

# THE Collector's Digest

Vol. 9. No. 108  
DECEMBER 1955  
Price 1s.6d.



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

## From the Editor's Chair

WISHING ALL THE MEMBERS OF THE  
BROTHERHOOD OF HAPPY HOURS AT HOME  
AND OVERSEAS A VERY JOLLY CHRISTMAS  
AND PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR

ENTERING THE TENTH YEAR: Once again a volume ends - the ninth - and again there's progress to report. Quite a number of new friends have joined us, and happily, not one has been lost by death.

The high-light of the year was, of course, our century number. To the end of my days I shall never forget opening a completed copy and seeing four pages I had not the slightest idea would be there. What a pleasant surprise for me, and a kindly gesture on the part of those who had compiled them.

Another happy incident was the news that the C.D. had found its way into the British Embassy in Tokyo, and that it was introduced there by Johnny Bull. You'll see more about that on another page of this issue. Verily, the little mag. does travel, you know.

There are readers in all but three of the English counties, in north and south Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Eire and the Channel Isles.

Down to Redruth in Cornwall it goes to George Grainger, with whom I have corresponded longest; and to Alec Matheson, a mile or two away from John O'Groates.

Each month copies set out to Spain and Germany, and readers look eagerly for its coming in Canada, the U.S.A., Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania, South Africa, British East Africa, Ceylon, Iceland and Brazil.

Not a bad record for a little magazine which started in such a modest way just nine years ago. There must be something out of the common in this hobby of ours.

The question - Where next?

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A FINAL WORD: The 'Annual' is nearly ready! When this issue has been dispatched, I shall be getting down to the finishing touches - addressing the envelopes, checking the Who's Who and Jack Wood's article, and rounding up those who have not actually ordered. There are about forty of these at the moment, mainly regulars whom I can really take for granted. I should feel easier in mind, though, if they would just drop me a line saying, "Yes, sure."

You'll see the bill of fare elsewhere. And, here let me say if anyone can get a quart into a pint pot its surely the York Duplicating Services. You'll agree when you see it.

Yours sincerely,

HERBERT LECKENBY.

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THE FIRST CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER OF  
THE 'BOYS REALM'

By Herbert Leckenby

The first Christmas Double Number of the 'Boys Realm' was dated December 6th, 1902. Though that was 50 years ago I can still remember the big thrill I got when its gorgeous coloured cover met my gaze on the newsagents counter. How happy were we boys of the period when we had, at last, those twopenny copies in our hands after weeks of eager anticipation. No boy of to-day could get a greater thrill with half-a-dozen of the Annuals in his possession. To us who are nearing the allotted span those were the good old days so far as our reading matter was concerned.

The artistic cover in chocolate, red and blue showed a boy skating towards a break in the ice, with another youth in the background shouting a warning. The artist, according to tiny initials in a corner, would appear to have been 'G.P.' initials unknown to me.

The cover enclosed twenty-eight large pages packed with reading matter. First came the start of "Nelson Lee's Rival", which I believe was the second serial concerning Maxwell Scott's most famous detective. It was a typical Scott yarn concerning vast estates, and the attempts to prevent the rightful heir succeeding to them. Nelson Lee won through in the end, of course, and without the assistance of Nipper, for six months were to pass before that "missing heir" came on the scene. "Nelson Lee's Rival" was illustrated by Fred Bennett an artist I never welcomed where Nelson Lee stories were concerned.

Other serials were "Harry the Horseman" a fine circus yarn by Henry St. John, and illustrated by J. Abney Cummings; "The Bully of St. Simeons" said to be "By a New Author" who some of us believed was "Max Hamilton", otherwise Cicely Hamilton, artist T.W. Holmes; "The Peril of the Pacific", by Robert Leighton, illustrated by R.J. Macdonald, and the concluding chapters of "The Jungle King" by William Murray Graydon.

The long complete stories were "Two Christmas Days" by Allan Blair, and "The Cruise of the Bunter Street Pirates" by Captain Shand. There was quite a lot of 'Bunter' in this story for the hero was Dick Bunter who lived in Bunter Street with Bunter's Dock at the back. Dick was a very different Bunter to the later William George. R.J. Macdonald illustrated this yarn and A.H. Clarke the

one by Allan Blair.

There was also a short complete story concerning Captain Handyman, stories about whom ran for a year. Captain Shand was the author and R.J. Macdonald the artist.

Another short complete was "Our Christmas Highwayman" by Gilbert Floyd which had a picture by T.W. Holmes showing a lady being attacked by a tramp with schoolboys running to the rescue. A familiar touch about that one.

That was the end of the fiction, unless "Sea Ghosts and Phantom Ships" could be styled so. It was contributed by the versatile Captain Shand, whom Hamilton Edwards declared was a real old sea-dog.

There were other seasonable articles including "Parlour Athletics for Christmas", a page of drawings by R.J. Macdonald. This artist still at it to-day, seems to have been quite busy over fifty years ago, and his figures look very much the same still.

There was "A Christmas Greeting" on the editor's chat page in Hamilton Edwards' own handwriting. It concluded "The Golden Time of Youth is with us but once only so enjoy it to the full."

True, of course, and clean grand old papers like the "Boys Realm" helped a lot. And maybe when round about Yule-tide fifty years on we can turn their pages once again and for a fleeting moment recapture that lost youth.

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 Can Anyone help me please? Wanted: "Silver Jacket" Nos. 1 to 8 and 13 onwards. 1/- each offered for good copies. LEONARD PACKMAN, 27 ARCHDALE ROAD, EAST DULWICH, LONDON, S.E.22.

W A N T E D: "Knock-Out Comic" (with Billy Bunter and Sexton Blake). Any issues prior to 1955 (i.e. 1954 or earlier). Single copies or "runs" welcomed. LEONARD PACKMAN, 27 ARCHDALE ROAD, EAST DULWICH, LONDON, S.E.22.

FOR SALE: Vol. of Gems for 1936 (contains early Magnet stories) price £4. 4s.; Magnet "Stacey" series (12) 36/-, "Water Lily" series (8) 14/- all mint. Collectors' Digests, Nos. 68, 71, 76, 78, 79, 80, 82, 86 to 93, 95, 97 and 99, 1/- each or 15/- the lot. D.B. WEBSTER, 7 CROSBY ROAD SOUTH, LIVERPOOL, 22.

WANTED AND FOR SALE: 3d. Boys Friend Library and Champion Library. Boys Own Library - wanted Nos. 32, 37, 39, 60 and 86. Britons Own Library - wanted Nos. 2, 10, 11, 12. H.C.N. PRICE, 22 NORTHDOWN RD., MARGATE, KENT.

# BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

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

With this issue the year will fast be coming to a close, so I would like to take this opportunity of thanking all those who have kindly helped to keep Blakiana's flag flying with their contributions. I also again thank those who have written to me in appreciation of my own little efforts in producing Blakiana. It would, however, make me much happier if those good people would send me a short article now and again, thus helping out the few - without whom Blakiana could not continue.

To give the new year a good start off, January issue will contain the conclusion of Walter Webb's article on Gordon Shaw and the first part of an excellent four-part contribution by W.H. Goodhead, entitled "The Best and the Worst".

The S.B. Circle's feature in this year's C.D. Annual contains something to suit all tastes, and I feel sure that when you have read the 24 large pages you will agree with me it is one of their best efforts - to my mind the best. Incidentally, the manuscript articles were typed out and prepared for the Agency by Len whilst he was very ill, for as he said, "We cannot let our supporters and readers down".

Finally, I wish you all a very happy Christmas and a Prosperous and Healthy New Year.

JOSIE PACKMAN.

## EXPERIENCES OF A SEXTON BLAKE WRITER

by Walter Webb

### PART TWO

Amongst the less pleasant of the author's experiences was what he refers to as his "batching" days. At that time Western Canada suffered from a dearth of women and marriageable girls, and extremely few came along to relieve the poor, lonely, overworked Western bachelor farmer, thousands of whom were badly hampered by their own housekeeping cares. Working fourteen hours a day, the unfortunate bachelor farmer did his own cooking, the while he longed for a woman to appear, and such was his state of mind

that after a few years he would marry any woman who would have him. The author knew one - a really decent fellow and an Englishman - who, after several years of a bachelor's life, grew more and more depressed, until, following an attack of melancholia, he was found dead in bed with a bottle of morphine at his side.

With the coming of spring the author looked around for his next summer's employment, and was put into communication with an American who had large land interest in Saskatchewan, and so, having two years experience, he decided to start farming on his own account. Leaving Manitoba, young Shaw went out to the newer West, but during the journey struck Prince Albert, one of the oldest towns in that territory and there lost all interest in the farmer's life. Hitherto he had experienced nothing but hard work, amidst essentially British surroundings, but here at Prince Albert all was different. Here was Canada as he had always boyishly pictured it. Situated in the bush, the author saw Indians for the first time, and mounted policemen, also men returning from the woods with the spoils of their traps, and with furs galore.

Lumbering not being carried out in the summer, young Shaw decided to go in for rail-roading. The Canadian Northern Railway was building its trans-Continental line almost through the district at that time, so the author, after a long tramp, with his bundle on his back, applied for work. The result was that he was offered a job at thirty-five dollars (£7) a month and board to scoop up the earth at the side of the "right-of-way", with a great scraper, or slusher, drag it in towards the middle of the long line of clearing that marked the route of the new railway, and dump it, so building the grade on which the track was to be laid. He found the work hard, but interesting, clean and healthy, and the more rail-roading he did, the better he liked it, for by this time he was hardened to rough work and living and had the muscles to tackle the hardest task.

All the summer young Shaw and the other members of the outfit progressed with the work of grading, work which the author recalls, was the healthiest for him and made him as lean as a wolf, but as hard as nails. When, in the thunderous month of June, the rain came down in a perfect deluge, drenching him and the other members of the outfit through in a moment, they ignored their wet clothes, let them dry on their skin, and not one of them came to the slightest harm. When, on occasions, he had to wear damp clothing for as long as a fortnight the author never once took cold, which

he attributes to the fact of breathing in the air of the open, healthy spaces, instead of the germ-infested atmosphere of our cramped and sooty towns.

With the fall, when frost made it impossible for the work to be progressed with, the outfit was disbanded and sent to Prince Albert. Having tasted the delightfully free life of the man who roughs it in the true sense of the word, young Shaw was determined to go lumbering, and although knowing well enough that he would once again be a greenhorn the urge to learn new things had become an obsession. The distance to the lumber camp was forty miles, and this the lumbermen walked in a day, travelling for the most part on bush-trails, walking in single file and rarely speaking a word. One thing the author observed and that was that they kept to the same rule in the lumber camp as in the railroad camp with regard to the separation of the "white" man and foreigner. The "white" men were Britishers, Canadians, Americans and French-Canadians. The foreigners were those who hailed from almost every quarter of the globe, and were kept to their own bunkhouse.

The following morning the author and his companions were all engaged to take their places in the gang, and Shaw, being green, was put on as a "swamper", at twenty-five dollars (£5) a month, and board. The job of the "swamper", who, incidentally, was the least important member of the camp, was to cut away all impeding undergrowth and trees of smaller growth between the newly-felled logs and the main trails, or the skidways, and, in this occupation the author was kept hard at it throughout the winter. The hours of work were very early, growing earlier still as winter advanced, and suspended as soon as darkness fell. One advantage was that the weather hardly ever prevented their work, for it did not matter what sort of blizzard was howling outside on the plains. In the shelter of the bush all the intimation they had of the storm was the moaning in the tree-tops, or the softly-falling snow. Also, there being hardly any wind they were better able to bear the cold, even though the temperature on occasions fell to fifty-four degrees below zero. Long before spring came along, their cut having been finished, the author and the majority of the men were paid off and sent to town, the author being richer by eighty dollars (£16) in his pocket.

Having saved a tidy little sum, the writer, with another summer's work to look for, determined to get back to Manitoba. Arrived in Winnipeg, he and a friend lazed around Portage le Prairie



in search of work. Following an interview with the foreman of the section of the C.N.R. that ran through Portage, they were engaged as "section-men" (platelayers). Of the labours and tribulations of the section-man, the author's recollections are, if not altogether happy, very lively indeed. Unlike an English railway, who employ a gang of platelayers to look after a mile or so of track, out West - at that particular time at any rate - three men had to survey every ten mile of track, and when the work became too heavy for such a small number extra men were employed. Shaw was one of the extra men. The rate of pay was one dollar and forty cents (5/9d.) a day of ten hours.

A lot of the accidents on the Canadian railroads at that time were caused by the violent changes in the weather, but it was the unfortunate section-man who got the blame, and the author recalls an accident to a freight train right on the section in which he was working at the time. They had to travel the length of the section in a lever-pumped hand-car periodically to make sure that no defect had been overlooked, but despite this, intense heat, which had caused the rails to expand at one point, resulted in a derailment of the train, and it was only after a whole day's killing labour that it would be got back on the rails again. Although a sun-kink had caused the accident the blame was laid on young Shaw and the rest of the section-gang.

After three weeks of this work came the news that a surfacing gang was being made up to finish a branch line that had been built the previous summer away north of them. Every available man was taken on, and working in the densest bushland all the time, the author has pleasant recollections of the time he spent here and admits that it was his own fault that he did not take his work more seriously, for, had he done so, there would have been a lining-foreman's berth for him the following year, with, maybe, an overseer's later; after which would have come the post of roadmaster, followed by superintendent of the line, with a salary running into thousands a year. But although attempts were made to persuade him to take up such a career, young Shaw turned them aside, for he had the lust for seeing fresh things and the idea of taking up regular work was not to his taste at all. Had it been otherwise the tales of Janssen the Moonlayer would not, of course, have been written, and we old Serton Blake enthusiasts would not have been permitted those lively, likeable tales of the famous sleuth the author in the

near future was to write for our entertainment.

Having thrown away the chance of a rosy future, the author, the task of surfacing fifty miles of track being finished, joined up with a threshing outfit. Three weeks later he was off again in search of fresh fields. After part of a season lumbering again, Shaw travelled about for some time, arriving eventually at a part of the River Saskatchewan, west of Saskatoon, where they were building one of the biggest bridges in the country. As a bridge-builder, Shaw found his task a very cold and uncomfortable one. His work was of the humblest - to shove flat cars along the top of the pile bridge to the piers, loaded with an assortment of ingredients, and dump them.

The author finished the winter there, and then, more from curiosity than anything else, took train for Medicine Hat, Alberta, where he looked around for a ranch on which to try his hand at punching cattle. Having got placed on one, the author found himself in for a lot more farm-labouring. That fall he helped in a round-up, which served to bring home to him with full force that even after five years or so in the country he was still lamentably green. Like a cowboy of the present day American film, Shaw, among others, scoured the plains, rounding up every beast he saw roaming about the unfenced land and bringing it up to the ever-growing herd collected at the spot which had been arranged upon. At the end of the round-up they were paid off, and the author, who had no particular desire to spend the winter on the prairies after having spent the same season in the shelter of the bush, struck the trail again.

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MORE BABBLINGS OF BARDELL

by Victor Colby

"Go on! Go on!" Mrs. Bardell urged Tinker. "He's a prince I tell you. You can't keep 'im proppin' up the door like 'e was a man from the Food Ossif. It says there 'Prince Jonah'. That means 'is father's a king or somethink. You can't keep kings waiting - they'll chop us heads off!"

Tinker grinned. "Not these days old dear. Anyway his father isn't a king. If he's anything, he'd be a maharajah."

"Well that's worse. I never did like the sound of them mambajarahs. Always cutting peoples throats and things, like I've seen them on the pictures. Tyin' snakes around their necks and

stickin' fevvers in their 'air."

(S.B.L. 3rd series 207 "The Riddle of the Prince's Stooze")

Motherly and solicitous, respectful yet with a dignified independence which could be almost withering, Mrs. Bardell was the High Priestess in a temple of comfort. She was not only a house-keeper but a homemaker. Hers was the power not merely of ordering a household, but of shedding upon it that intangible atmosphere which is the magic of home. Unswervingly loyal to Blake and Tinker, she would no more have neglected them than reduce her own circumference. Yet there were small trials and minor distresses which now and then ruffled her placid temper. A long standing feud between her legs and the stairs leading to the consulting room brought her often into the doorway as she was now, breathless and a little irritable.

"Up an' down - up an' down!" she muttered, "I gets the fair 'ump of it."

Tinker smiled.

"Yes, my boy, you'd larf on the other side of your 'ead if you had bellicose veins and was expected to 'op up and down like a mountain goat!"

"The master is in the laboratory", Tinker said.

"So I can smell", she said with a sniff.

"Do you want him?" Tinker asked.

"No", said the old lady a little perversely, "but there's an individual downstairs who does."

"I'll pop in and tell him", Tinker said.

"You'd better", said the old lady, "you don't go off unconshus so easy as I do."

(U. Jack No. 891 "The Case of the Paralysed Man".)

"It's that 'usband of me cousin been at it again sir, and her come here to ask if nothing couldn't be done. He loses his job along of this compression, and took to whisky simultaneous and 'e's drinking 'em out of house and home."

(S.B.L. 2nd series 400 "The Secret of the Lock.")

CORRECTION: The article on the Boy's Realm (page 352) was written for last year's December number and hold over. The reference to R.J. Macdonald slipped through until too late to correct it.

H.L.

# HAMILTONIANA

Compiled by HERBERT LECKENBY

Last month I told you how those C.D's had been left at the British Embassy, Tokyo, by none other than one Johnny Bull, where they had passed into the hands of Mr. Leslie Rowley. Well, naturally, that intrigued me immensely so I sent off an air letter to Mr. Rowley. Ten days later I received an extremely interesting reply. Here it is:-

British Embassy, Tokyo, Japan.

16th November, 1955.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

It was most kind of you to write me and I hope that you will not mind this reply to you being in typescript as I intend sending Ben Whiter a copy so that he too may learn the latest chapter in the 'Johnny Bull' story.

I have received a letter from Johnny which reads in part:

"... The Collectors Digest came into my possession when I visited one of the Army Camps near Tokyo. I had taken along some reading material for some of the lads one of which was a Quartermaster Sergeant with a figure rivalling that of Billy Bunter. This SQMS told me that during his schooldays his girth had earned him many nick-names one of which was Bunter and remembered that at the time he felt very self conscious about it as he was an avid reader of the 'Magnet'. One thing led to another and after an interesting evening talking about the 'old school', he handed me some copies of the Collectors Digest. These were the ones I passed on to you. The name of the SQMS escapes me at this moment, but should it come to mind I will write you again.

"As you yourself realise, collecting books or magazines is very difficult when one is leading a nomadic existence and for this reason alone I have not yet succumbed to the spell of gathering to myself copies of the old papers which gave me such joy in my younger days...."

Although Johnny's letter does not take us much further, I hope his explanation is of some interest.

In the early days of my present stay in Tokyo I was browsing through a book shop in the Japanese equivalent of Charing Cross Road and came across a copy of the Holiday Annual for 1927. This, of course, I immediately 'bagged'. From the inscription on the flyleaf it was obviously a present from a fond Japanese parent to his son. Just goes to shew how widely read the old book was.

Thank you very much again for your letter.

Yours very sincerely,

LES ROWLEY.

Well, I've had some interesting letters since I started the C.D. and this ranks with the best of them. Eh! I would like to know who that S.Q.M.S. was. He reminds me of that military policeman I met during the war who thought such a lot of D'Arcy.

And that's a delightful bit about the Holiday Annual and the Japanese parent, too.

I am pleased to say, also, that the C.D. will be going out to Tokyo regularly from now on, and an Annual will soon be on its way.

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In Raymond Glendenning's Book of Sports for Boys, there's no less than four Frank Richards "Felgate" stories. In one Felgate plays Greyfriars at cricket.

It seems Felgate is in Hertfordshire. That will answer G.A.'s query last month.

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Now for two seasonable reviews of stories of yesteryear:

DO YOU REMEMBER?

By Roger M. Jenkins.

No. 14 - Magnets 1191 - 1194 - The Cavandale Abbey Series.

Christmas without Bunter would have been unthinkable in Magnet days, for as well as the seasonable fall of snow and the Yuletide mystery there always had to be the Owl of the Remove tagging himself on to the party, patronising his host and keeping the servants in their place in his own inimitable manner. And, strangely enough, the readers liked it this way. Bunter, whose intrusions into all the term-time Magnet stories have often been criticised as excessive, was really in some peculiar way the making of the Christmas story in the Magnet. There were some fine Christmas numbers in the Gem, but taken as a whole they never

equalled the Magnet Christmas stories, perhaps because they lacked the vulgar, homely, and amusing touch that only Bunter could provide.

Of course, the juniors never wanted Bunter with them, and Charles Hamilton's ingenuity must have been sorely taxed at times to find a new pretext for letting Bunter join the party. Although the reason given was always plausible, it was nevertheless a pleasant change when it was Bunter who invited the others to join him. Such was the case in 1930, on the occasion of the famous Cavendale Abbey series.

Lord Cavendale was the owner of Maharajah, a famous racehorse, whose entry for the Thousand Guineas at Lantham had upset many punters who had backed Black Prince before Maharajah's form was known. Maharajah was safely guarded, and as a result attacks were made on the life of Lord Cavendale, since the death of the owner would automatically cancel his entry.

No-one else but Bunter would have travelled beneath the seat of a railway compartment and so have been able to prevent the first attack on Lord Cavendale's life; no-one else but Bunter would have invited himself to Cavendale Abbey on the strength of it; and no-one else but Bunter would then have asked the Famous Five to be his guests at someone else's home.

It was a jolly series. If the criminals were not very hard to find (and how could they be camouflaged when so few characters were strangers to the reader?), there was plenty of excitement and the skeins of the mystery were so well tangled that even Ferrers Locke took a little while to find out all the answers. Bunter was a pig in clover, aristocratically forgetting the name of the manservant assigned to him, and at times trying even the patience of the grateful host, Lord Cavendale himself. Exasperating as he was to all around him, Bunter was nonetheless a source of never-ending joy to the reader. The Cavendale Abbey series, like all the other Greyfriars Christmas series, was nothing more nor less than an account of how Bunter disported himself over the festive season. We cannot find it in our hearts to begrudge him his well-earned share of the limelight at this time of the year. As Bob Cherry so nobly remarked, "Dash it all, I'm glad to see you Bunter!"

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CHRISTMAS NUMBER OF THE ROARING TWENTIES

By Eric Fayne

By 1922, the Christmas Double Number was just a nostalgic

memory, like the 50,000 word stories and the familiar blue cover of the earlier Gems. But the war had been over for four years, in 1922, and the Gem was getting back into its stride again. The price had been increased to 2d. only a few weeks before, it now boasted 28 pages, and the cover of red, white, and blue always seemed peculiarly British. Best of all, the genuine Martin Clifford was writing most of the stories and the barometer seemed set fair.

The Christmas Number for 1922 was dated December 23rd, quite a change from those pre-war days when it appeared always in the middle of November.

The St. Jim's story was entitled "For Friendship's Sake", and it was the opening yarn in the series where Tom Merry was expelled for theft and a holiday barring-out followed. There was snow in the quadrangle, but, apart from the weather, all the usual trappings we had come to expect in the Xmas story were absent. Variety is the spice of life and a change is as good as a holiday, but not a Christmas holiday. I remember as a thoughtless boy that I regarded the theme as a dismal selection for Yuletide, and reading it again today, when commonsense should prevail in the mellowing years, I blush to say that I still feel the same way about it.

The story was extremely well-written, with its full share of suspense and pathos. It had Tom Merry in the lead, and should have been doubly welcome to me for that reason. True, it was very short - none of the genuine Martin's stories after 1918 ran to more than about nine chapters - but it should have rung the bell. Perhaps it did ring the bell for some, but not for me - for the bell did not sound a merry Christmas peal. The small boy regarded it as a bogus Xmas Number, and, in 1955, when I should know better, I still have a grudge against it.

The full-page Editor's Chat was dry as chip. The Editor, at that period, was particularly sententious.

Also on the bill was "Foiled at the Finish" which was described as a "Wonderful Story of Football and Christmas Adventure", by Stanley Austin. I have never read it, so cannot say whether it was a substitute for Tom Merry dealing with ghosts and puddings in a haunted dining-room. Duncan Storm contributed an instalment of his serial "Wolves of St. Beowulf's", and a caption informed us that "Wobby & Co. spend their Christmas afloat".

As I never read but one Gem serial, I cannot say whether it

was as tedious as the illustrations made it appear.

To complete the issue, the centre pages contained the Grand Xmas Issue, the Editor's description, not mine! of "The St. Jim's News". It was a fair copy of "The Greyfriars' Herald", as it was in those days in the Magnet, but I always regarded the "News" as counterfeit, and stood solidly for "Tom Merry's Weekly".

It is, perhaps, not necessary to add that this was not my favourite Christmas Number of the Gem. I use it simply to demonstrate how a tip-top story by the genuine Martin Clifford failed to register - with me - because he dared to be different at Christmas time. The guilt is mine - not good old Martin's!

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Here's one of Bill Jardine's sport contributions which may start some arguments among the football fans:-

### "THE ALL-STAR XI"

by

William Jardine

Back in South Africa in the carefree days of my boyhood - the Nineteen-Twenties - it was a common practice, among a group of us youngsters to organise various sporting contests among ourselves. Naturally, in winter, football claimed our main interest and although ours was a "rugger" school, we were all well-versed in the "dribbling" code. Most of us were also avid readers of the "Magnet", "Gem", "Nelson Lee", etc., and, in "out-of-school" hours, in "pick-up" games, we would don the mantles of the "Hamilton-Brooks" scholastic establishments, and our games would become "Greyfriars versus St. Jims", or "St. Franks versus Rookwood", etc. At one time I remember we planned out an imaginary tour of England - no doubt inspired by one of the "travel" series - and an itinerary was drawn up, consisting of a number of matches in which our own school played, not only the "big-four", but "smaller fry" in the shape of Highcliffe, Bagshott, the River House, Rylcombe Grammar School, and others. We formed a regular school eleven, and the opposition - although comprising the same fellows each time - became St. Jims or St. Jude's or Rookwood, as the case might be! The final match of the "tour" was played against an English Junior XI, which, supposedly represented the "cream" of all the schools mentioned in the Companion Papers.

I cannot recall the result of the "final test", or of any of



the other matches either. Nor can I recollect the "make-up" of the various teams; I don't think we were too particular in this latter respect! I do know however that it provided us with a great deal of healthy sporting entertainment, and gave our games an added interest!

I could not help being reminded of our schoolboy "tour" when a short while ago I was browsing through some "Gems" of 1934 Vintage. The "Eastwood Cup" was then in progress, and the league tables, and match reports, were published each week in "Tom Merry's Weekly". All the familiar names were there, including Abbotsford, Claremont, Redcliffe, etc., as well as the "big guns". Pleasant memories were re-enacted in my mind's eye. I started musing, and ..... an idea came forth!

"If", I reflected, "if a representative team were selected from these schools; what would the "line-up" be like?"

The more I pondered, the more fascinating the subject seemed to become, and this humble effort then, is an attempt to select, what I consider to be, the best football team that our favourite schools could field.

At the outset I think it will be generally agreed that the composition of the team will have to come solely from the "big four", namely Greyfriars, St. Jims, Rookwood, and St. Franks. It was only on very rare occasions that they were defeated by any of the "lesser lights", and it is logical therefore to assume that they possess the "stars"!

Firstly then, it will be necessary to study the "line-ups" of the four schools. Here, one runs into a "spot of bother"! Messrs. Hamilton and Brooks were not consistent in the regular selection of their junior teams. Players were "switched" from one position to another with amazing dexterity, and I find it hard to credit for instance that Jimmy Silver would play himself at inside-left in 1925, when in 1924, we were informed that he excelled as a centre-half. Likewise, Buster Boots and De Valerie appeared to alternate with astonishing regularity between the forward and half-back lines! Still less can I become reconciled to the idea that Johnny Bull is now the Remove goalkeeper, as the Bunter Books inform us!

Nevertheless, in spite of our authors' "licence" in these matters, it is possible - with the aid of some research - to draw up a representative picture of the four regular Junior XI's. Opinions may differ slightly in this respect, but after an exhaustive study, I believe the following teams to be the best that

could be put into the field:

Firstly, Greyfriars:-

FIELD:

BULL: TODD:

CHERRY: LINLEY: BROWN:

VERNON-SMITH: PENFOLD: WHARTON: OGILBY: HURREE SINGH:

The only criticism I can forecast in the above team is the inclusion of Ogilvy. J. Breeze Bentley, in his admirable article, "The Remove Form At Greyfriars" states that Ogilvy is not in the form team. If this is correct, I can only ask, "Who then takes his place?" Nugent is certainly not a regular member of the team, and I cannot visualise Redwing, Newland, Trevor, Morgan, or any other contender displacing the "dour Scot"!

Next, St. Jims:-

WYNN:

FIGGINS: KERR:

REDFERN: NOBLE: LOWTHER:

TALBOT: LEVISON: MERRY: BLAKE: D'ARCY:

I don't think there'll be any quibbles here. Some may prefer Herries and Digby to Redfern and Levison, but I'm of the opinion that the latter two are slightly the better players.

Now Rockwood:-

RAWSON:

DOYLE: TOWLE:

CONROY: SILVER: LOVELL:

VAN RYN: MORNINGTON: ERROLL: DODD: COOK:

I cannot see any criticism here, excepting possibly Raby for Van Ryn. But, if the South African is in form I think he's the obvious choice.

Lastly, St. Franks:-

HANDFORTH:

YORKE: BURTON:

GREY: BOOTS: DE VALERIE:

PITT: TRAVERS: HAMILTON: CHRISTINE: FULLWOOD:

This team is based on the one which played Bannington Town, (N. Lee No. 130. 1st. N.S.) and which we are told is the "strongest force". Unfortunately, Brooks only mentions seven players in his description of the game; namely, Handforth, Boots, and the five

forwards. I'm sure that Yorke and Burton cannot be improved upon in the full-back positions, and Jack Grey must surely be a "cert". The only "doubt" is De Valerie, and some Leeites might prefer Tregellis-West. Montie however is essentially a forward, and I "plumb" for De Valerie in the half-back line.

Thus, the school teams. Now, from the foregoing, here's an impartial attempt to select an "All Star XI". It must, of course, be appreciated that all selectors come "under fire" on practically all occasions. How many times, for instance, have you thought the English Football selectors a group of weak-minded, brainless nincompoops, for consistently refusing to include your favourite Centre Forward in the English International team?

Nevertheless, here goes:-

Between the "sticks" the choice must be narrowed down to Fatty Wynn and Handforth, whose records - from a careful perusal - are better than those of Squiff's and Rawson's. Of the two, I favour Handforth, as being slightly more consistent, and less likely to over-eat before the match!

Figgins and Peter Todd are my choices for the full-back positions. The former for his versatility and speed, while Toddy must surely be reckoned to be superior to Kerr, Towle, or Burton.

Bob Cherry - the finest schoolboy "all rounder" - must be an automatic choice for right-half, while Jimmy Silver "towers" above his rivals for the "first" position. At left-half we have a strong quartette challenging for a place; Lowther, Lovell, Brown and De Valerie. All are good men, and it's difficult to make a final selection. After a great amount of deliberation and perusals of descriptions of matches - I make it a "toss-up" between Lovell and Brown. Arthur Edward gets my eventual vote chiefly because of his familiarity with "Uncle James" in the middle!

Now, the forwards. On the right-wing it appears to lie between "Smithy" and Reggie Pitt, but I think "Smithy" has the "edge" on his challenger. However, I would give the inside-right position to St. Franks, in the shape of Vivian Travers. The two "bounders" should make a good combination!

At Centre-Forward, the choice is extremely difficult. I eliminate Erroll, then Tom Merry - sorry Tom - then.....now who shall it be? Harry Wharton or Nipper? After pouring over "Nelson Lees" and "Magnets" till my eyes are nearly popping out of my head, I select..... Wharton! In actual fact there's nothing

to choose between them, but I believe that Wharton - who would naturally captain the team - would inspire greater confidence especially in the event of things not working out according to plan! It might be argued that both "men" warrant a place in the team - one of them moving to an inside-forward position - but quite frankly, and "brutally" too, I don't believe there's room for both. Nipper and Wharton wouldn't "hit it off" in the same team.

Bob Christine is the obvious man for the inside-left position, his only serious rival being Jack Blake but Christine is faster, and more likely to get that "snap" goal!

D'Arcy and Fullwood are the chief claimants for left-winger, and Gussy gets my vote as the greater potential goal scorer, also he is the more consistent of the two.

Here then, is my "All Star XI":-

GOAL:	HANDFORTH	(St. Franks)
RIGHT BACK:	FIGGINS	(St. Jims)
LEFT BACK:	TODD	(Greyfriars)
RIGHT HALF:	CHERRY	(Greyfriars)
CENTRE HALF:	SILVER	(Rookwood)
LEFT HALF:	LOVELL	(Rookwood)
OUTSIDE RIGHT:	VERNON-SMITH	(Greyfriars)
INSIDE RIGHT:	TRAVERS	(St. Franks)
CENTRE FORWARD:	WHARTON	(Greyfriars) (Capt.)
INSIDE LEFT:	CHRISTINE	(St. Franks)
OUTSIDE LEFT:	D'ARCY	(St. Jims)

And I'll lay ten to one, in doughnuts, they'll beat all comers!

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MAGNET TITLES (Cont'd): 1510, Billy Bunter's House Warming; 1511, The Stay-In Strike at Greyfriars; 1512, The No-Surrender Schoolboys; 1513, Holding the Fort; 1514, The Fighting Form; 1515, The Prisoner of the Stronghold; 1516, Coker the Kidnapper; 1517, The Man with the Glaring Eyes; 1518, The Ananias of the Remove; 1519, Ponsonby Pulls the Strings; 1520, Keeping Quelch Quiet.

"Urgently required: Magnets 397, 400, 401, 407, 409, 437, 461, 906, 907, 1011, 1013, 1025, 1038, 1035, 1132, 1134, 1194. I also wish to replace 100 old copies between 1000 and 1300. Lists of any available welcomed. Your price or generous exchange for anything offered.

CHARLES VAN RENEN, BOX 50, UITENHAGE, SOUTH AFRICA.



By JACK WOOD, NOSTAW, 328, STOCKTON LANE, YORK

First of all this month, may I take the opportunity of wishing all my readers a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year.

And now, without further ado, I leave you to read another fine character study by an old friend of a St. Frank's junion who was one of Brooks's major characterisations, and I feel sure, also one of his own favourites.

ST. FRANK'S CHARACTER - NO. 2 REGINALD PITT

By Bernard Thorne

There is no doubt that Tommy Watson of the Ancient House Remove was a poor prophet! And so, for that matter, was Nipper. Watson had asserted emphatically that a leopard could not change his spots; and in a like manner Reginald Pitt, Serpent of the Remove, would never change from the cunning, smoky sort of bounder that he was. Nipper had agreed with his chum, although he was shrewd enough to see that there were unseen facets in Pitt's unpleasant nature. But he doubted if the Serpent would ever become a credit to the Junior School.

But with the passing of time (and several issues of the Nelson Lee Old Series) Watson's and Nipper's predictions proved to be hopelessly out of court. In fact the new boy who had cunningly plotted the downfall of Nipper and the expulsion of Montie Tregellis-West and Handforth in Old Series 170-177 who gambled, smoked and broke bounds, became one of St. Frank's most popular juniors.

Reginald Pitt arrived at St. Frank's on September 7th, 1918 and was placed in the College House with Bob Christine and Co. - St. Frank's having only two houses in those days. Rather slim of build with dark hair that curled freely on his forehead; he had dark deep-set eyes and a swarthy complexion. His cunning and cruel nature, coupled with his liking for gambling and cigarette smoking, soon earned him the soubriquet of the Serpent.

It proved to be an appropriate title. Within a few days of his arrival he proceeded to make bets on the forth-coming inter-house boat race. He openly bragged that the College House eight would beat Nipper and Co., and then engineered their victory by a particularly despicable trick. Unfortunately for the Serpent, a chance remark of Handforth's made Nipper suspicious, and the popular Remove captain was able to reveal the scheme. The race was held again; the Serpent lost his money, received a thrashing from Nipper, and was thrown neck and crop out of the College House by Bob Christine & Co.

The failure of his plans, far from teaching Pitt a lesson, only made him more vindictive. He obtained the Head's sanction to board in the Ancient House, and proceeded to further his vendetta against Nipper and Co. with such cunning that he almost succeeded in getting Montie Tregellis-West and Handforth expelled. It would have gone badly with him - in fact he would have earned his own expulsion - had he not shown courage of a very high degree in saving Tommy Watson from death in a fire at a house in Bannington. Nevertheless, there was no doubt that his heroic act had been the outcome of his own mean, despicable trick. For he had inveigled Watson into visiting the house - a questionable, gambling den - with the sole intention of exposing him to the school authorities. Before he could complete his plans a serious fire had broken out in the building and Tommy Watson had been trapped.

It was then that some quirk in Pitt's vindictive nature had asserted itself and he had saved Tommy's life, although suffering serious burns himself. Watson's gratitude was tempered by the knowledge that, but for Pitt, neither would have been involved in the episode. In Nipper's words: "He held the opinion, as he had plainly stated, that the Serpent would break out in the same way. Personally, I was very much afraid that Watson was right."

But the Remove, generally, were inclined to let bygones be bygones, and give Pitt the benefit of the doubt. Many of the boys were ignorant of the reason for Watson and Pitt's presence at the

Bannington house; they only knew that the Serpent had shown great courage in his actions. And so, when he was released from the school sanatorium, he was able to return to the Ancient House and Study E with the past behind him.

"The Boy From Bermondsey" (Old Series No. 178) saw the arrival of Jack Mason at St. Frank's; and the slow change in the Serpent's character began. The two boys became friends and thanks to Pitt, the Cockney boy was finally established in Study E as Jack Grey, the son of Sir Crawford Grey, Bart. But much was to occur before this: when Jack Grey's troubles were at their zenith, he was imprisoned aboard a tramp steamer by his rascally uncle, Simon Grell. In collision with a schooner off Caistowe, the steamer had foundered and word had reached Nelson Lee, Nipper and Pitt that Jack Grey was among those lost. Such a change had occurred in the Serpent's character that he collapsed when the news was received.

"It's horrible, sir - horrible!" choked Pitt.

He sank in a chair, and the next moment he was sobbing as though his heart would break, his face buried in the cushions of the chair.

We stood looking at him in dull astonishment, momentarily forgetting the tragedy. Could this possibly be Reggie Pitt - the fellow who had been known as the Serpent? I had never thought it possible that he could be so affected. I had never dreamed that he cared so much for Jack Mason - the boy he had tried his best to injure during his first few weeks at St. Frank's.'

Thus Nipper in Old Series No. 185. Jack Grey, of course, was not drowned. He returned later none the worse for his adventure. But the friendship of the two boys was firmly cemented, and continued unbroken for the duration of the St. Frank's tales.

And so Reggie Pitt continued to rise in the estimation of his fellows. He soon took his place as a regular member of the junior cricket eleven, and later, in the five test matches played between the St. Frank's first eleven and Young Australia he was selected. Although eclipsed by the performances of the Handforth brothers and Walter Church he gave a display that established him as a batsman.

But it was as a soccer player that Pitt earned greatest fame. He was, without doubt, the finest winger in the school's history, and at outside right was always the star player in the Junior Eleven. His skill was such that, in Old Series 328-335, he was

chosen to play for the professional Bannington club.

In 1925 the school was reorganized, and to a large extent, rebuilt. The Ancient and College Houses were extended to include two new houses - West and East. The Remove were quartered in the Ancient and West houses, and the Fourth in the East and Modern houses. With Nipper retaining his position as Junior Captain and skipper of the Ancient House, Reggie Pitt was a certainty for the West House captaincy. Under his leadership, the West House achieved a prominence never held by the old College House, and Reggie's "merry men" were rarely far behind Nipper and Co. in Junior School sports and general rivalry.

A long time was to pass before Reggie Pitt again featured prominently in the Nelson Lee Library. Then came the Christmas of 1928 when, in New Series 138-140, he became the owner of a genuine castle complete with drawbridge, moat and keep. It was an enthusiastic school-boy who stood at the top of the hill outside Market Donning and pointed to where the ancient grey turrets and battlements of Raithmere Castle rose above the sombre clumps of yews and firs.

"Mount your trusty steeds, my henchmen, for we now descend upon the moated castle!" he said. "Let us trust that the drawbridge is down, and that we do not fall into the most gadzooks! On, serfs - on!"

It was a grand series, replete with snow, ghosts and Ezra Quirke! - in our opinion one of Brook's best.

The following year began the School Ship series, and following almost immediately, the School Train series. In these the irrepressible Handforth held the centre of the stage. When the boys finally settled down to a normal life at school, Edwy Searles Brooks commenced to introduce a host of astounding and unreal characters who packed St. Frank's to suffocation point. Stanley Waldo, Claude Gore-Pearce, K.K. Parkington, Deeks, Goffin, Bonner, Wee Johnson Ward (Georgie Wood?), Skeets Bellton, King Victor Orlando, were but a few. In addition, almost a complete staff of new masters who were mad, eccentric, and generally impossible!

Whether this innovation was a belated attempt to re-kindle dying fires and awaken interest in the Nelson Lee's disillusioned readers is a matter for conjecture. But we, who had known the paper in earlier and better days, were not impressed. Reggie Pitt, Bob Christine, Fullwood, John Busterfield Boots, had now become mere echoes of a once popular melody. Right to the end



Reggie Pitt held his position as outside right in the Junior Eleven and still made his famous runs on the wing. But his efforts rarely ended in the net. Until the final tale he was made to feed passes to a new bunch of star players - Corcoran, Tich Harborough, and K.K. Parkington. Reggie Pitt was dead, but he was not permitted to lie down.

There is little more to be said. The Nelson Lee Library staggered on to the brink of the precipice and, without a backward glance, plunged to its doom. And with it passed one of St. Frank's finest schoolboy characters - Reginald Pitt, ex-Serpent of the Remove!

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THE COLLECTORS' DIGEST ANNUAL, 1955

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# OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

LONDON BRANCH MEETING, NOVEMBER 25th

Cherry Place became the Priory on the occasion of the November meeting as Treasurer Bob had drawn a map of Rookwood and district which was to be the subject of a fine talk by Roger Jenkins. This proved to be a real winner as a good general discussion on the merits of Rookwood and the characters associated with this Hampshire school. Closely allied with this talk was a fine quiz from Percy North of the Rookwood country. This proved rather difficult and no result can be given at the moment as no papers were finished. Another quiz from Don Webster was won by Bob Whiter and caused quite a lot of amusement owing to the wrong answers being given by the composer. Laurie Sutton, a new member gave a talk on how he started his collection and Roger Jenkins read a very amusing chapter from a "Magnet". Roger reported good borrowing from the Hamilton section of the library and announced that the December meeting will be at Wood Green on the 18th day of the month. Don Webster and Frank Unwin hope to attend this meeting. At the conclusion of the meeting those who remained heard a good selection of Bob and Eileen's records on the radio-gram. And so now for the Christmas meeting once again.

UNCLE BENJAMIN.

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NORTHERN SECTION MEETING, NOVEMBER 12th, 1955

There was a gratifying attendance, the best for some time. It included another new member, Mr. J.H. Wilson of Ilkley, Leslie Hall, an old one but who was attending his first meeting, and Cliff Beardsell once again.

Following business we settled down to listen to Breeze Bentley give his annual talk. This time he dealt with the stormy incredible (in the hands of anyone else but Frank Richards) career of Vernon-Smith, from the day he was nick-named the 'Boulder' up to the famous story 'Bob Cherry's Barring-Out' which was a collectors' item forty years ago. Supporting his talk Breeze read dramatic extracts from the stories. A big effort for Breeze, taking him right up to closing time. On December 10th the Christmas Party. There'll be the real Christmas atmosphere.

HERBERT LECKENBY, Northern Section Correspondent.

MIDLAND SECTION MEETING - OCTOBER 31st: Tom Porter gave us some interesting details of a recent visit to the London Club, and we then had a reading by Mrs. Corbett from a "Holiday Annual" describing a typical "Breaking-up" day at Greyfriars. Next Treasurer Norman read us some interesting extracts from a lengthy correspondence which appeared recently in the "Daily Telegraph". This was an interesting commentary on Norman's recent talk as it dealt with the topic of adventure stories.

During and after refreshments we tackled a novel and teasing quiz compiled by Mr. Broster. We had to supply the surnames to a number of initials quoted. Dr. Locke's initials were given as "H. H. L." When his sister took the Remove for a short spell in "Red Magnet" days she called him "Arthur". Of course quite a number of discrepancies like this occurred during the very long career of the good old "Magnet".

EDWARD DAVEY.

MERSEYSIDE SECTION MEETING - NOVEMBER 13th: Though still without some of the regular members, a most interesting evening was spent by those present. The preliminary business having been dispensed with, it was reported that the Bootle Council had agreed to our proposed Exhibition, and it only now remains to fix the date. One of our junior members, George Riley, then presented his first Quiz and what a "snorter" it was. Nobody knew which Form Master at Greyfriars dabbled in photography, nor the name of Jerry Dodd's pony. However, Norman Pragnell beat Peter Webster by a single mark for first place.

Next month is our Christmas Meeting (Sunday, December 11th, 7 p.m. prompt) when all members are asked to submit a humorous poem and prizes will be awarded to the best entries. We hope to have a full house for this festive occasion when we usually spend a happy time at Waterloo House. We, on Merseyside, extend seasons greetings to all other O.B.B. Clubs, "Herbert" & Co. readers.

D.B.W.

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L E T T E R   B O X

THE PROUD RECORD OF FRANK RICHARDS

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Many thanks for the C.D. The letter from our friend at Basingstoke is extremely interesting. I had not heard of the broadcast he mentions, and it is quite curious that it should have been given by a "Richards". It is pleasant to learn that the broadcaster referred to the "high moral tone": which I flatter myself was achieved without sermonizing. The older I grow - and I

am growing quite old now! - the more pleased I am to remember that, in all my sixty million words, I never wrote one that any boy or girl might not read aloud to Aunt Euphemia.

Roger Jenkins' article was a real pleasure to read. I like old Hobson so much myself! Of course Roger is quite right about the "mystery" not being the major point of interest in a story. A story depending wholly on the "mystery" can hardly be read more than once: while in my opinion at least a story that is worth reading at all is worth re-reading many times. It always makes me grin when I read in a commentator that Horace packs a "surprise" at the end of an Ode. A "surprise" can surprise only once: and then is dead and done with. Unless there be something else, and something better, who would read anything a second time!

Thanks to Eric Fayne for his very charming review of "Backing up Billy Bunter". And to Jack Wood for the same. And I like, too, Basil Adams' article on that "Ravenspur" series, though I have often wished that I had never written it. But I was specially asked to do a "thriller" series, and like poor old Mauly I never could say No.

With kindest regards, Always yours sincerely,

FRANK RICHARDS.

BEN WHITER REPLIES TO G.A.

Dear Editor,

I read G.A.'s review of Billy Bunter's Own with interest. Whilst I recognise that no one can object to honest criticism, I should like to say I do not agree with him in his comments on the size this year. I think the fairest way is to compare it with a pre-war Holiday Annual. B.B.'s Own is about half the size, and priced about 25% more, but on the other hand cost of production has more than doubled. So on the whole I think its a fair deal. In any event its quality that matters and I am sure all will agree we have got that once again in B.B.'s Own.

BEN WHITER.

GREAT COLLECTION BREAKING UP!

Lack of Space Causes Hard Pruning.

Several complete series of 'Magnets' and a few odd copies left to clear. 'Union Jack' runs of Sexton Blake vs. Kestrel, Zenith, Waldo and other favourite characters; large selection of the old pink covers. Great variety of coloured covers.

'Boys' Friend Libraries' of The Rio Kid, Captain Justice, King of the Islands and a few old Hamilton Gems of Greyfriars and St. Jim's - these are real collectors' items.

WANTED TO COMPLETE RUN! The old green 'Penny Popular': Nos: 4, 5, 9, 39, 51, 69, 225, 231, 241, 242, 243, 244, 246, 248, 249, 251, 252, 253, 254, 256, 257, 259, 262, 264, 267, 268, 270, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 277, 280. HARRY HOMER, YULDEN FARM, HEATHFIELD, SUSSEX.

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