

# THE COLLECTORS' DIGEST

VOLUME 9, No. 106.

Price 1s. 6d.

OCTOBER, 1955



MR. MAURICE DOWN, LAST EDITOR OF THE GEM & MAGNET.  
DRAWN SPECIALLY FOR THE C.D. BY MR. C. H. CHAPMAN.

# The Collector's Digest

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Editor, HERBERT LECKENBY,  
c/o YORK DUPLICATING SERVICES,  
7, The Shambles, YORK.

## From the Editor's Chair

EIGHTH LONDON PILGRIMAGE: Ah me! It's all over once again, and honestly, I believe its been the most hectic of them all, and once again I'm faced with the problem of giving an adequate description without overrunning my space.

Anyway on Monday, September 12th I arrived at King's Cross at 1 p.m. to find Len Packman awaiting me as he has done for years past; on this occasion he had a companion, that Happy Wanderer, Alan Stewart who was to set sail for foreign parts again two days later. A pleasant chat, then Len and I went on to my now familiar 'den' at John Shaw's. Len had got the week off and we proceeded to map out a programme. Unfortunately, where Len was concerned, it wasn't going to be carried out.

The following day we had arranged to meet George Mell at lunch time and then go on to Surbiton to see Eric Fayne. We met George, then Len, feeling ill, had to go home. During the rest of my stay I only saw Len once and that was in his bedroom. Whilst there he asked me to express his regrets that replies to his many correspondents would be inevitably delayed, but he would respond as quickly as ever possible.

Well, on that Tuesday I went on to Surbiton where I had the same good time I have had in the seven years that have gone before.

Other familiar rendezvous were with Eric Landy and Jimmy Stewart Hunter at Liverpool Street, Charles Vennimore on the Embankment, Marcus Johnson in Baker Street, Ben and Bob Whiter at Wood Green, Bob Blyth at Holloway, Arthur Richardson at the Ministry of Civil Aviation, and Roger Jenkins by the Marble Arch. How I love to go along to these places just as I did last year, and the years before that.

Here's a typical day. Met Bill Lofts in Edgeware Road at noon and went on to his home for a look at his collection. Then

to Paddington Station to meet for the first time Ray Bennett from Tipton, Staffs. The meeting lasted just four minutes. There's a good story behind that but space prevents me giving it in detail unfortunately. From there we went on to renew acquaintance with genial Jim Swan. Next a journey right across London to the home of Frank Pettingell. Gosh! what a reception he gave us. We could have stayed all night browsing over his marvellous collection. In between we heard a little of his experiences whilst working in the film "Value for Money" with Diana Dors. Back to Camberwell about midnight. Not a bad effort for a chap in retirement! The spirit of eternal youth!

Up bright and early next morning for the Brighton meeting, held once more at the hospitable home of Bill and Gladys Jardine. What a grand pair they are; and what trouble they go to to make sure all the members who make the journey have a good time. I'll leave Ben Whiter to tell you all about the meeting. On the way down I had the pleasure of a good chat with Maurice Kutner, whom I was meeting for the first time.

Prior to that there was the little party at Len Packman's. Present were Bill Lofts, Charlie and Olive Wright, and the enthusiastic members of the younger generation, Anthony Baker and Mike Moorcock. A pleasant evening indeed, though inevitably quiet as Len was in bed in a nearby room.

Another outstanding event was the long run down to Bournemouth with Bill Lofts to see John Jukes whom I knew not last year, but jolly glad to think I know now. A lovely late summer's day and a grand welcome by John and Mrs. Jukes. Bill remarked when he had been there a few minutes that he felt quite at home and so indeed did I.

Then on my last full day a pleasant surprise, I learned that the Reverend Mr. Pound from Birmingham was in London. We met and had lunch together.

Len, of course, was unable to see me off from Kings Cross as of yore, but I did not make for the train alone for Charlie Wright was there to bid me farewell.

Well, I'm writing this a few hours after my return home and what a job it has been to try and get all in in the space at my disposal. Is there any wonder I am saying as I write '354 days until the next time'?

POSTSCRIPTS

To John Jukes. I believe it's 102 miles from Waterloo to Bournemouth, but verily, John, it was worth every yard of it.

To Mike Moorcock. Hard luck about that officious ticket collector at Victoria, Mike. He was so busy showing his authority to you that he never got my ticket. I'm keeping it as a souvenir.

To Frank Pettingell. I bet it took you a long time to get all those volumes back on their shelves again, Frank. I'll be thinking of that evening every time I hear you on the wireless from now on.

To Ray Bennett. All the way from Tipton, Staffs, for a four minutes chat, and you say it was well worth while. I must buy a new hat, Ray.

To Jim Parratt. Sorry I couldn't accept your kind invitation to see Bunter on T.V.

To Percy North (Basingstoke), Ted Cox and George Copping (Southampton). So near and yet so far thought I as we passed through your stations.

To Len Packman. What rotten luck for you after planning such a perfect week for me. I can only hope Len you will be fit again by the time you read this.

To John Shaw. How comfortable was I in what I have come to look upon as that little 'den' of mine.

To all the members, wives, mothers and fathers my sincere thanks for all their hospitality.

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MORE ABOUT THE "ANNUAL": Shortly after my last news about the Annual's progress I received from New Zealand Geoff. Hockley's article "S. Walkey, King of Adventure Story Writers". And Geoff. actually paid 10/- to send it air-mail! Gosh, when I think of some of the things you fellows do for the cause my heart is full.

When I read Geoff's graphic descriptions of those blood-tin-gling yarns, I had an impulse to get out some of the 'Chums' I possess and get down to reading about such picturesque characters as Admiral Slam, Captain Angel, Solomon Snake, Sharkteeth and Davy Yardarm. So will you I guess if you are fortunate enough to possess them.

Soon after came a thought-provoking article from Don Webster, "Bridging the Gap". Don says quite a lot in comparatively small space.

Next, Roger Jenkins' "Those Blue and White Magnets". Well you

know what Roger can do.

What else? Plenty! Just before I left for London, Gerry Allison handed me "Restoring Order at Rookwood". A big effort this and no error, for it gives a complete list of all the Rookwood stories in the Boys Friend and a key to those which were republished in the S.O.L. Gerry pays tribute to those who helped in a big task.

And oh yes, there's two contributions by myself "Streets of Memories" and "Those Remarkable Serials in the Old Time Comics".

Well, that's enough to be going on with. Honestly I'm confident its going to be as good as those that have gone before.

Have you ordered yet? If not, do please do so without delay. It's so much easier for me when I can calculate requirements. I should appreciate, too, a few more adverts.

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In the land of the Rising Sun. Whilst in London Ben Whiter gave me a pleasant surprise for he told me that a number of C.D's. had turned up in the British Embassy at Tokio! I have an idea Alan Stewart may know something about that. Anyway they evidently interested a member of the Embassy so much so he may soon be a member of the London O.B.B.C.

Happenings like that make life seem good to,

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LECKENBY.

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THE STRANGE STORY OF THE CHAMPION MAGAZINE

By W.O.G. Lofts

Much has been written of late of the end of the "Champion" which in accordance with the A.P. new policy of modernising all its publications was the last of the pre-war A.P. papers to finish. I would now like to record the existence of a boys paper which appeared in 1913 entitled "The Champion Magazine" which has given me plenty of work to do regarding research and writing and also coincidences that I have ever come across. My story opens several months ago, when that great enthusiast of boys' papers Anthony Baker showed me a copy of this magazine; it was number One, Price 3d. and issued monthly. This paper was published by Odhams Press,

and was modelled on the style of the B.O.P. and "Captain". It was quite a good publication, and its contents were really firstclass. Upon looking through the files of the British Museum, I could not find any trace of its existence, and concluded that either they had mislaid their records whilst cataloguing, or else Odhams had not sent them copies as required by law. Several weeks later Herbert Leckenby wrote to me and asked me if I had ever heard of the "Champion Magazine". He had a copy of number 12. He also wondered how long the paper ran. I then wrote to Odhams Press Ltd. and asked them for details of this paper. I was not prepared for the reply I received. It came from the legal office and they stated they have no record of ever publishing a paper of that name! I phoned their legal representative and said that I know that they published the paper because I had a copy of it, and that there could be no mistake who the publishers were. They then promised a more thorough search, and there the matter rested.

A few weeks later Mr. T. Johnson of Neston wrote to me, and asked me if I could give him any details of "The Champion Magazine" as he had a copy of January 1914 No. 1 Vol. 2 which was the copy following mine. (Herbert had very kindly let me have his number 12, dated December 1913). Talk about coincidences; three different people writing to me in the short space of time about a boys paper which had never been heard of before. Now let me finish my story, whilst at the Museum on Whit Saturday, the supervisor told me that they had found trace of the paper I had been seeking the previous visits, "The Champion Magazine". It had been incorrectly catalogued hence my natural failure to find trace of its existence. The paper in its second volume had changed its publishers, and also its editor, it must have ran for only 9 or 10 issues longer because it ended in October 1914. The Museum copies of the second volume are bound into an Annual form, with a preface, and like the bound copies of B.O.P. and Chums. Mr. Johnson's copy is the monthly issue complete with cover. I should say for certain that the magazine finished around that time, because all the serial stories were completed, and one story in fact was given brief details of how the story would have ended. The publishers of the 2nd Vol. were Partridge and Son.

The Editor in his chat in the last volume of Vol. 1 gives some sort of hint that the paper would be out of his control, because he repeats himself several times in lines of poems "I shall not

pass this way again". Vol. 2 which is bound into Annual form has on its cover a boy playing football, with a blue background. Its inside cover had inscribed "The Champion Annual" 1914. I myself have seen several of these annuals in the past, but did not naturally connect it with a monthly boy's paper which was in fact bound into an annual form.

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## BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

27, Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22.

As I require every inch of space this month in order to get in all that simply must go in, I will just say that there are a lot more good things in store for you in forthcoming issues - and I still want to hear from more of you.

JOSEIE PACKMAN.

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### CRICKETER AND CRACKSMAN

by Walter Webb

#### PART TWO

The battlefield upon which Sexton Blake and Raffles were next to come to grips was far removed from the little village in Somerset, being, in fact, in far off Gibraltar, the exciting incidents of which were published in S.B.Lib. No. 601 on 2 December 1937, under the title of "Raffles' Crime in Gibraltar".

A manuscript containing the formula for the manufacture of a very cheap and effective synthetic fuel for internal combustion engines, containing complete and exhaustive notes upon the process was the prize for which several crooks of different nationalities were determined to get their hands on. When Raffles fell foul of one, Lal Chundra, who had been commissioned by one of the totalitarian states to get the manuscript by any means, he found himself right up to his neck in trouble, and this was aggravated still further when Sexton Blake arrived in Gib. But the full force of Blake's attack was directed against Lal Chundra, the more deadly and ruthless enemy, and it was this fact which gave Raffles the opportunity of wriggling out of a most unpleasant situation, though

not without profit for himself, for the gentleman cracksman escaped from Gib. with his pockets lined with notes and diamonds, stolen from the safe of Lal Chundra. In this episode Raffles took the spoils but the honours went to Sexton Blake.

The paths of Sexton Blake and A.J. Raffles crossed again just over a year later, when the war clouds were gathering ominously over Europe and the progress of A.R.P. activities and other defence measures were front page news in all the newspapers. This third case, the details of which are to be found in the famous Baker Street Index, tabulated under the heading of "The A.R.P. Mystery", and recorded in story form in S.B.Lib. No. 669, concerned the rivalry of two big private inquiry concerns, the Raeburn Scribe Agency and the W.J. Allardyce Investigations, and their campaign against a desperately dangerous organisation of spies and saboteurs, known as the "Earthquake Men", whose plan it was to take over a chain of the bomb-proof, gas-proof shelters now completed in various parts of the country, and secretly equip them with machine-guns. But the plot to sabotage and blow up our aerodromes by the Earthquake Men who would then fall back into the bomb and gas proof redoubts, equipped for a siege and intended to form footholds on which invading troops, dropped by parachute could descend, was smashed by the intervention of Sexton Blake. Not that Blake was the only man to get to grips with the ruthless Earthquake Men - A.J. Raffles and Bunny Manders also played a harassing part in the grand climax, helping materially, if unintentionally, to bring to the criminologist one of his greatest successes.

Three quarters of a million in gold lying on the bed of the Gulf of Sandoros! Such was the glittering prize which lured to the scene the arch crook known as the Key Man, Raffles the gentleman cracksman, his partner, Bunny Manders and sundry others of the criminal fraternity. It brought Sexton Blake and Tinker along too, but in their case it was to baulk the lawbreakers of their intentions of raising the spoils for their own ends. Although Blake succeeded in thwarting the crooks of their intentions, he once more had the galling experience of being unable to pin anything on the cool, iron-nerved gentleman cracksman, so that, as far as the pair of them was concerned, it was once again "Honours Even".

This adventure, entitled "Scuttler's Cache" was perhaps originally intended for publication in the S.B.Lib., but actually



inserted in the first SEXTON BLAKE ANNUAL, in three episodes. To be quite accurate, this was the third of the Blake v Raffles encounters, for it was written before the A.R.P. Mystery, which was destined to be the final meeting between the famous pair.

When in idle moments Sexton Blake is wont to skim through the pages of the Index, Tinker's notes in relation to their tussles with Raffles are not without their effect in the detective's memory. It is with genuine respect and ungrudging admiration that the investigator looks back on those stirring encounters, to the cool, steady nerved, smooth-tongued cracksman, so self-possessed, so calculating, and above all, so worthy a foeman of his - Blake's - own steel. \*

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\* For those who are interested, the original complete series of Raffles stories by E.W. Hornung, appeared in three volumes: "Raffles" (The Amateur Cracksman), "Mr. Justice Raffles" and "A Thief in the Night", the number of stories in each volume bring 16, 19 and 10, in that order.

J.P.

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CONSULTING ROOM CHAT: An Occasional Blakien Miscellany  
by DEREK FORD

What's in a Name? A friend of mine in Manchester, to whom I lent the May "C.D." with my first "Chat" in it, was my one and only correspondent on the subject of house-names with Blakian associations. So it would seem that they are elusive as well as exclusive. My friend writes: "Your paragraph reminded me of the house I was negotiating for - unsuccessfully it turned out - the month before war broke out, called SEKALB (please reverse). I believe it suffered heavy bomb damage a few years later, so it appears not to have been one of those 'lucky names' one occasionally hears about. Apart from this, and it may have referred to the admiral, the artist, the poet - even the owner rather than the 'tec - I have come across no 'WALDOORS', 'PURVALES' or 'WULINGS' - not even a 'ZENITH'.

"I wonder if any of your readers recall the popularity of the name Pedro for dogs - and cats - some thirty years ago. Every variety seemed to have been called it, from Alsatian to Wolfhound, small dogs included. I particularly remember an advert in my local paper about that time which read something like: 'LOST'.

fawn and white dog (mastiff), answers Pedro'. I particularly remember the last part, but unfortunately never discovered what the question was. I suppose you know that the Spanish name Pedro is the equivalent of the English Peter.

"I have gone in for the 'Daily Sketch' win a racehorse competition. What about Pedro as a suitable name for it, if I'm lucky? Alternative 'Tinker' has, in various forms, been used before, so that's out. I suppose it would be sacrilege to call it 'Sexton Blake'. I shall bear in mind, however, for that little country pub I've long promised myself if I was ever real lucky on the 'pools'. To close this paragraph, does any reader remember the racehorse called Paul Cynos?"

News Item. "P.C. Perkins lives in Sherlock Road, Hampstead, attached to Holmes Road police station, Kentish Town". Now if any reader could find us, say, a P.C. Tinker, living in Sexton Road.....

A check in the Manchester area telephone directory shows only one S. Blake listed. How about yours?

(There is only one plain S. BLAKE listed in the London Telephone Directory (London Postal Area). J.P.)

Complaint. When I was last over at my Manchester friend's home, his son was complaining to me about being told off for bringing his S.B. Lib. to the table ... "Dad promptly afterwards opened his paper". Instead of telling him it was one of the privileges of growing-up, perhaps I should have quoted the Duke of Wellington on the subject: "Reading at meals promotes digestion. It has a greater virtue, for no reader at meals was ever a glutton. I always read at meals".

Revelations. So now Blake has turned up in America ... in the pages of "Brave & Bold", according to W.O.G. Lofts, and called Gordon Keith. Did you know that, in revised S.B. Libs., Blake has also been called Paul Rivington and Anthony Vyne by Donald Stuart (Gerald Verner); Ruston Carr by Anthony Parsons, and Anthony Hood by John Drummond? And that is not a complete list by any means. But, in my opinion, the use to which S.B.L. No. 173 "The Motor-Coach Mystery", by Walter Tyrer, was put several years ago will need some beating. The plot was used for the "Susie" serial 'strip' in the Sunday Dispatch. I'm really surprised no one spotted it at the time. Incidentally, John Hunter, as Peter Meriton, is the writer for the "Judy" 'strip' in "Tit-Bits".

In the News. When I was unwrapping a parcel of S.B.L.'s not long ago, the headline "Sexton Blake" caught my eye one of the newspapers round it. It was from an account in the "Daily Herald" of April 21st, of the theft of the first Strasburg edition of the Marseillaise, worth about £2,000, from the British Museum. Accused was Thomas Bolitho, who confessed to leaving it in the left luggage office at Baker Street station in the name of S. Blake! The reporter comments: 'Remember Sexton Blake, the schoolboys' detective hero of two generations ago?'. Bolitho was sentenced to 21 months.

Parallel. I wonder if you read recently, that at an inquest on a Miss Forester, of Hampstead, London, the mystery of a weekly letter she received containing only £1 notes was still unsolved. It immediately reminded me of "The Secret of the Castle Ruins" (S.B.L. No. 307) by Anthony Parsons. Remember the mystery of the registered letter Miss Titmuss received each week containing £50? Of course, in that particular case the source was eventually found to be her late father's (unmentionable) bookmaking business, but the coincidence is there, and worth recording. (Shades of the 'Sholto' pearl business in the Sherlock Holmes story "The Sign of (the) Four". J.P.)

Tailpiece. "Have you done with the 'Sexton Blake', dear?"  
"Nearly. I've only got the beginning to read now".

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H A R R Y B L Y T H

by W.O.G. Lofts

When Frank Vernon Lay mentioned to me several weeks ago that Harry Blyth's son had written to the "Daily Telegraph", in connection with some letters in that paper concerning Sexton Blake, I was very interested. I had learned some time ago from John Hunter that he had met Harry Blyth, jnr. about ten years ago, at which time the gentleman was living at Broadstairs; but as he was an elderly man even at that time Mr. Hunter doubted if he was still alive. Now, only quite recently I had written a short history of the life of Sexton Blake for the Dime Novel Round-Up, and as Mr. Blyth's son was still alive I thought it a good idea to send him a copy of the printed article, to prove to him that S.B.'s creator is not forgotten - as he had thought was the case. As a result, I received several interesting letters from Mr. Blyth, and one week-end I called to see him in person. Although in his middle

seventies I found Mr. Blyth in very good health, and he was able to give me a few more details of his father.

Harry Blyth was a free lance, and for years ran his own paper in Glasgow, called the "CHIEL" (subtitled "Scottish Punch"), and was a wonderful pennyworth of reading in those days. The paper was originally produced in partnership with Robert Arthur (who built the Kennington Theatre, London, S.E.), but in later years this gentleman dropped out. It ran for 363 issues, commencing 17 Feb. 1883 and finishing 25 Jan. 1890. By a strange coincidence, in his editorial chat in No. 32, Harry Blyth wrote of readers' letters appearing in the "Daily Telegraph". Little did he dream that some seventy-two years later his son would be writing to the same paper about the famous character which his father created.

Harry Blyth also had an interest in the Theatre Royal, Glasgow, for which he wrote one of the most successful pantomimes. He was a very busy man, having three serials running in English and Scottish papers. Writing for the Harmsworth Press was just a side-line, and for the first story of Blake he received the sum of £9. 9. which included the price of the copyright of S. Blake as well!

Here is what all Blake lovers have been wanting to know - how Sexton Blake came to be born. Harry Blyth wrote a series of weekly articles for the "Sunday People" entitled "Third Class Crimes". This series was very successful and caught the eye of (then) Alfred Harmsworth, who commissioned him to write a series of detective stories for his new paper 'The Marvel'. Harry Blyth decided on Sexton Blake as being the name of the criminologist, and thus the famous Baker Street sleuth was born.

As is also now known, Harry Blyth died of typhoid fever in February 1898 at the early age of forty-six. Obituary notices appeared in all the well-known papers of that period, for he was a popular man at that time. He left several unfinished manuscripts of stories which his son still retains in his collection of Old Papers. He has a fine bound volume of "Pluck" which contains his father's stories. He also has copies of papers in other fields containing his father's works, including a complete set of the Scottish paper "CHIEL". Mr. Blyth does not take after his father in the literary sense but admits that he could have had his chance, for he met all types of authors and famous people in his early days. The nearest he ever got was to write some poems, but they were never published.

My Blyth was very pleased and gratified to learn that his father was far from forgotten, and I for my part shall always be grateful to him for clearing up the mystery of how Sexton Blake got his name.

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SEXTON BLAKE CIRCLE

In view of Harry Homer's resignation as Chairman of the Circle consequent upon his being abroad for the best part of each year, and thereby unable to deal with the Circle's affairs - a Special Meeting was held at 12, Ashburnham Road, Greenwich, London, S.E. on 7 September 1955.

It was agreed that the Vice-Chairman Len Packman should take over the Chairmanship and that Josie Packman shall be Vice-Chairman.

Harry Homer will, of course, continue as an ordinary member.

A fine programme has been arranged in regard to the Circle's contribution to the C. Digest Annual this year. This will comprise a series of articles by individual members, the work of editing and preparing for publication to be done by Len Packman.

JOSIE PACKMAN.

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WANTED: YOUNG FOLKS TALES, from January 1914 onwards. Will exchange the early Tim Pippin series including No. 1 from 1906 or any Old Boys' Books, Magnets, Gems, Nelson Lees, early series. Also complete Silver Jacket. Any or all for Young Folks Tales. W. HALL, 46 WALDER ROAD, HAMMONDVILLE, VIA LIVERPOOL, N.S.W. AUSTRALIA.

AVAILABLE: Magnets, Gems, Holiday Annuals, Populars, Marvels, Union Jacks, Sexton Blake Libraries, Detective Weeklies, Comics, Boys Magazines, Nelson Lees, 1st, 2nd and 3rd series. Robin Hood Libraries, Buffalo Bills, Adventures, Wizards, Rovers, Triumphs, Claude Duvals, Travel and Inventions, Chums, Scouts, B.O.P's., Boys Cinemas, Illustrated Police Budgets (rare), Schoolgirls Own Annuals, School Friend Annual, Film Annuals, etc. etc. S.A.E. please. WANTED: S.B.L's 1915-35, N.L. Lib. 1913-18. Collectors' Digests 1-30. Penny Dreadfuls, etc. RONALD ROUSE, 3 ST. LEONARDS TERRACE, GAS HILL, NORWICH, NORFOLK.

WANTED: Magnets & Gems. Will purchase whole collections or running series, state price. C/O BERMAN, 121 WRENS PARK HOUSE, WARICK GROVE, LONDON, E.5.

# HAMILTONIANA

Compiled by HERBERT LECKENBY

Mr. A.E. Gerrard of Mandeville Publications, informed Len Packman in a recent letter that Billy Bunters Own has been held up through production trouble but that it will be published for certain on October 14th. Unfortunately there will be no Tom Merry's Own this year, but there will, of course, be something for his admirers in Billy Bunters Own so be on the look out for it.

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Here We Are Again. The "Daily Express" September 23rd carried on its leader page a bold heading across three columns: The Bunter Business by Shirley Lowe. The article started off thus:

"This is a boom week for a frock-coated gentleman in a Piccadilly store - a man who is in the Bunter business.

Billy Bunter was a fat boy who liked his tuck. Mr. Clifford Tolman is a thin, serious bespectacled man in his 40's who prepares the sort of tuck boxes that delight the Bunter in every boy."

Then followed an amusing account of how the tuck boxes are prepared.

Miss Lowe made one slip for in the case of Bunter she should have used the present tense, of course. Matter of fact the latest Bunter book had just been published.

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NOTE: Here is something about the ever popular 'Inky' which will be new to the great majority of you. H.L.

## INKY AND THE MYSTERIOUS MOSSOO

by F. Vernon Lay

We all know that Inky arrived at Greyfriars in Magnet No. 6 "Aliens at Greyfriars". At first he was only there "pro tem", having been destined for Herr Rosenbaum's new Academy near Greyfriars, but he returned and became a permanent and much loved character.

It may not be so widely known however that a story of Inky appeared a few months earlier. Glancing through my title file recently my eye caught "The Mysterious Mossoc" author not given.

The title having a familiar sound I thereupon determined to pursue the matter if possible and luckily found the magazine in question was in my collection. It is the 1d. Marvel for 10th August, 1907. The pride of place is as usual a Jack, Sam & Pete story of S. Clarke Hook in this case entitled "Pete the Mayor". No author is given for the second story nor is one referred to in the previous week's build-up, but I was immediately interested when I read the opening words "Hurree Ramset Jam Singh came into the Third Form at Notherby School with" etc. etc. Reading on, his pal's name is Redfern and he addressed the Nabob of Bhanipur (his title is given in full) as "Inky" and he replies "I have made the important discovery by the pure accidentalness. The sublime Robinson is coming to visit us after we have wooed the balmy slumber. The respectable Hake is coming with him. Their august intention is to administer severe castigation". Truly the genuine Inky! The plot is similar to many before and after. The new French Master receives the inky squirt destined for the rival form leader but impresses the boys by his sense of fair play. The sneak Knowles discovers he is being blackmailed and uses the information to his own advantage; he slips up however and the heroes also find this out and as the French Master Monsieur Lavallo is a good chap decided to help him. They disguise themselves as policeman and succeed in arresting the blackmailer, accept two sovereigns from him as a bribe and then accidentally for the purpose allow him to escape. The £2 they return anonymously to Monsieur Lavallo, and he, his fears removed threatens Knowles with the Head, Dr. Lisle and consequent expulsion. When Knowles cries "Think of my people - my mother" his heart softens and he lets Knowles off with twelve of the very best.

It was the end of 1906 and during 1907 that Charles Hamilton began to develop his real talent for school stories and to drop the sea stories which seem to have been his earlier love and in the above story which ranks with the early St. Jims stories in the companion paper Pluck, we can see the budding of the genius who has given so many immortal names to schoolboy fiction - among them Hurree Ramset Jam Singh the Nabob of Bhanipur.

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(You'll like this. H.L.)

PUBLIC SCHOOL TO PUBLIC HOUSE!

By Anthony P. Baker.

It would be difficult to find a more sinister place than the

Three Fishers. Frank Richards described it as "about the most disreputable place in the county". From the point of view of the Greyfriars authorities it was a most unhappy coincidence that it should be within easy reach of the School, and so place temptation in the path of the young. How many times did Mr. Quelch, while walking along the towpath of the Sank, see the top of a cap just disappearing behind the inn's fence. Whisking through the nearby gate, he would hurry in search of his quarry, always finding by the time he reached the inn that the bird had flown. No doubt it was very annoying, but as Magnet readers we can look on the matter in a rather different light, and find the Three Fishers a fine background for many exciting episodes.

We gather from the stories that the Three Fishers was not in the best state of repair, and that it was surrounded by a fairly extensive unkempt garden, bordered on one side by Oak Lane, and on the other by the towpath. Strangely enough, there is no recorded incident of a Greyfriars habitant going there for a 'pint'. It was always the billiards room at the back that held the fatal fascination. Thither the Bounder invariably journeyed on the first day of term, not to mention sundry visits on half-holidays and "after lights out". Here, either with Pon & Co. or with other doubtful acquaintances, he would while away the smoky hours until his usually well-filled wallet was empty.

And yet, to the satisfaction of the reader, he always came back for more, and there is a never failing thrill when the Bounder disappears into the Three Fishers, and we wonder whether or not he will escape this time. Perhaps you remember the incident in Magnet 1264 when Sir Hilton Popper is on his track. "Sir Hilton" we read, "appeared to know his way about the Three Fishers, deplorable as the place was. As a matter of absolute fact, Sir Hilton had known the place well in his younger days, when he had not been quite so particular about his own conduct, as he now was about the conduct or others."

There was no escape this time "Herbert Vernon-Smith, leaning over the table, cue in hand, was taking a shot. A fat man, recognisable as Mr. Banks the bookmaker - was standing by the table, his hand resting on his cue. A potman was bringing in some liquid refreshment for Mr. Banks. That red-faced gentleman was smoking a big cigar. Smoke was curling from a cigarette on an ashtray, apparently laid there by the Bounder. Smithy potted the red as



Sir Hilton Popper looked in." All was well in the end because the Bounder saved the school from robbery by a pseudo-French friend of Quelch's. The story was appropriately called "The Bounder's Luck".

Vivid description like that makes one wonder if someone else knew a real-life Three Fishers "in his younger days when he had not been quite so particular about his own conduct"... the author, perhaps!

Nothing apparently could keep Vernon-Smith from the Three Fishers and perhaps the best of all on this theme came in No. 1361. Given leave from detention to play football, he goes instead to his old haunt for billiards with the Highcliffians. This time it is Wingate who is on his track.

"Vernon-Smith had not missed a shot so far. But he missed one suddenly and his cue clattered down on the cloth, as his name was suddenly called from the french-windows in a voice he knew only too well.

"'Vernon-Smith!'

"The Bounder, dropping his cue, spun round with a gasp. One word fell from his lips as he stared at the familiar figure.

"'Caught!'"

This particular Magnet formed a fine introduction to the Smedley series, and ended with Mr. Vernon-Smith's words: "You have neither a father nor a home. You had both and you have chosen to throw them away."

An ingenious twist on the usual theme came in Magnet 1564. Smithy escaped from the Three Fishers just in time, but left behind Bunter's overcoat, which he had forcibly "borrowed" in a previous incident, and which was duly discovered. An awkward situation was avoided as the Fat Owl, under the watchful guidance of the Famous Five, was reluctantly rolling round the football pitch that afternoon. Frank Richards is truly an author who knows how to use his material.

Closely associated with Vernon-Smith in his escapades were those two well-known crooks, Messrs. Joe Banks and Joe Lodgey. Lodgey was really a native of the St. Jim's area, but he frequently visited the Three Fishers and its neighbouring stronghold, the Cross Keys. Both are beery, portly and florid and wear the check suits and bowler hats which fiction associates as closely with bookmakers as it connects convicts and the broad arrow. There is

little to choose between the two "Mr. Lodgey", the author tells us "was a horse-dealer by profession, but he did more business taking bets on horses than in buying and selling those quadrupeds." Both were colourful and occasionally sinister additions to the Greyfriars landscape.

Vernon-Smith and his corresponding numbers in other forms (Angel, Hilton and Price, Loder, Walker and Carne) were far from being the only members of Greyfriars to get involved in awkward situations at the Three Fishers. Magnet 1613 saw the whole Famous Five taking the very tempting shortcut through the Three Fishers grounds from the towpath. At least, one presumes it to be the Three Fishers, though the name given is the Cross Keys, which is really situated in Friardale: one of the very few discrepancies to be found in the Magnet. However, this apart, Harry Wharton & Co. are unfortunate enough to meet Mr. Squidge, Book-maker, who suggests that it is "worth a quid not to be given away to your schoolmaster." Fortunately, the inevitable ditch is near at hand, and Mr. Squidge is left to adorn it. "It was a horrid, muddy, draggled and dismantled object that crawled, panting and gasping and spluttering, from the ditch after they were gone."

Previous to that, Wharton was caught climbing over the Three Fishers fence, after he had warned Hilton who was watching a glove-fight - another of the pub's doubtful luxuries - that Wingate and Gwynne were on the watch outside. This was No. 1292, in the middle of the celebrated Harry Wharton v Mr. Quelch Series, and naturally the Three Fishers was just the background needed for such a series.

Perhaps it was put to better use in the Stacey Series - the "doubles" theme led naturally to mistaken identities in awkward places like the Three Fishers. In Magnet 1427, Wharton deliberately makes Quelch think he has entered therein, while really hiding in the usual bushes by the gate. In the Headmaster's study later:

"'You deny you entered the gate at all, Wharton?'

"'Certainly, sir!'

"'And why did you hid, as you state?'

"'To make a fool of Mr. Quelch, sir!'

"'Wha-a-at?' stuttered the Head. 'What-what-what did you say, Wharton?'

"'And Wharton, with perfect coolness, repeated his words:

"To make a fool of Mr. Quelch, sir!"

That was not the end. The following issue saw Joe Banks meet the same fate as Mr. Squidge at the hands of the Famous Five, when he mistook Harry for his good customer Stacey. The Three Fishers must have been fairly thick with Greyfriars caps at this time (I often wonder why Greyfriars people always took their caps into the Three Fishers - either to be seen over the fence, or to be left hanging on a peg for discovery): No. 1431 saw Wharton in there again while a glove fight was in progress, this time to rescue Smithy.

Even the fat and fatuous Bunter entered the Three Fishers scene more than once. He also visited Joe Banks at the Cross Keys in "Billy Bunter's 'Cert'" (1249) to put a fiver on Silver Spot at 10-1. The result was as everyone except Bunter had expected: "Bonny Boy - 1, Spot Cash - 2, Raspberry - 3. Also ran: Limelight, Dawdle, Little Wonder, Impervious, Silly Billy, Blackbird, Ripe Apple, Silver Spot".

Frequently, the Three Fishers was used as "background" for incidents up at School. Someone, returning late at night, would find the window barred, or a debt with Joe Banks would bring, perhaps Loder near to stealing (Magnet 1399). Once, Smithy, with the better half of his character uppermost, went to look for the erring Wingate Minor, after lights out (1329). As they were clambering back into the School, with the fag going first:-

"The Bounder grasped the rain-pipe to climb in his turn, and as he did so there was a footstep, and a grasp of iron was laid on his arm. He was dragged away from the wall into the light of the stars, and a tall Sixth-Former bent to peer at his face.

"'You!' Wingate's voice was cutting in its contempt. 'Vernon-Smith! Who was with you - you were not alone?'"

The Bounder did not mention to the Head of School that it was his younger brother.

The Three Fishers has become an established part of the Greyfriars scenery. Nowhere else in the Greyfriars district has played so prominent a part in the stories. Looking back through the pages of the Magnet, it is good to be able to share with Smithy the thrill he finds when climbing over the leads at night to visit his dingy friends at the Three Fishers; it is even good to share Mr. Quelch's disappointment as he stares over the fence and sees a quickly vanishing cap; and it is with scarcely less than affection

that we behold "almost the most disreputable place in the county".

\* \* \* \* \*

MAGNET TITLES (Cont'd.) .. 1494 The Convist who came Back; 1495  
The Spy of the Sixth; 1496 The Shadow of the Sack; 1497 His  
Scapegrace Brother; 1498 Harry Wharton's Amazing Relation. 1499  
The Secret of the Smuggler's Cave; 1500 They Called Him a Funk;  
1501 The Schoolboy Smuggler; 1502 Contraband.

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## LETTER BOX

THAT "PASSING" OF MARTIN CLIFFORD

September 12th.

Rose Lawn, Kingsgate-on-Sea.  
Broadstairs, Kent.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Many thanks for the C.D. I have been much entertained by the speculations regarding a grown-up Greyfriars. But I think that Harry Wharton and Co. are much more interesting at fifteen than they could possibly be at fifty-five: and their author rather wishes that he could follow their example, and keep on Peter-Panfully, as Inky might express it.

A reporter from a Sunday newspaper came down to see me on this very subject the other day: and between us we sketched out the future careers of the Famous Five. It was very amusing: but I think it will be a long time before Colonel Harry Wharton and Captain Robert Cherry, Retd. call on rubicund Farmer Bull at his moorland farm in Yorkshire, and meet there a writing chap named Nugent, a grey-haired prince called Hurree Singh, and a plump rosy stockbroker of the name of Bunter!

I liked W.F. Champion's article on Lovell very much. But I wouldn't agree that things would go on just the same if Lovell, Herries, and Johnny Bull were interchanged. I couldn't imagine one in the place of another --- Johnny in Study No. 6, Lovell a member of the Famous Five, or Herries still less. There are shades of character that have escaped the writer's eye. But it was a really fine article and I enjoyed reading it.

I have been getting letters on the subject of the "passing" of Martin Clifford. It does give one rather a jolt to break an association which began as long ago as 1906. But there are practical considerations which must govern both authors and publishers. Old readers, I am very happy to know, remember

Martin with affection; but new readers know him not. Tempora mutantur! and alas! nos et mutamur in illis! There was a time when the Gem was far ahead of the Magnet, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy more widely known than Billy Bunter. Now I am told that T.M.O. will not pay its way, while BBO continues to prosper. Martin has had to realise that the time has come for him to take a back seat, and leave the field to Frank. Luckily, they remain inseparable, and Martin will want for nothing that Frank can provide!

With kindest regards,  
Always yours sincerely,

FRANK RICHARDS.

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## Nelson Lee Column



by JACK WOOD  
NOSTAW, 328 Stockton Lane,  
YORK.



A day or two ago I received a letter from old friend Norman Pragnell, of Liverpool, who poses three questions. While I am also giving him a personal reply, I feel that the points he raises may be of more general interest, so I propose to answer them, too, in this column in the hope and belief that you may find them of interest as well.

Norman reminds me that in an earlier C.D. Annual he read of a Gem serial in which the St. Frank's boys paid a return visit to Eldorado and had a spot of bother with an old friend, Professor Cyrus Zingrave. Norman wants to know a little more about this serial and how it fits into the St. Frank's story in general.

Well, here it is, in some detail. Entitled The White Giants

of El Dorado, and hailed as "the finest St. Frank's serial ever written", the story opened in Gem 1,344 dated for the week ending November 18th, 1933. It ended in No. 1354 dated January 27th, 1934. It was thus the first new serial of the St. Frank's juniors to appear after the merger of the Nelson Lee Library and the Gem - it followed the revival of the Foo Chow series, and preceded the Treasure Isle stories in which the St. Frank's characters had exciting adventures in the Pacific.

From the internal evidence of the story and the "Gossip" items in the Gems of this era, it seems fair to say that in The White Giants we were, in time, back at the end of the main run of the Nelson Lee Library with Fighting James Kingswood as headmaster of St. Frank's.

It was a story on just the old lines of thrills and adventure in a strange country. The opening had us on our toes with expectant enthusiasm.

"We're off!"

'Hurrah!'

Enthusiastic cheers went up from scores of schoolboy throats as the giant airship, Sky Wanderer, rose gracefully from the famous playing fields of St. Frank's College, and soared over the grey, stately Houses of the great school."

It was, of course, a wonder airship built by the Manners Aircraft Corporation, with Sir Hobart himself in command. Lord Dorrimore had presented the Sky Wanderer to the school as a cruising school of the skies to take the boys to the far-flung corners of the Empire, to educate them by personal contact with all the peoples of the earth.

The first travellers were selected by special examinations. Nelson Lee was headmaster, other masters included Alington Wilkes, Beverley Stokes and Professor Tucker, and there were about 75 boys representing all forms. Needless to say, the one and only Umlosi was in the party.

Needless to say, too, a party with Dorrie in it was not likely to be conventional, so instead of going by way of Panama a more southerly route for New Zealand is taken so that another view may be obtained of the land of the Arzac White Giants in the heart of Brazil, which was believed to have been destroyed in the earlier series about El Dorado by a terrible earthquake.

They find the City of Gold has been rebuilt, are grounded by a

"death ray", are attacked by a herd of mastodons as well as the White Giants, and at the end of the first instalment become the prisoners of King Yoga, who turns out to be Zingrave.

From that reminiscently stirring beginning, Brooks provided a yarn which, while it owed something to similar stories he had penned over the years, was the best we had had from him for years. The old thrill was there, and one breathless adventure followed another in rapid succession. Yes, this was certainly what we old Franconians wanted!

Lee and his companions run into a rival kingdom and an old friend, Captain Harry Cane, an intrepid world-flyer, who had disappeared two years earlier. He was, naturally, known as Capt. Hurricane.

Odd that for the hero of the piece, so to speak, Brooks should choose the same name and nickname as years before he had bestowed upon one of his villains. Other times, other customs, I suppose; but I digress.

With the aid of Capt. Cane and his friendly White Giants, the reign of Zingrave is brought to an end and that wily old scoundrel is captured once again. But not before there have been more exciting moments reminiscent of the earlier Nelson Lee Library visits to Lost Lands and of that old Comrade yarn in the Boys Magazine when Venus was visited.

In the theme of two warring "nations" we recalled the stories of Northestria and New Anglia of some 10 years previously, which brings me to Norman's second query regarding a reference in the Nelson Lee Library and the S.O.L. reprints, of the New Anglia stories to an earlier visit.

Norman has been unable to trace any earlier N.L.L. yarns of any visit to New Anglia, and asks if I can clear up the mystery. As it happens, I can.

The Nelson Lee Library stories were in the Small Series, Nos. 366 to 380, which appeared in June-September 1922. They were reprinted in the S.O.L. in 1939.

But, as Norman had already found there was a Boys Friend Library, No. 657, The Wonder Craft, dated March, 1923, in which Lee and Nipper paid an earlier visit to New Anglia. What puzzled Norman was that this appeared after the N.L.L. issues referred to above.

The simple explanation is that the Boys Friend was itself a

reprint. It was, in fact, the third of three monthly numbers which reprinted a series of short stories which appeared in the *Nugget Weekly* in 1921. These stories related "exclusively" certain hitherto unrecorded episodes in the long battle between Nelson Lee and the League of the Green Triangle.

Lee and Nipper found themselves chasing Zingrave into New Anglia, and they were aided by Raymond Gray, the inventor of The Wonder Craft, which was one of Brooks's favourites, a convertible aeroplane-submarine.

(Note: The first Green Triangle series in the N.L.L. ended with No. 53 in 1916. The *Nugget* stories resurrected some characters already dead, thus substantiating the "previously unpublished episodes" idea.)

Norman's final query raises the whole question of Boys Friend Library reprints. Demands of time and space prevent a detailed answer here, but I will search out what information I can and give it next month.

I hope, however, that I have, in answering Norman's queries, whetted a few appetites for news of less familiar St. Frank's stories. There is quite a fund of these into which little research has been done.

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 FOR SALE: 'C.D.' ANNUALS 1 - 7, 5/6 each; lot 36/-. COLLECTORS MISCELLANY (PARKS) 5th SERIES 1 - 20, Oct. '45 - Sept. '51 1/- each; lot 15/-. 16 BUNTER BOOKS (FULL SET) 5/6 each; lot £4. AUTOBIOGRAPHY FRANK RICHARDS 7/-. BESSIE BUNTER 5/6. COLLECTORS DIGEST VOLS. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 (to date) COMPLETE EXCEPT NO. 62 (Feb. 1952), ALSO FEW LATE VOL. 3, 1/- EACH; 10/6 PER VOLUME, (VOLUME 6, with 62 missing, 8/6); LOT £2/10. BOYS MAGAZINE (1922) Nos. 14 and 15, 9d. each. WESTERN LIBRARY (LANAGAN), NOS. 2,3,10,13,15,22,25,29,33,37,43,52,57,62,85,88,101. 6d. EACH, LOT 7/6. ENTIRE COLLECTION AS ABOVE TO CLEAR £9. ALL POST FREE. TRAYNOR, 1 ROSE VILLAS, SWINDON STREET, CHELTENHAM.

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 SALE: Magnets and S.O.L's, Chatterbox Annual 1916, Pearsons Magazine 1898 Vol. V. (Captain Justice Stories), 2 Crime Books. Would Exchange. E. MAGOVENY, 65 BENTHAM STREET, BELFAST.



# OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

## LONDON SECTION

There was a very good attendance at the Autumn Woodingdean meeting, including as is now customary, our worthy vice-president, Herbert Leckenby. Fresh from his numerous visits to all his old and new friends in the south, he was in sparkling form and ably conducted his "ask me another quiz". Previously to this he had outlined some of the good items that are to appear in the forthcoming "C.D. Annual". Chairman Roger presented to Herbert the latter's original drawing by C.H. Chapman suitably framed, this drawing of Herbert appeared in the very successful 100th issue of the "C.D." A very full agenda with two other quiz competitions and a very good reading by host Bill Jardine who with hostess Gladys rounded up a very good "Study" feed. Next meeting was decided to be held at "Cherry Place", 706, Lordship Lane, Wood Green, London, N.22, on Sunday, October 16th, 4 p.m. sharp. Altogether a very successful meeting in the glorious St. Frank's country. The hosts are to be congratulated on another happy occasion and with a good view of the lights of Brighton on the way back to the station, the company wended their various ways home.

UNCLE BENJAMIN.

\* \* \* \* \*

## NORTHERN SECTION MEETING, SEPT. 10th, 1955

In the unavoidable absence of Secretary Ron. Hodgson, the Chairman read the minutes of the previous meeting.

After the reading of some interesting correspondence by Gerry Allison and myself, we got down to the first item on our winter programme "My Collection" by Gerry. With a wary look in a certain direction, he set off like this.

"Man is definitely an acquisitive animal. The main enemy he has to put up with is woman. Nothing gives wives or mothers so much pleasure as 'getting rid' of the piles of rubbish which their devoted menfolk have acquired with so much toil, trouble and expense. Any way will do as long as it is cleared out; the dustbin, the salvage collectors or the fireback. "Get shut of it".

Mrs. Allison exclaimed "Wait until I get you home" but I have an idea she didn't really mean it and from what I have seen in the Allison home, his collection at least is not in danger.

Gerry went on to give a graphic account of his collecting experiences over many years and of the memorable day when we met in that room for the first time over five years ago.

If all the talks we are to have during the winter nights are to be as engrossing we are in for a jolly good time.

Next meeting, October 8th, its Jack Wood's turn with St. Franks and other Schools. Rally round, Northerners.

HERBERT LECKENBY,  
Northern Section Correspondent.

\* \* \* \* \*

MIDLAND SECTION MEETING, AUGUST 22nd

Our Chairman began the proceedings tonight by congratulating our Treasurer who has just become the proud father of a son. We were very pleased to hear that most auspicious news, and sincerely echo Jack's good wishes to Norman and his Wife. Incidentally it turned out to be Norman's evening altogether, as we were booked for a talk by him and extremely interesting it was too.

This talk was on Adventure Stories as compared with those about School life. He made a vigorous defence of the former, claimed that they were far more popular and referred to the splendid work of such writers as Percy F. Westerman, Major Charles Gilson, Captain Brereton, and G.A. Henty. Norman's charming and disarming manner rather disguised the fact that he "got in" some hard knocks at Greyfriars enthusiasts.... especially "so much Bunter-puerile stuff!" Pentelow's Haygarth was a better school than Greyfriars. "Modern Boy" was aimed at a higher age group than the "Magnet". However, we agree that we can all get enjoyment out of other stories, just as we can enjoy other films than those featuring our favourite film star.

Naturally this most excellent talk provoked a very lively discussion, and inevitably the evening soon went.

EDWARD DAVEY.

\* \* \* \* \*

VISIT BY MERSEYSIDE CLUB TO MIDLAND  
18th SEPTEMBER, 1955

A notable step forward in inter-club relations was taken with this first official visit exchanged between our two Clubs.

Our visitors were met on arrival on New Street Station, and after refreshments in the Station Cafeteria we went by 'bus to Romsley Hill Top. From here we did a particularly lovely walk down to Shut Mill Glen and up again to Walton Hill and so to the "Happy Return" Cafe at Romsley.

During very welcome cups of tea we discussed matters of interest, and meanwhile other members arrived, among them Miss Russell who very thoughtfully brought her camera. After posing in the lovely Autumn sunshine for a few snaps, we sat down to a delicious bacon and egg tea.

During further discussions we tackled a very fine rhyming quiz compiled by Don Webster; one on which he had clearly spent much time and thought with excellent results.

Far too soon it was time to see our friends off; but most assuredly we shall long retain many pleasant memories of happy hours which suggest interesting possibilities for future events of a like nature.

EDWARD DAVEY.

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SEPTEMBER MEETING - MERSEYSIDE SECTION

This meeting was not so well attended as usual, only a dozen members being present, but nevertheless an enjoyable evening was spent. The Chairman in the course of dealing with Club business mentioned we had lost another member - Harry Francomb (who has moved further afield) so we are poorer by the loss of a Sexton Blake fan. Don read a happy letter from Frank Unwin (how we shall miss him!) and also correspondence from the Midland Club re the proposed meeting with them.

After refreshments, and Bill Horton having attended to the Club Library, three teams tackled a most interesting Cross-Word drawn up by Jack Morgan (there were some "cross words" over the spelling of the River Rhyl - or is it Ryll). Next month is our Annual Meeting, when amongst other items we shall discuss the possibility of holding an Exhibition in Liverpool.

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ANNUALS: HOLIDAY, 1925, 1928, 5/-, 1934, 8/6. CHAMPION, 1935, 1951, 5/- THE TWO. SCHOOL GIRLS OWN, 1925-26, 5/- ea. 1937, 3/6. FURTHER DETAILS ON REQUEST. G. HIGHTON, 14, GREYHOUND ROAD, WILLESDEN, LONDON, N.W.10.

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THE NAMES THE SAME - BUT

Among the stories published in the A.P. "Thriller Comics" a library the size and price of the "Sexton Blake" are two entitled 'The Red Rapiers' and 'The Black Dragoons'. I spotted them on a bookstall and as the titles brought back memories I had a look at them. Sure enough they were the Morton Pike stories which were first published as serials in the Boys' Friend over 50 years ago, and illustrated so attractively by "Val". In their present form they're all pictures, that method which is such a craze now-a-days. It all seems so daft to me; how can they capture once popular Morton Pike's graphic style in the balloons which accompany the pictures. And why on earth do they call them 'comics'?

The two serials, of course, were also reprinted in the Boys' Friend Library at 3d. with 120 pages providing hours of enthralling reading. Value for money in the good old days which will never return.

Still the stories in their present form seem to sell, so you can't blame the publishers. I must be 'old-fashioned'. But I ask you, can you imagine a present-day boy saying 50 years on should he come across a copy of the 'Red Rapiers' in picture form: "My word, I read that when I was a kid".

Well, you know the pungent retort of Eliza Doolittle in a certain play of Bernard Shaw's, don't you?

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