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WILLIAM THE FIRST

*Storybook Schoolboy's
Link with Auckland*

Written for "The Listener"
by DOROTHY WISEMAN

NEW ZEALAND children who have been, and still are, enjoying the BBC presentation of Richmal Crompton's inimitable "bad boy" story, *Just William*, will, no doubt, be interested to learn that their hero was indeed a real, live boy. The accompanying picture of him was sent out to his only aunt in New Zealand, Mrs. G. A. Downie, of Auckland, when "William"—then a "monkey and a terror" of the first water—was a prep. school-boy of around 10 years old. Later, he attended the famous English public school, Cheltenham.

William, whose name by the way, is really Thomas, first made his bow to the reading public more than 25 years



THOMAS, on whose escapades Richmal Crompton (his aunt) based her stories of "William"

ago when another aunt, Richmal Crompton, first realised that there was grand story material in her erring nephew. Her first *William* stories appeared in the old *Happy Magazine* about 1922, when she was a student at London University, and she continued to write them with ever-increasing success through her immediately-following years as science mistress on the staff of a girls' school. Since those days she has written more than 25 books based on the hair-raising exploits of this irresistible lad. The stories have achieved immense and lasting success, and *William*, as the Children's Departments of our Public Libraries will testify, is as popular to-day as ever he was.

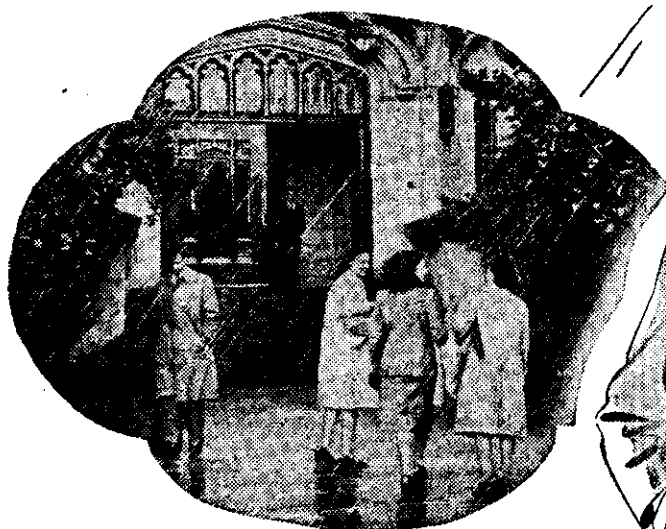
He Was at El Alamein

But while British children everywhere have been delighting in his doings as a story-book hero, the real William has been growing up. He is now 32 years old and a bank cashier in a Kentish town. He fought in the British Army throughout the war and was alongside our own New Zealanders at El Alamein. Nowadays his chief passion in life is not mischief, but music, and he is particularly devoted to the works of Beethoven. His sister Margaret, the argumentative Ethel of the stories, is also a very gifted person and had an interesting job during the war as a designer of the uniforms worn by the British—and also many of the American—women's services.

The full name of William's authoress-aunt is Richmal Crompton Lamburn, and her father, the Rev. Edward Lamburn, was for many years headmaster of Bury Grammar School in Lancashire. The unusual name Richmal dates from the days when an ancestress of the name journeyed to England with Anne of Renault, a Frenchwoman who crossed the Channel to marry one of the early English kings.

Richmal Crompton has written many novels and stories besides her *William* books, the best-known of which is perhaps the *Odyssey of Euphemia Tracy*. She is still writing prolifically. Her brother—William's uncle—is also a writer of distinction. He is John Lambourne, formerly of the Rhodesian

(continued on next page)



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