BRIAN ALDISS OBE (1936-39)

He was born on 18 August 1925 in Dereham, Norfolk above the family department store HH Aldisss. He died on 18 August 2017 on his 92nd birthday.

He was one of the greatest science fiction writers of his time and this seems to have started when he left the College at the age of 13.

This article was published on our website when he received the OBE in 2005 :-

Brian Aldiss (36-39), the famous science-fiction writer, was awarded an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours in June 2005 for services to literature. Brian Aldiss was one of many pupils who left the College at a young age at the start of WW2 and didn't return. Brian had indelible memories of ***life at Fram*** *in the 1930's.*

Brian later served with the Royal Signals Regiment in Burma.

After leaving the army, Brian worked as a bookseller in Oxford that provided the background for his first book, The Brightfount Diaries (1955), a volume of short stories. His first science fiction novel, Non-Stop, was published in 1958 while he was working as literary editor of the Oxford Mail between 1958 and 1969. He has written over 75 fiction and science-fiction titles including Hothouse (1962), which won the Hugo Award, The Saliva Tree (1966), which was awarded the Nebula, and Helliconia Spring (1982), which won both the British Science Fiction Association Award and the John W. Campbell Memorial Award.

Brian's autobiographical fiction includes The Hand-Reared Boy (1970) and A Soldier Erect (1971), and he has also written three volumes of autobiography, Bury My Heart at W. H. Smith's: A Writing Life (1990), The Twinkling of an Eye or My Life as an Englishman (1998) and When the Feast is Finished (1999). He is the author of several poetry collections, including Home Life with Cats (1992) and A Plutonian Monologue on His Wife's Death (2000).

Several of his books, including Frankenstein Unbound (filmed 1990), have been adapted for the cinema. Most recently, his story, 'Supertoys Last All Summer Long', was adapted and released as the film AI in 2001. His latest books are Super-State (2002) and Jocasta (2005), a reworking of Sophocles' classic Theban plays, Oedipus Rex and Antigone.

Brian has won numerous awards for science-fiction writing including a Kurd Lasswitz Award (Germany) and a Prix Jules Verne (Sweden). He lives in Oxford.

On 31 October 2015 he was the subject of a 2 page article in the Daily Telegraph magazine entitled "The world of Brian Aldiss, science-fiction writer". You can see the article below.

The world of Brian Aldiss, science-fiction writer

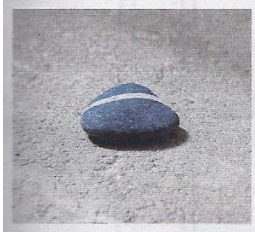
Brian Aldiss, 90, is a science-fiction author and anthologist. His career has spanned almost seven decades and seen him publish more than 100 books, among them the acclaimed Helliconia trilogy and *Frankenstein Unbound*. His short story *Supertoys Last All Summer Long* formed the basis of the Steven Spielberg film *AI Artificial Intelligence*. In 2000 Aldiss was named a grand master by the Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers of America. The four volumes of *The Brian Aldiss Collection: The Complete Short Stories: The 1960s* have just been republished by Harper Voyager. He lives in Headington, Oxfordshire, and has four children and seven grandchildren.

Routine I get up at around 7am and have a bit of toast

before settling down at my desk, starting by filling in my journal of the previous day. I've been doing it for decades; there are nearly 100 volumes now. After that I write and research until about midday. The rest of my day involves time with friends, a spot of gardening and often some fun in the evening – a cinema night or party.

Tolstoy I can't remember when I got interested in the

Russians, but they were always moaning about something, and that's what I wanted to hear when I was young. One automatically gets to Tolstoy after that, and I found him wonderful. He has seen all the ghastliness of life, yet he exults in it, knowing we only have to do it once. I've probably read *Resurrection* [pictured] eight times.

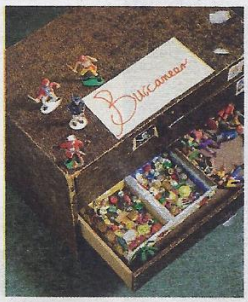


Defence mechanism My father was very unfeeling when I was growing up, and sent me off to boarding school when I was six. I was so upset that I used to wet the bed in the dormitory. To stop other boys teasing me, I told terrifying stories. If any of them cried out in horror for me to stop, I had triumphed; they were never going to mock me. Eventually I wrote the stories down. I intended to charge a penny per read, such was the demand. Unfortunately, everybody wanted to read, but they weren't so happy to pay.
War In 1943 I joined the Royal Signals, keen to escape living with my parents and looking for adventure. I was posted to the Far East and had my 19th birthday on the harbour frontier in Bombay. I fought in what became known as the Forgotten Army. We saw so many explosions, so much death and hardship, but I also made friends for life and grew fond of Asian culture [statue pictured, previous page].

When I was a boy in Devon, I would write and illustrate stories in school exercise books to amuse my little sister, Betty. I must have been about 11, and she was six. Astonishingly, they've survived all through the war, and plenty of moves. Some were quite bloodthirsty, others fairly tame, and I did a regular series about the exploits of characters called Adventure Boy and Adventure Girl, based on the two of us.

You can't ever truly escape memories of war, however, and in a way I was fortunate to have my stories to funnel some of those images into.
Pebble In many ways, this pebble [pictured] represents time itself. I found it on the beach in Norfolk when I was eight, and its markings are extraordinary. If you ponder just how many years it would have taken for such an appearance to form, the age it must be is staggering, and puts life in perspective.

Painting I have always been a painter, practically as long as I have been a writer. This [pictured] is one I did earlier this year. It's typical of the sort of style I do now, but that has changed a bit over the years. I've sold a few in my time, and have had one or two exhibitions in Oxford.
Board game I first played this Waddington's game of Buccaneer [pictured] at Christmas when I was about 10, before war broke out. Every generation in my family has played it since, but I have added so many new rules and characters that it has morphed into something else entirely. My children say I adapted it so I would win, but I just made sure it kept up with them getting cleverer. It isn't very politically correct, though – I introduced slavery at one point.



Agatha Christie's secret When I was a young bookseller in Oxford, I was fortunate enough to have lunch with Agatha Christie at All Souls College. She was very grand but all sweetness, and I plucked up the courage to look for some writerly advice, asking how she came up with such complex novels that tie together so neatly. She told me she wrote the books as normal, all the way through, before pausing at the penultimate chapter. She'd then work out who was the least likely character to have committed the crime and go back to fix a few train timetables, alter some relationships and make sure it all made sense, before proceeding to the end.
Creativity My sister, Betty, is a very creative person. She went to art school and was once a costume designer for the BBC, and made this wonderful collage screen for me [pictured]. I have no idea where we got our creative genes from – neither of my parents was good in that department – but I suppose it must have always been bubbling under.
America I used to go to a science-fiction convention called the Conference on th Fantastic, in Florida. They spoilt me no end, so I'd just generally show off at various events. This poster [pictured was for one of them, an 'imaginary conversation with Philip K Dick'. It's called Kindred Blood after his middle name. I have always been popular in America. Readers there are less stupi about science fiction. British people have – or had – a bit of a prejudice against it, but Americans understand that while it may take place in ar alternate or future world, it deals with the present.

Interview by Guy Kelly. Photographs by Rick Pushinsky
Next week: Gemma Cairney, radio presenter

The following obituary appeared in the Daily Telegraph on 22 August 2017 :-

BRAIN ALDISS – Master of science fiction who used the genre to exorcise the ghosts of a traumatic childhood and hold up a mirror to modern life

Brian Aldiss, who has died on his 92nd birthday, was one of Britain's leading science fiction writers, although he wrote in many other genres and was gifted in both his range and invention.

Aldiss came to prominence in the 1960s alongside Kurt Vonnegut and J G Ballard as part of a new wave of science fiction writing which used its conventions to hold up a mirror to the present – a present in which the human race is threatened by its own ambitions and ingenuity.

As a writer Aldiss was extraordinarily prolific. As well as more than 40 science fiction novels and short story collections, he edited numerous anthologies, wrote a 700-page autobiography, books of travel, a three-novel series based on his own experiences of growing into manhood, a four-novel series about the last days of the Cold War, a volume of poetry, and a series of comic short stories set in a bookshop.

At its best, Aldiss's science fiction had all the strengths of the good novel – strong storylines combined with emotional depth and psychological insight. It seemed that within the traditional plot-driven structure of science fiction, Aldiss found the metaphorical landscape to confront the demons and insecurities that had pursued him into adult life from an unhappy childhood: "When childhood dies," he once said, "its corpses are called adults and they enter society, one of the politer names of hell."

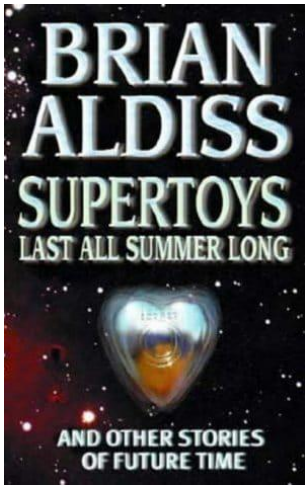
Brian Wilson Aldiss was born on August 18 1925 above HH Aldiss, the family department store at Dereham, Norfolk. The business had been founded by Aldiss's grandfather, known as "the Guv'nor", as a drapers and outfitters, doubling as an undertaker. H H Aldiss's sons, including Brian's father Bill, were employees, and

young Brian spent his first five years living in the warren of shops, workshops and living quarters that fronted Dereham High Street.

His childhood, though, was the stuff of nightmares. His father, though basically a decent sort, had been traumatised by his experiences in the First World War and sometimes took his anger out on his young son, on one occasion holding the squalling infant out of a first floor window and threatening to drop him unless he stopped crying.

But it was his mother Elizabeth whom he blamed for inflicting the deepest emotional scars. From his earliest years she made him feel unwanted, comparing him unfavourably with an older sister, who, he was given to understand, had died at the age of six months; it was only 60 years later when he examined the parish records that he discovered that she had in fact been stillborn.

Brian was five when his younger sister Betty was born and, suffering from whooping cough, he was packed off for six weeks to stay with his grandmother in Peterborough. An acutely sensitive child, he came to believe that he had been deserted by his family in his hour of need, an impression reinforced after his return to Dereham by his mother who threatened to leave him if he would not behave.

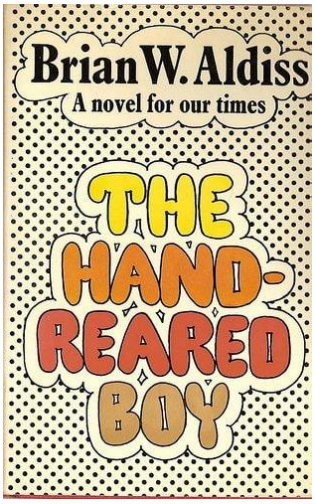


Themes of rejection and loneliness featured frequently in his writing. In the 1960s he wrote a short story about an android boy called Supertoys Last All Summer Long. In the story, the boy does not realise he is an android, but is aware that his mother does not quite love him and is unsure why. The pathos becomes acute when she gets permission for a real pregnancy. The story was bought by Stanley Kubrick as the basis for a film, was taken over by Steven Speilberg after Kubrick's death and released as A1 Artificial Intelligence in 2001.

Aldiss's mother's rejection brought on bouts of vomiting and bed-wetting, and to sort him out his parents packed him off, aged six, to the first of a series of nightmarish boarding schools where he was variously beaten, bored, starved, and sexually assaulted in the dormitory by older boys. "I felt I was being incarcerated in these places because I was a nuisance in the family", he would recall.

Storytelling was his salvation. At prep school, he would entertain his friends with stories about Bessie, a ghost who occupied the front room in the family home in Dereham. He also discovered a talent for drawing elaborate mazes which would often wind over several sheets of paper.

In 1936, aged 11, he discovered Astounding Science Fiction, a magazine which opened a whole new imaginary landscape: "I felt that this was the real world – that it was much more important than anything I knew before." He filled notebooks with his stories: "I warn you Aldiss", one of his schoolmasters thundered, "if you go on like this, you'll become another Evelyn Waugh".



At the age of 16 he was transferred to West Buckland School, Devon, where his parents had moved after "the Guv'nor's" death, Brian's father having been bought out of his share in the family business by his uncle.

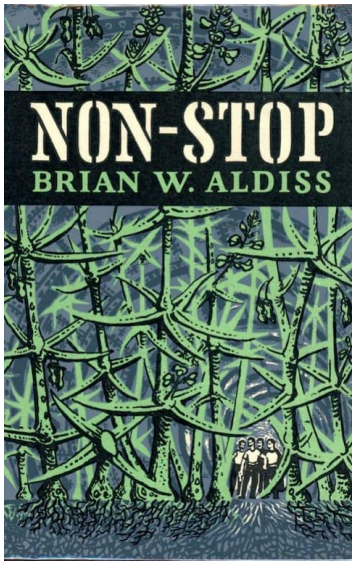
There, Brian graduated to writing mild pornography to titillate the other boys and towards the end of his school career enjoyed a torrid affair in the school linen cupboard with the school matron.

He drew upon his experiences of adolescence in The Hand-Reared Boy (1963), the first of the Horatio Stubbs trilogy. With its enthusiastic celebration of masturbation, the book became a succès de scandale and shot to the top of the bestseller lists.

In 1943 Aldiss signed up with the Army and trained in Norfolk and India as a signalman. He then went to Burma with Slim's "Forgotten Army", and though

(thanks to the bombing of Hiroshima) he never fired a shot in anger, he enjoyed the comradeship. "To go from boarding school to the comparative comfort of the British army was tremendous", he recalled.

He took part in the liberation of Mandalay and was later posted to Sumatra where British, Indian and still-armed Japanese occupiers fought side by side against Indonesian insurgents, with orders to return the islands to the Dutch. There he ran a cinema for the troops and fell in love with a Chinese woman who went to Singapore expecting him to follow. Instead he was posted to Hong Kong and never saw her again.



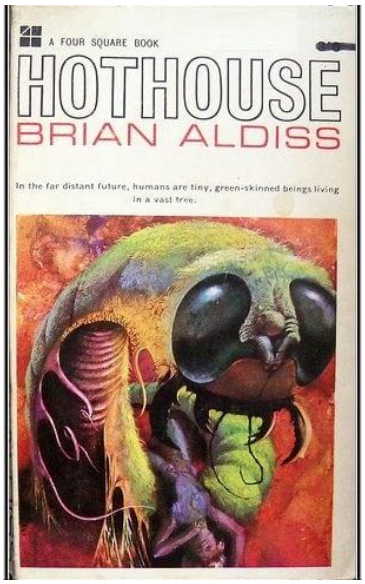
Aldiss's adventures in the Far East would inspire several books including A Soldier Erect (1971) and A Rude Awakening (1978) – the last two in the Horatio Stubbs series. They also provided him with useful imagery for his science fiction. In Non-Stop (1958), his first science fiction novel, a jungle is let loose within a starship. In Hothouse (1964), a giant banyan tree sprawls across the world, threatening to smother humanity.

Compared with all this, post-war Britain was dreary almost beyond endurance. Unable to bear the thought of a conventional career, Aldiss found a job in Sanders booksellers in Oxford where he marked down Evelyn Waugh as the rudest of all his customers, and John Betjeman as one of the nicest and most unworldly. In 1948 he married the owner's secretary Olive Fortescue.

Aldiss's' first science fiction story, Criminal Record, was published in the magazine Science Fantasy in 1954. Other successful short stories followed, including Not for an Age (1955) which won a science fiction competition run by the Observer. The same year saw the birth of a son, and gained him his first mainstream literary success with The Brightfount Diaries, a book of comic short stories based on bookshop life. Following its publication, Aldiss was offered the post of literary editor of the Oxford Mail.

The prize money from the Observer enabled him to throw in his job at the bookshop and work from home. But the arrangement put an additional strain on an already rocky marriage. After the birth of a daughter in 1957, Aldiss walked out on his marriage.

For some years he lived a Bohemian life in a run-down part of Oxford. Lonely and yearning to see his children, he became seriously depressed. At night he would walk for miles; in the day he would sometimes find himself shoplifting boxes of Lego for his son. In Greybeard (1964) he poured out his sense of loss in a parable of England left without children after a terrible plague.



Yet the end of his first marriage marked the beginning of an illustrious literary career. Non-Stop won him the accolade of Most Promising New Author of the Year from the 16th World Science Fiction Convention, and thereafter he continued to churn out bestsellers at the rate of about one a year.

During the 1960s he won two of the most important prizes for the genre: the Hugo (awarded by fans) in 1962 for Hothouse and the Nebula (awarded by other writers) in 1965 for The Saliva Tree. In 1961 he was appointed editor of the Penguin Science Fiction Series and in 1968 was voted the most popular science fiction writer by the British Science Fiction Association.

His personal life too took a turn for the better after he met Margaret Manson, secretary of the editor of the Oxford Mail, who became his second wife in 1965.

By the 1970s everything seemed to be going Aldiss's way. Happily ensconced with Margaret and their two young children in a spacious house just outside

Oxford, he had been reconciled with the children of his first marriage and his literary career continued to flourish.

But both he and Margaret had affairs and their mutual infidelities led him to have a nervous breakdown in 1974. He subsequently became very ill with chronic fatigue syndrome. His problems were compounded in 1981 when his accountant rolled up at his house one day and informed him that, owing to a miscalculation, he had been discovered to be owing huge amounts of money to the taxman. Aldiss was obliged to sell his house and his vast science fiction library to pay off his debts.

Again he found salvation through writing, embarking on the Helliconia trilogy (1982-3), a sequence set on a planet with such a wide orbit that a complete year takes 1,000 earth years while the seasons consume whole generations. The series contained vivid metaphorical landscapes of depression and was acclaimed as a masterpiece.

The books restored his fortunes, enabling him to buy another large house outside Oxford. His psychological turning point was typically bizarre "I heard a voice in the middle of the night which told me quite clearly that my mother really loved me", he recalled. "Until then I had always been convinced that my mother didn't love me and it had made me very insecure as a consequence".

In the early 1990s, with their children grown up, the Aldisses sold their home to Roger Penrose (the mathematician with whom Aldiss would collaborate on White Mars, a Utopian novel published in 1999) and moved to a smaller house in Headington.

But in 1997, Aldiss suddenly developed an inexplicable phobia about finding a snake in the house; three months later, Margaret Aldiss was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. She died in her husband's arms in November 1997. Devastated, Aldiss published a moving account of her death in When the Feast is Finished (1999).

A tall, shambling, unassuming man, Aldiss had a sharp sense of humour and a disarming frankness of manner. A prominent figure on the literary scene (he served at various times on the Booker jury and on the Arts Council literary panel), he vigorously pressed the claims of science fiction as a respectable literary genre uniquely suited to the twentieth century, and wrote an acclaimed history, Billion Year Spree, in 1988.

Aldiss wrote two autobiographical memoirs, Bury My Heart at WH Smith's: A Writing Life (1990) and The Twinkling of an Eye: My Life as an Englishman (1998).

He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1994, and served as chairman of the Society of Authors in 1968, president of the British Science Fiction Association from 1960 to 1964 and of World Science Fiction from 1982 to 1984. He was appointed OBE in 2005.

His last novel, Comfort Zone, published in 2013, was not a work of science fiction, but a story set in Oxford about the breakdown of a community amid controversy over a proposal to build a mosque.

Aldiss is survived by a son and daughter by his first marriage and a son and daughter by his second.

Brian Aldiss, born August 18 1925, died August 18 2017

The Sunday Times on 27 August 2017 printed the following additional short article on him, making specific reference to his time at the College but without naming it :-

Brian Aldiss

Bestselling writer who honed his skills telling ghost stories to school friends

The author Brian Aldiss, who died the day after his 92nd birthday, established his literary credentials by telling ghost stories at the dead of night to a prep school dormitory of fellow pupils poised to pelt him with shoes if he faltered. “I’ve never feared criticism since,” he said.

An ebullient man who did not hide his weakness for women and brandy, he was recognised as a harbinger of a new type of science fiction that explored the foibles of humanity. One of his short stories became the basis for the Steven Spielberg film AI: Artificial Intelligence. He also wrote a bestselling series of sex comedies in the 1970s.

Aldiss was an atheist but hoped to have a church funeral. There was one condition: “I want all my friends to dress up as skeletons.”

— *The Times*