

Tom Thumb

Tom Thumb tells of the adventures of a boy as big as his father's thumb. The earliest surviving printed edition was published by Richard Johnson in London in 1621, which makes it the first printed fairy tale native to England.

Tom Thumb was undoubtedly a staple of oral storytelling before this. He is mentioned in earlier texts that assume the reader is familiar with the concept. The exact folklore is unknown, and it is impossible to know to what extent Johnson was retelling a traditional tale or creating a new one.

Dressed in an outfit fashioned of leaves and cobwebs, Tom embarks on a series of increasingly ridiculous and repetitive adventures. He is accidentally baked into a pudding but eats his way to freedom. He is retrieved from a

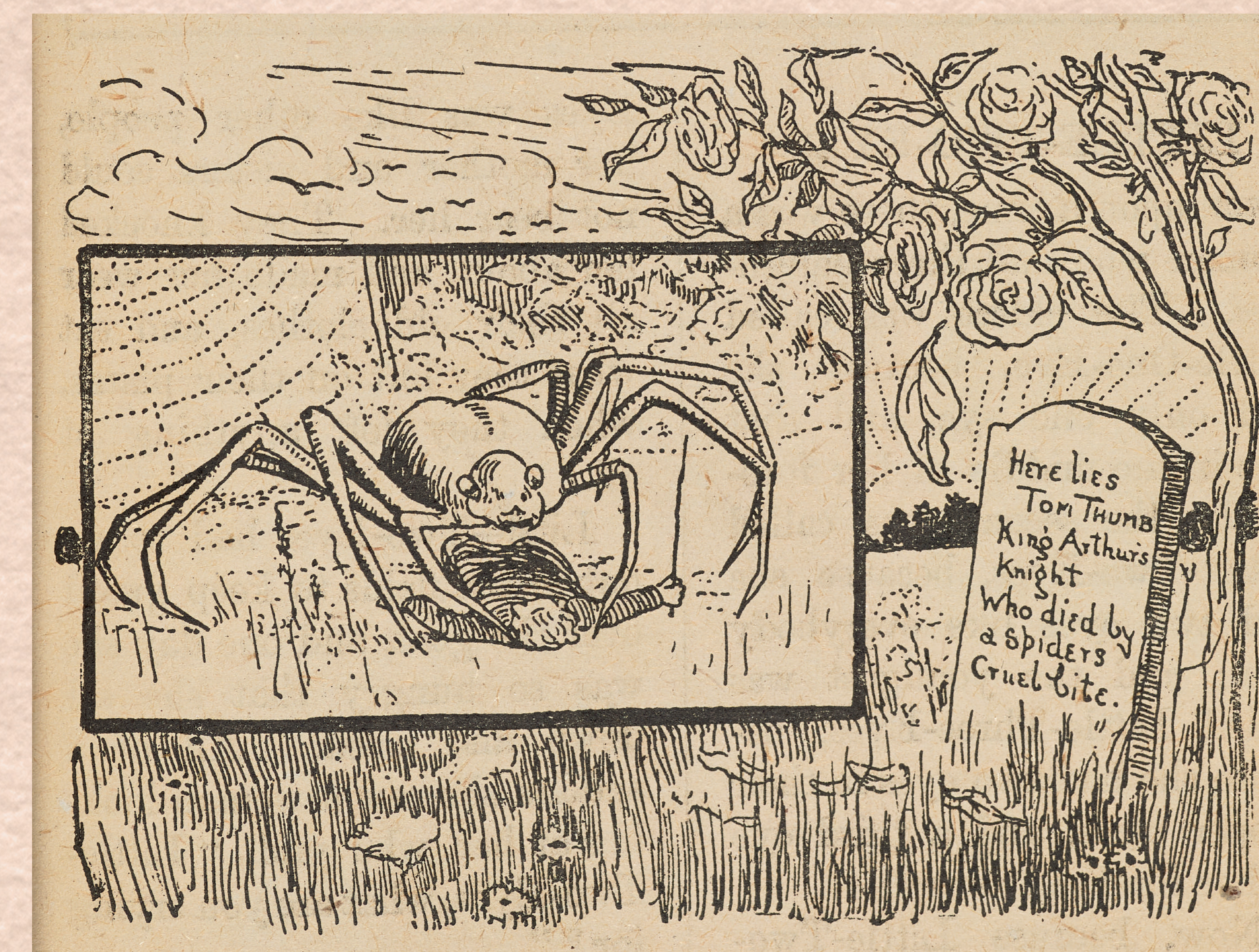
cow's stomach by his mother and a laxative. Having been carried away by a raven to a cannibal giant's castle, he escapes by 'rumbling and tumbling' in the giant's stomach until he is vomited up. Eventually making his way to King Arthur's court, he becomes a great favourite with both the King and the ladies. After visiting his parents, Tom is bestowed magical gifts from his fairy godmother, including a ring that makes him invisible and a hat of knowledge. His subsequent adventures involve more enchantment and less swallowing.

Tom Thumb enjoyed considerable success as a prolific writer over the centuries. His name is appended to more children's books, primarily educational, than any other national folk hero.

The Surprising adventures of Tom Thumb (1814-1820?). Briggs Collection Pamphlet PZ6.1.S8 barcode 6001930743. Tom Thumb was originally intended to entertain adults but by the nineteenth century was sanitised for a younger audience. In particular, references to bodily functions were removed by having Tom escape from the various creatures' mouths.

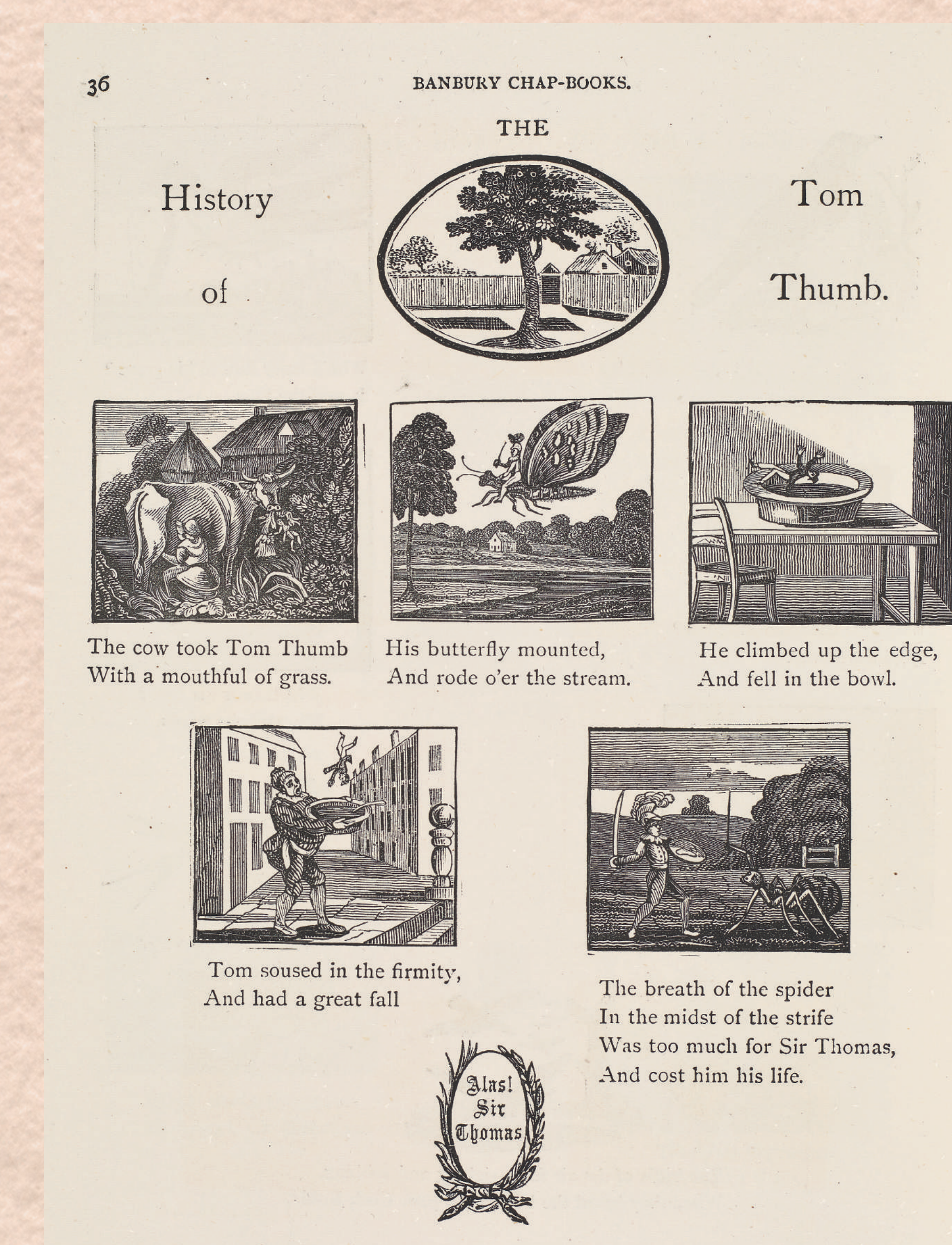


Plaque marking the grave of Tom Thumb in The Collegiate Holy Trinity Church, Tattershall, Lincolnshire. CC-BY-SA-3.0 Wikipedia. Tom Thumb's grave adjacent to the font in Holy Trinity Church, Tattershall, Lincolnshire. The tiny gravestone is just 16" (40cm) long and the inscription reads: "T. THUMB, Aged 101 Died 1620".



Tom Thumb, *Favourite fairy-tales*, edited by W.T. Stead (1896?). Briggs Collection Pamphlet PZ6.1.F2 barcode 1005848128.

Tom Thumb's adventures end abruptly in the 1621 book, but later editions frequently have him dying of a spider's bite.



'The History of Tom Thumb', from *Banbury chap-books and nursery toy book literature*, E. Pearson (1890). Briggs Collection Z1037.67.P4 barcode 6001932940.