Autobiography. The magazine is burlesqued as "Chit Chat" in George Gissing's New Grub Street. In the closing scene of the film Kind Hearts and Coronets (1949), the protagonist Louis Mazzini (Dennis Price) is approached by a journalist (Arthur Lowe) from Tit-Bits. Tit-Bits spawned many imitators, including Harmsworth's Answers. It specialized in 'human interest' snippets with short stories and full-length serials by authors such as Rider Haggard. Pin-ups appeared on its covers from 1939.



*Tit-Bits* from December 1955



*Tit-Bits* from December 16 1961

In the 1950s, George Newnes was at Tower House, Southampton St, Strand, London WC2. Tit-Bits was printed by W. Speaight, Exmoor St, W10. It came out on Mondays. In 1959, it was selling about 904,000 copies. By 1961, it was printed by Sun Printers, Watford & London. Tit-Bits lost the hyphen from its masthead at the beginning of 1973. Newnes became part of IPC Magazines at Kings Reach Tower, London. It took over rival Reveille. In the 1980s, it was published on Thursdays. Readers Digest would later produce material like this but in a more family friendly version. They would also see massive sales and are still in print today, thought their readers are aging fast.

Tit-bits was taken over by Associated Newspapers Weekend on 18 July 1984 with sales of 170,000 copies. The last editor was Paul Hopkins. Its main competitors were not other magazines but popular daily papers such as the Sun. Ron Chilton, chief executive of IPC Magazines, said the popular tabloids were 'just daily Tit-bits with a bit of news added on to the front'.

In reporting the closure, the Financial Times 'described Tit-bits as 'the 103-year-old progenitor of Britain's popular press'. It went on: 'The ploys used by newspapers today to boost circulation were nearly all pioneered by Tit-bits. Tit-bits was running competitions, with what were then fabulous prizes, decades ago; Tit-bits was first to put a glamour girl, albeit with clothes, on the front page;

Tit-bits serialized H. Rider Haggard's 'She;' and it was Tit-bits that first thought of launching a national treasure hunt.' The Financial Times also reported: 'Chilton made it clear that Titbits would never again come out as a separate publication. Apart from anything else, IPC would not wish the old logo to fall into the hands of pornographers. However, Tit-bits was later sold to Sport Newspapers, which then sold it on. The name lives on as a glossy adult monthly Tit-bits International.

### **What does that have to do with sliding block puzzles?**

The paper was always looking for ways to capture readers and the popular sliding block puzzles were a perfect way to advertise their paper. They took Dad's Puzzle, Ma's Puzzle, The Flying Puzzle and the 15 puzzle and made versions with their papers name TIT-BITS in prominent display. These puzzles were called Tit-Biits Teasers. They produces at least 6 versions.

These puzzles needed to be small, cheap to produce and have a cover or area where the advertising could be placed. The simple shape of the wooded blocks were cheap to make. The paper box was also cheap to make. The puzzle was pocket size and could be carried around and shared with friend thus adding to the advertising value.

Advertisers liked the inexpensive puzzles. There were over 20 versions of dad's puzzler used for advertising moving companies, refrigerators and oil companies and political candidates. Each version used the same puzzle pieces and the basic cover but added their names and changed the wording on the moving pieces to support the product being advertised. The shapes of the pieces were given names that reflected the new product.

The company could print what they wanted on the face of the blocks. There was room on the front of the lid to print the company name and the theme for the puzzle. Many of the advertising puzzles were easy to solve. You did not want to frustrate potential customers. Some were a bit harder but they were made that way for a particular reason. If the person could not solve the puzzle they could get the solution by visiting the merchant or they could send away to the merchant to get a solution. That way when they showed their friends the puzzle they would know the solution as if they had solved it.

## Sliding Blocks



## Tit-Bits Teaser 1, A version of Dad's Puzzler





**Tit-Bit Teaser Number 2. A Flying Puzzle version.**



*Tit-Bits Teaser No. 2, George Newnes, London, Made in the U.S.A., circa 1928.*

### Tit-Bit Teaser Number 3

I have not found this puzzle in any web search.  
Even the best puzzle collection list it as missing.

Tit-Bit Teaser Number 4. The Traffic Jam Puzzle. Similar to Ma's Puzzle





Tit-Bit Teaser Number 5. A Flying Puzzle version.

# TIT-BITS TEASER N<sup>o</sup> 5

## 6<sup>D</sup>

GLASGOW

 ROYAL SCOT		1 CARLISLE	12 WILLESDEN	
		2 LANCASTER	4 PRESTON	
VACANT		3 SIGNAL	5 SIGNAL	6 PRESTON
8 WIGAN	7 WARRINGTON	9 CREWE	10 RUGBY	11 BLETCHLEY
		9 STAFFORD		

LONDON

Place the blocks in box as per diagram. The puzzle is to move the big square block marked ROYAL SCOT from the corner marked GLASGOW to the bottom corner labelled LONDON without jumping or raising any block from the bottom of the box, and without turning any piece.

**GEORGE NEWNES LTD.**  
8-11 SOUTHAMPTON ST., LONDON, W.C.2

Not so easy as it looks!

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**Tit-Bit Teaser Number 6. A 15 Puzzle version.**



A Puzzle to arouse interest and sharpen the Intellect.

**HOW TO SET TO WORK.**

First of all arrange the small squares in the order of the diagram on the left. Take out and put aside the piece numbered 16 and then **slide** (not lift) the remaining pieces until you have arranged them in the order of the diagram on the right, after replacing 16 in the blank space and completing the Puzzle.

HOW TO START				HOW TO FINISH			
16	15	14	13	1	2	3	4
12	11	10	9	5	6	7	8
8	7	6	5	9	10	11	12
4	3	2	1	13	14	15	16

THE SOLUTION IN THE EDITOR'S POSSESSION WILL BE PUBLISHED IN THE ISSUE OF "TIT-BITS" DATED DECEMBER 31ST.