

# THE COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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APRIL 1956

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No. 7, APRIL 16th, 1932



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# The Collectors' Digest

Vol. 10 No. 112

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APRIL, 1956

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

## From the Editor's Chair

BILL LOFTS FOUND IT! You'll remember that last month we published a letter from Mr. J.L. McDuff asking if we could help him trace a story of his which appeared in one of the Thomson papers in, he thought, 1934. Well, that was just up Bill's street. He set to work in the British Museum and waded through all the Thomson papers for 1934 without result. Nothing daunted he started on 1935 and at long last came across it in the Rover No. 672, March 2nd, 1935. As I've said before, a real sticker, Bill.

And now to give it a perfect ending, it only remains for one of you to supply Mr. McDuff with a copy of the Rover No. 672. It could be sent either to him, or to Bill Loft's.

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A BOYS' AUTHOR AND "ANSWERS": Last month I mentioned the serials John (David) Goodwin wrote for "Answers". Now the other day quite by chance I picked up a copy of that paper dated October 22nd, 1910. In it was an announcement that one of those serials "Blackmail!" had been made into a play under the title "Tracked by Wireless". This, in part, was what was said about it:

"Written by an ardent sea-gypsy, it used to arrive in Bouverie Street scrawled on all sorts of queer scraps of paper, by all sorts of messengers and from all corners of the Thames estuary and the East Coast. Chapter after chapter, in any sort of order was brought into the office by bargees who had had it pitched into their craft, weighted with half-crown delivery fees; by railway-porters, who had received it from the drivers of fish specials; by Thames pilots, or by longshore loafers from Wapping."

Well, though the author's name was not mentioned, that sea-gypsy was our David Goodwin all right. For his home was on the Norfolk Broads, he owned his own yacht being quite well off, and

spent his days cruising about the North Sea and the Thames Estuary and writing stirring yarns for boys' as well as adult stories. As a result, boys who read the Boys Friend and its companions in the early years of the century were thrilled by yarns like "The Boy Bargeowners", "Gunfleet Jim", "The Secret of the Thames", and "Dave, the Bargeboy".

I well remember how, some years later, when I was corresponding with David Goodwin he sent me a copy of one of his books in stiff covers, entitled "The House of Marney". Remarked he with a chuckle, "This is really one of my old 'bloods', "Dave the Barge-boy" which I wrote for the "Boys Realm".

Harking back to the play "Tracked by Wireless", "Answers" said it would be played in every corner of the United Kingdom and was appearing that week at the Shakespeare Theatre, Clapham Junction. I wonder if it received as much applause as did the stories he wrote for boys in those days of long ago.

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The "Annual Subs." Serial: Alas, and alack! there's still ten to come.

Yours disappointedly,

HERBERT LECKENBY.

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## BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

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

During the past few weeks I have received some excellent articles, added to which there are one or two more on the way from overseas. It is, therefore, with the greatest satisfaction and pleasure that I announce the forthcoming main Blakiana feature in the next three issues of the C. Digest. They are all 'full-length' and will appear in the following order:-

|                          |                 |
|--------------------------|-----------------|
| "Sexton Blake, Marksman" | by W.T. Thurbon |
| "Who Was Lady Molly?"    | by Walter Webb  |
| "Turn Back the Clock"    | by E.V. Copeman |

As for those 'on the way', one is by Mr. Copeman and the

---

other by Victor Colby. I hope to announce the titles of these next month.

It is so nice to receive such fine articles.....I am really beginning to feel that my efforts in conducting Blakiana are not in vain!

No one can hope to please all of you all the time, but I am quite sure that during the next few months the majority will be pleased with the 'bill of fare'.

Further to my comment last month on the covers of the recent S.B. Libs., I am given to understand that the Editor of the S.B.L. died last year (having been in harness in that capacity since the beginning of the S.B.L. in 1915), and that a young man has 'taken over'. This young Editor's ideas are undoubtedly correct as regards the attraction of the 'modern' cover - for the type of literature one expects it to grace, but for those who, like myself, buy the S.B.L. for the purpose of reading the 'straight' detective adventures of Blake and Tinker, this is no attraction. This of course is only my opinion, and I shall be pleased if you will let me have yours.

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### THE BEST - AND THE WORST

by W.H. Goodhead

#### CONCLUSION

Meanwhile, the sensational and romantic story of the overthrow of King Karl and his villainous henchmen had captured the imagination of all England, and Blake and his colleagues were given a semi-official reception at the Savoy.

Suddenly, however, the cup of triumph was dashed from Blake's lips in a dramatic manner. At Brixton prison, to which Karl had been taken for incarceration pending his trial, with the aid of a 'mysterious blue phial', had staged a phoney suicide. The prison doctor - Scarlatti in disguise - took advantage of the temporary confusion to throw a couple of gas bombs into the room, and a squad of escape experts specially trained for the event whipped the Ace away in a fake Flying Squad car. With him, of course, went Samson and Lou Tarrant.

The news that the Ace was once more at large came as a shock to England's law-abiding citizens. Blake, however, who was recognised by both the public and the authorities as the only person

capable of bringing Karl to a final reckoning, refused to panic, preferring to wait for the Ace to show his hand. He had not long to wait.

Karl's fear and hatred of Blake had by this time begun to destroy his reasoning powers, and his desire for vengeance now became an obsession. Some exciting events soon transpired. Then, in a last fling, Samson and Scarlatti were killed, whilst Tinker was kidnapped and held by Karl personally - in an attempt to force Blake into a compromise, whereby the Ace could make his getaway. But Blake rose to the occasion and broadcast the following message to the nation: "Sexton Blake continues his appointed task, be the consequences what they may".

The lad's predicament now became a nasty one. Not only was he strapped to an exact working replica of the electric chair from the Sing Sing death cell, but his captor took a ghoulish delight in pointing out to him a large vat of hydrochloric acid in which he intended to dissolve his body after electrocution. Karl was obviously suffering from acute megalomania, and was behaving like a combination of Fu Manchu and the villain in a nineteenth-century melodrama.

Nemesis, however, was slowly but surely overtaking the Ace, and the net was tightening around him for the last time. Blake and his party were now in full cry, and eventually became informed of the whereabouts of the Ace. Thus, before Karl could complete his plan of escape from England to seek fresh fields abroad - and also electrocute Tinker and give him his vitriolic bath - Blake burst in like an avenging angel. The sight of the detective once more standing between him and freedom finally cracked the nerve of the now completely shattered Ace who, mouthing incoherent threats and pleas, saved everyone a lot of unnecessary trouble by falling backwards into his own vat of hydrochloric acid.

That, at long last, was the end of the Double Four. Nothing now remained to be done except, as Shakespeare has it: "Call the field to rest and lets away, to part the glories of this happy day".

The final crushing of the Double Four was celebrated by a royal reception followed by a civic one. Two remarks can serve as a farewell and a summing-up respectively; one by Ruff Hanson who, overcome by the sight of the Lord Mayor in his full regalia, was moved to remark: "Durn me, if I was'nt an American citizen I'd wish to be a British subject", and the other by Blake who, when his triumph over the Double Four was referred to as the

biggest coup of the century, remarked somewhat uncharacteristically that it was only because it was the biggest he had ever tackled.

All this took place way back in 1927, before the moronic infiltration of the soul-deadening 'comics', when Blake was in his heyday and reading was a pleasure. Much water has flowed under many bridges since then, and standards of behaviour, education and literacy have changed considerably, chiefly for the worse. Let Blake, Splash Page, Ruff Hanson, Karl and the rest of the actors in the story of the Double Four remain as fresh as ever in my memory. Comparisons are notoriously odious, but what juvenile literature of today will be read or even remembered with pleasure a quarter of a century from now?

Once again, to misquote Shakespeare: "The oldest hath seen most. You that are young shall never see so much or live so long".

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UNION JACK TITLES - YEAR 1920 (JANUARY - JUNE)

|         |  |               |
|---------|--|---------------|
| No. 847 | The League of the Cobbler's Last. (Zenith) | A. Skene.     |
| " 848   | Kestrel's Great Bluff (Kestrel)            | L. Jackson.   |
| " 849   | Tinker's Lone Hand                         | C. Hayter.    |
| " 850   | The Case of the Criminal Scientist         | R. Murray.    |
| " 851   | The Forest of Ghosts (Losely)              | C. Hayter.    |
| " 852   | Double-Crossed (Nantucket)                 | A. Murray.    |
| " 853   | The Vanished Australian                    | W. Graydon.   |
| " 854   | The End of the Trail                       | R. Murray.    |
| " 855   | The Case of the Rival Promoters (Plummer)  | M. Osborne.   |
| " 856   | The Beggars' Hotel (Zenith)                | A. Skene.     |
| " 857   | The Mystery of the S.S. Olympic            | R. Murray.    |
| " 858   | The Informer (Crim. Con.)                  | R. Murray.    |
| " 859   | The Mystery of the Gnarled Oak (Lee)       | E. S. Brooks. |
| " 860   | The Hidden Headquarters (Crim. Con.)       | R. Murray.    |
| " 861   | The Strange Case of the Clyde Emeralds     | S. Gordon.    |
| " 362   | Tinker's Big Case                          | E. S. Brooks. |
| " 863   | The Cargo Stealers (The Owl)               | A. Murray.    |
| " 864   | The Dance of Disaster (Kestrel)            | L. Jackson.   |
| " 865   | The Clue of the Green Stain. (Waldo)       | E. S. Brooks. |
| " 866   | The Marley Farm Mystery (Losely & Lobangu) | C. Hayter.    |
| " 867   | The Five Clues (Zenith)                    | A. Skene.     |
| " 868   | The New President (Crim. Con.)             | R. Murray.    |
| " 869   | Dirk Dolland's Dilemma. (Crim. Con.)       | R. Murray.    |

|   |              |
|---|--------------|
| No. 870 The Mystery of the 9.12 Express (Lee) | E.S. Brooks. |
| " 871 The Case of the Four Statues (Zenith)   | A. Skene.    |
| " 872 The Clue of the Golden Hair             | -            |

(Number 847 is dated 3 January 1920, and number 872 is dated 26 June 1920.)

The titles for July to December 1920 will appear next month. (Collectors' Digest, May 1956.)

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BRILLIANT BLAKE

(Memories of a Veteran Reader)  
by DICK MILTON

I may claim, without undue egotism, to be the oldest reader of "Union Jack". In 1894, I, aged 12, purchased the initial number for the modest sum of one halfpenny. The story, "The Silver Arrow", was by Paul Herring, and held me fascinated, and I determined, at all costs, to secure the second number. This deserves special mention, for it introduced to the reading public the now world-famous detective, SEXTON BLAKE. The succeeding stories were mostly narratives of the goldfields and the Wild West, vividly written by popular authors of the period: Harry Blyth, Maxwell Scott, John G. Rowe, Alec Pearson, Herbert Maxwell, Claude Heathcote, Shaw Rae, Henry St. John, John Collier and others. The Blake yarns were generally sandwiched between these stirring takes of adventure in various parts of the world, and won golden opinions, Mr. Shaw Rae being responsible for some of the most dramatic and clever stories in the series.

After a while, serial tales were introduced, one of the most gripping being "Shadowed and Haunted", in which the famous sleuth shone conspicuously. In subsequent years a rival to Blake appeared in the shape of Nelson Lee, by Maxwell Scott, and, it was acknowledged, a more formidable opponent than the latter detective, it was difficult to imagine. Week after week I, and other enthusiastic readers, revelled in the adventures of these two specialists in crime. They were meaty melodramas, served up with sanguinary sauce, for our delictation. I dined upon them every week, and, believe me, I found them very appetising. Munching meals to "Murder".

Slightly older than the "Union Jack" there was the "Marvel", also price one halfpenny. Through its pages ran a Blake serial -



"King of Detectives". The immediate success of these two books tempted the enterprising publishers to launch even a third upon the market, which up to that time had been inundated with trashy stuff of the penny-dreadful brand, but, needless to say, this first class trio of papers, the "U.J.", "Marvel" and "Pluck", very soon drove these "horribles" from the field.

A further fillip was given to "Union Jack" when appeared abridged versions of the standard works: Dickens, Scott, Ainsworth, Lytton, Marryat, Cooper, Cockton, Blackmore - all were included in the classical menu dished up for the critical palates of its readers. And, besides stories by the immortals, we were given feats of fiction from the pens of such able-writers as Charles Hamilton, Captain Eric Brown, Walter Everard, Sydney Warwick, Edwin Wooton, Arthur Applin, and, above all, E. Harcourt Burrage, whose "Tom Tartar" and "Lambs of Littlecote" have delighted millions of boys (and girls) who, in their early days, looked upon this fine and clever author as a benefactor. I class Burrage as No. 1, as regards a caterer for youthful readers - nothing obnoxious, but every line fit and proper, good wholesome tales, which did credit to both publisher and writer. (A Toast! Here's to the memory of E. Harcourt Burrage!)

The next phase in the career of the dear old "U.J." was when the price rose to a penny, then three-halfpence, and finally to twopence. By that time the "Sexton Blake" yarns were exclusive to the paper and, strange as it appears, throughout the long sixty-odd years of changes of modes, fashions and manners, the immortal detective, "Brilliant Blake", still holds sway over the lovers of good, sound thrilling fiction and, as we hope, will continue to do while the clever company of younger writers carry on the traditions of their great predecessors, who, away back in the halcyon days of our boyhood, the 'nineties, and early twentieth century, set the example by using their very best efforts in the work they did for the papers and books which specialised in the King of Detectives - SEXTON BLAKE!

\*\*\*\*\*  
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 C.D.'s., ANNUALS, ANY SUCH CORRESPONDENCE WELCOMED AND ANSWERED.  
 PLEASE HELP. ASHLEY, 23, MOUNTJOY, BRIDPORT.

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COMICS CORNER

## The Early History of Comics

By W.O.G. Lofts

To say when the very first type of comic paper was issued is very debatable. There were papers published as long ago as "Comic Times" and "Comic News" in 1847, but these were not the comic papers we are so familiar with, they contained nearly all written jokes, and occasionally single cartoons. It was not until September 1883, when the well known firm of James Henderson published a new type of humorous paper, that to my mind was the beginning of the comics. "Scraps" as this new paper was called, contained cartoons and sometimes several single pictures joined together to form a short story or a funny incident.

This paper was so popular with the public, that it was expected that soon other firms would follow suit; and in May 1884 the firm of Daziel Bros. followed with "Ally Slopers Half-holiday" which of course had as its main comic character the renowned Ally Sloper.

These papers it must be admitted were for the general public, as well as perhaps for children, their huge success, can be seen by the latter running for 1,788 issues, when it was amalgamated with "London Life". By a strange contrast Gilbert Daziel published a companion to the "Half-Holiday in 1899 entitled "Ally Slopers Haporth" which only ran for one issue.

The amazing foresight of Alfred Harmsworth in 1890 saw the great possibilities of this type of paper, for in May he produced the first of many comic papers for children priced at  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. entitled "Comic Cuts". This paper in fact was boycotted by some Newsagents at that time, because at the low price of  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. it was injuring the Newsagents trade! This did not worry Harmsworth, because its success was so phenomenal that it was making over £25,000 a year profit! A very interesting announcement was made in the 11th issue when it was stated that none other than the Prime Minister (Mr. Gladstone) was one of their most ardent readers!

The rival firm of Trapps Holmes & Co. were quick to see the possibilities of this, and on the 12th of July, 1890 they issued "Funny Cuts" with a very famous man as Editor, Gordon Phillip-Hood, who was noted for his yearly comic Annuals. "Nobbler & Jerry"

were the main comic characters, and this was the paper in which quite a lot of Charles Hamilton's early work is to be found. Two weeks later Harmsworth retaliated with "Illustrated Chips", but they must have found the title too long winded, as after six issues they shortened the title to "Chips". Many people are under the impression that Weary Willie and Tired Tim were in the first issue until the last (2,997 1953) but in fact this famous pair made their appearance in May 1896, but were then called Weary Waddles and Tired Timmy. These names were considered too long to pronounce, and like the previous title were changed to the world famous Weary Willie and Tired Tim after a few weeks. Tom Browne the creator of them is reputed to have said that they got on his nerves, and handed them to another artist after a short while. In year 1891 saw another four comic papers issued with the titles of "Skits" "Comic Pictorial Nuggets" "Joker" and "Jolly Bits", these were all of the same format of "Scraps" and by some collectors they are not recognised as comics. 1892 saw the third of Harmsworth papers issued entitled "Wonder" whilst Trapps Holmes had their second comic running with the title of "Worlds Comic", Hendersons had "Comic Pictorial Nuggets". The year of 1893 saw only one new arrival that being "Larks" another Gilbert Daziel effort, this was later bought out by Trapps Holmes Ltd. 1894 also only saw one new comic entitled "Champion Comic" this was a very poor affair, and by some strange reason they reverted the numbering back to number 1 again after 26 issues.

Comic Home Journal was the only new arrival for 1895, whilst 1896 passed by without a new comic on the bookstalls.

Two new arrivals in 1897 were "Big Budget" and "New Joker", whilst the last year in which new comics were published before the turn of the century. 1898 produced no less than seven new arrivals the first of these broke new ground in comic history as when "Coloured Comic" was published in May of that year, its front cover was coloured, previous to this, all comics were in black and white on white or coloured paper. The front page colouring was not kept up for long, and later was dropped although they still retained the title of "Coloured Comic".

Charles Hamilton did much work for these papers which of course also contained short stories (Trapps Holmes the main concern) but it is very interesting to note that "Jokes" which was really the continuation of "Joker" and "New Joker" was published by the

Greyfriars Publishing Co. I have often wondered whether Frank Richards first saw this famous name when he wrote his first story about this school in 1900 (not published until 1908 of course; in the "Magnet"). "Pictorial Comic Life", "Monster Comic", "Comic Bits" "Half-Penny Comic" and "Dan Leno's Comic Journal", the latter an attempt to boost sales by claiming it was edited by that famous comedian of that time Dan Leno, were the others published in that year.

These were the comics as known published until the turn of the century. If I have not given many details of some regarding characters, etc., I hope that you will excuse me, as one must make use of the space available. Perhaps in future issues of the C.D. I can give interesting information regarding some of the comics well known to us all, but that depends on space available.

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# HAMILTONIANA

Compiled by Herbert Leckenby

THOSE MYSTERIOUS "GREYFRIARS" LETTERS: Since last writing I have received more of these from Mr. Prout, Jack Drake and Coker, and Len Packman has had a post-card from Gosling. I have a suspicion that not all of these came from the original japer.

Well, it was a good and clever leg-pull at first, but I think, and others agree with me, that it would be a pity to spoil it by playing it too long. I am sorry, too, that Mr. Quelch has not revealed himself so that we could 'converse together'. After all he went to a lot of trouble, but if I had not published the letters, and I might not have done, I don't quite see what satisfaction he expected to get out of it. As I said the letters were much enjoyed at a Northern O.B.B.C. (and later at a London one) so why not allow us to give credit where it is due. So don't be bashful 'Mr. Quelch'.

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Here's a par. from the Eastern Province Herald, South Africa, of Feb. 24th, 1956 (kindly sent by Charles van Renen). It appeared under a big head-line. "IT WOULD HORRIFY BILLY BUNTER".

"To protect schoolchildren against the temptation of too many sweets, the Transvaal Education Department has framed new rules for tuckshops at schools.

Billy Bunter, the mythical fat boy of Greyfriars who habitually gorged himself on cake, cream puffs, tarts and toffee would have been horrified at the curbs being placed on his Transvaal counterparts who have the appetites of hungry horses and for whom the standard school desks are too cramped."

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And here's another. J.L. Manning in the Sunday Dispatch commenting on the M.C.C. spot of bother:

"At any rate, when he asked for water, he was given a bucketful. Very funny in the Remove at Greyfriars, but humiliating for a Parkistani Test Umpire, sensitive that the players disliked his decisions."

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THE MAGIC OF ROOKWOOD

By Roger M. Jenkins

Rookwood is the last of Charles Hamilton's creations which never fails to interest me. It is true that, compared with Greyfriars and St. Jim's, it seems rather the Cinderella of the trio, dwarfed by its elder (though not ugly) sisters. It is also true that a number of discriminating Hamiltonian collectors do not greatly care for the work of Owen Conquest: indeed one great authority once suggested to me that there was an air of unreality about the school, and that he could scarcely believe even now that the Magnot and the Gem author could have been responsible for these stories. Why was Rookwood so different? Why is it nevertheless that most collectors find it so completely absorbing? Why was it so successful? Let us see whether an analysis of the structure of the school will provide us with the answers to any of these questions.

It is well known that Rookwood was created in 1915 at the request of Hinton to revive the flagging Boys' Friend which had just come under his control. The Rookwood story occupied about a quarter of each number, running to about four or five chapters in lean years and to seven or eight in fat ones. Here at once may be seen why the Rookwood tales were so absorbing - they were constructed for a smaller stage, and all inessentials had to be cut ruthlessly. Thus it is that whilst some of the Greyfriars stories in the early days (and a few of the St. Jim's stories as well) are frankly disappointing, there is not a single Rookwood story by Charles Hamilton which does not possess that air of liveliness and expectancy which results when a good story is told briefly and animatedly, leaving the reader anxious for more. Of course, some Rookwood stories are better than others, but none can really be counted as a failure. It is possible to have too much of a good thing, and there are undoubtedly some grounds for thinking that the cover to cover stories in the late Magnets were a mistaken policy. Whatever temptations beset Frank Richards, however, it may safely be stated that Owen Conquest was never given the opportunity to spread himself, and I do not think that the Rookwood stories suffered as a result.

The essential factor to bear in mind is that Owen Conquest kept his canvas down to manageable proportions. The limelight

was focused on the Classical Fourth which contained twenty-four boys at its maximum; a few in the Shell and Modern Fourth were thrown in as counterweights, and there were of course one or two seniors as well. Where the stories were appearing in short weekly episodes, the readers did not want to be weighted down by a mass of characters, and at Rookwood, at least, no form was in danger of becoming so large and unweildy as the Greyfriars Remove.

Another interesting point was the composition of the end study. St. Jim's had its Terrible Three and Greyfriars its Famous Five, but Rookwood eschewed odd numbers and boasted a Fistical Four instead. Was this merely to be different? I do not think so. There is an old saying to the effect that even numbers are company, but odd numbers are not. I often think that study No. 10 in the Shell at St. Jim's wanted another occupant who would make it as fascinating as study No. 6 in the Fourth at the same school - that extra occupant seemed to make all conversation far less personal and far more interesting. Again, the Famous Five were really too many. They lost half the feeling of comradeship by being split up in so many different studies, and always lacked the integrated unity of the Fistical Four. A group of four is the ideal number around which to centre the stories: it allows for differences of opinion which do not necessarily lead to isolation.

The characterisation of the Fistical Four is particularly interesting. Emerson says that every hero becomes a bore at last, and it is certainly true that Harry Wharton (and to a lesser extent Tom Merry) both sacrificed the affection of the reader at times when they dug their toes in on some point of principle. (They were usually in the right, but this robbed them of even more sympathy: Johnny Bull, for instance, was never so unbearable as when he was right.) When we come to Jimmy Silver, however, we find that this faint aura of righteousness is completely missing. This is really very surprising, for the captain of the Rookwood Fourth could be very high-handed at times, in his raids on smoking parties or in the dormitory raggings inflicted on Mornington in his more recalcitrant moments. Tom Merry's maxim was the rather passive "Why grouse?" but Jimmy Silver's was the more active "Keep smiling". The reader could approve of any scheme which so cheery a youth initiated, and for this reason perhaps Jimmy Silver never once alienated the affections of those who purchased the "Boy's Friend". Furthermore, there was never anyone in the Classical Fourth who seriously challenged his lead: both Mornington and Lovell became captain at various

times, but it was obvious that neither had the real qualities of leadership, and so Jimmy could go his own sweet way unopposed by the better element in the form. Alas, this was not the case at Greyfriars and St. Jim's, where there were several other eligible candidates for the post besides Harry Wharton and Tom Merry respectively; probably none would have filled the post so successfully, but the idea of Blake or Talbot or Noble as junior captain of St. Jim's, or Todd or Field or Cherry as captain of the Remove does not seem so unthinkable as the idea of not having Jimmy Silver as captain of the Fourth. The Rookwood stories were built round the Fistical Four at all times, whereas the Greyfriars and St. Jim's stories had a way of meandering from the main groups of characters altogether. The star attraction of the "Gem" was Gussy, not Tom Merry, and the star attraction of the Magnet, in later years at least, was Billy Bunter, not Harry Wharton. But Rookwood was Jimmy Silver all the time, and Jimmy Silver was Rookwood. There were no two ways about that.

It was Lovell, however, who really distinguished the Fistical Four. Neither the Terrible Three nor the Famous Five contained a member with such a low standard of intelligence. The story which always sticks in my mind is the one in which Lovell, the treasurer of the games club, was £1 short, and accused Tubby Muffin of pilfering from the club funds. Although Tubby certainly had designs on the money, it turned out that Lovell had made an arithmetical error in subtraction, and no money was missing at all. To have included a character like Lovell in one of the main groups was a daring project which might easily have ruined the whole scheme of things: imagine, for instance, Coker or Grundy appearing regularly every week as a central character. Lovell's obstinacy, his certainty that he knew best, his refusal to face unpalatable truths were all Coker-ish traits, but he was sympathetically presented. Despite his faults, and they were legion, we were inclined to like him, and we did. Moreover, he was not overplayed, and could feature in a story without necessarily becoming an obstinate ass. Arthur Edward, like Jimmy, was a definite success.

Having provided two well-defined characters, Charles Hamilton might well have called it a day, and thrown in Raby and Newcome as mere names to act as makeweights. There is a certain amount of dispute amongst Rookwood collectors on this point. It is obvious that Raby and Newcome were not so well defined as the other characters in the leading groups at Greyfriars and St. Jim's. On

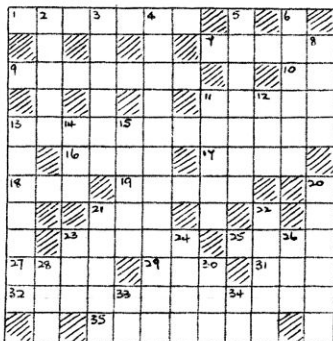


the other hand, Charles Hamilton has agreed that he employed a more subtle delineation of character here: two strong characters need two supporting characters to throw them into sharper relief. Raby was a plump, curly-haired junior who had a streak of obstinacy and pride which rose to the surface rather embarrassingly when he was once unjustly suspected of being a funk. Newcome was distinguished by his quiet sarcasm which made him the perfect foil for Lovell. This set-up suited the Rookwood stories very well, since there was not enough room to allow every one of the Fistical Four to take the spotlight in every story.

To be continued.

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THE COLLECTORS' DIGEST PRIZE CROSSWORD. No. 2 (New Series)



This puzzle is just to amuse you for a few minutes. But, to add to the fun, a Postal Order for 5/0 will be sent to the sender of the first correct solution opened by the Editor, and a 2/6 book of stamps will be sent for the second one received. If you do not wish to cut your C.D., make a careful copy of the square and post it.

CLUES

ACROSS 1, 9. "Here comes Billy Bunter!" (1, 3, 3, 7). 7. Kind of doper

often found in Sexton Blake's company in the old days. 9. See 1. 10. Doubtful about Squiff just before the end. 11. To start with, the school porter in the liner provides the animals. 13. It's painted on "The Three Fishers", no doubt (3, 2, 7). 16. One of Pentolow's came from Tasmanis. 17. Dicky Nugent? 18. Gem readers

will always cherish his memory. 19. When Rylcombe accommodates Mr. Quelch. 21. The strength of Levison. 23. They used to say she wasn't Frank's sister. 25. See 2. 27. Friardale Picture House shows a poem in lofty style. 29. Blagg, the postman, will do this if he loses a thousand letters. 31. The end of the Magnet. 32. My Dear Len, aid to find a comic character who gave us lots of fun, (7,7). 35. The dealers in the old papers welcome them.

**DOWN** 2,8, 25 across. Just our Gussy - (5,2,2,4). 3. It describes Wun Lung, and yet it doesn't. 4. When we bought the Gem (2,10). 5. A tune and a cry combine to make history on the cricket field. 6. Tom and this, for the old comic paper. 8. See 2. 11. Sword. 12. This officer is no relative of Carne, though he sounds like it. 13. Frank Richards is, the world over. 14. And the rest from set complete. 15. Nothing! One with an 'ist' came to St. Jim's long ago. 20. Bunter spent Christmas at Lord Reynham's. 21. Mr. Quelch plays golf with him. 22. The end of the Latin lesson. 23. Hasten from Hop Hi effect. 24. Opera by Verdi. 26. He edited My Magazine. 28. 7 was no amateur, when Lovell Minor left him. 30. Mr. Tata from the old Sidney Drew serials. 33. Not you. 34. Born without stress.

(Solution and prizewinners in our next issue.)

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SOLUTION OF C.D. CROSSWORD No. 1

**ACROSS** 1. Mauleverer. 8. Fohn. 10. Streams. 13. Feud. 14. Chad. 15. Eke. 17. See 31. 18. Huts. 19. Brett. 20. Orc. 21. Tairo. 22. GE. 23. Minor. 24. Err. 25. Lobangu. 28. Tray. 29. Rank. 30. See 7. 31. Brine. 32. Todd. 33. Oiler. 34. Hero. 35. See 7.

**DOWN** 2. Arthur. 3. Leeds. 4. Vim. 5. Efeto. 6. Roe. 7 (with 30 and 35) "And Every Story a Gem". 9. Hun. 10. School. 11. Rate. 12. Serious. 16. Kerr. 19. Bang. 21. Tinker. 22. Graydon. 23. Manner. 24. Error. 26. Orris. 27. Bail. 28. Totom. 31. (with 17) Bone. 34. He.

The first correct solution received by the Editor was sent in by JAMES W. COOK, 4, SWANSTON PATH, SOUTH OXHEY, HERTS, to whom a postal order for 5/- has been dispatched.

MAGNET TITLES (cont'd): 1562, Bunter the Bragger. 1563, Rivals for Riches. 1564, Bunter's Big Bluff. 1565, Getting His Own Back. 1566, The Schemer of the Remove. 1567, A Ventriloquist's Vengeance. 1568, Billy Bunter's Dead Cert. 1569, Carter Takes the Count.

# OLD BOYS' BECK CLUB

## LONDON SECTION

Another good gathering of the "Brotherhood" took place on this ideal March day with a surprise visitor from South Wales turning up. T.J. Hopkins who wrote to our Herbert many years ago was in town and took pot luck by coming to Wood Green and being fortunate found the meeting in progress. He was in time to participate in Bob Blythe's Twenty Questions Collectors' Quiz, Len Packman's Crossword Puzzle and listen to Charlie Wright's very good talk on "My Collecting Life". Previous to Mr. Hopkins arrival Len had conducted a very good "G" quiz and there had been two very good reports from the two librarians Roger Jenkins and Frank Vernon-Lay. The latter is doing good business especially with the Ezra Quirke series of the "Nelson Lee". One and all will remember the recent article in the "C.D." and the Frank Vosper one in the "Story Paper Collector" some years ago, about the St. Frank's Schoolboy Magician. After the official business had ended Mr. Hopkins had some very good conversations especially with Bill Lofts. A very good meeting indeed, everything of the best including the feed in the "Burrow".

April meeting to be held at Wood Green on Sunday, 15th. 4 p.m. sharp.

UNCLE BENJAMIN.

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## NORTHERN SECTION MEETING, MARCH 10th, 1956

We had been looking forward to this meeting for a long time for it was the day of Roger Jenkins' visit, something which has become one of the outstanding events of the Club's year.

Roger on this occasion divided his talk into two parts. The first dealt mainly with some of the inconsistencies in the Greyfriars and St. Jim's stories and the part played by the "substitute" writers, that ever intriguing question. It all led to a very animated discussion which was only broken off when the tea-cups began to be filled.

When the refreshments had disappeared we got down to a Quiz entitled "Not in the Fourth Form". Quite a lot of Gerry's time must have been spent in preparing the numbered sheets which were handed round. Roger came out an easy winner.

He then gave us the second talk "The Magic of Rookwood". In a most interesting and convincing way he built up a claim for Rookwood as the most real of the three famous Hamilton schools.

You will be able to judge for yourselves for we are publishing his talk in two instalments.

Yes, altogether it was a very enjoyable evening. Come again next year, Roger.

Next Meeting, April 14th. For the occasion a talk by Ronald Hodgson "The Story of the Northern Section O.B.B.C."

Ron, I am sure will make the most of the many memorable events in its six years of existence.

H. LECKENBY,  
Northern Section Correspondent.

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MIDLAND SECTION MEETING, FEBRUARY 27th

We spent a very pleasant evening with a varied, what one might call a "mixed grill" programme. A reading, a quiz, references to several letters received lately, some discussions of several topics, and a further short talk by Treasurer Norman in favour of other school story writers besides the immortal Charles Hamilton.

After preliminaries, Mr. Handley Senior read us some of the story (in the 1922 "Holiday Annual") of Talbot who had been unjustly disgraced and was down and out in London until found by his friends Tom Merry & Co. Dating from 1914, this story is an interesting example of the old fashioned tragic type of story with the "sob stuff" laid on rather thickly. Even so, Martin Clifford handled the theme in his masterly way making the story far more convincing than the immortal "Eric" of "Little by Little" fame.

The author of the Quiz (Mr. Broster) described it as "Easy". Um! Ah! We were asked to give the name of the Removite hailing from the place or country given. Thus Wharton and Bunter come from Wimford and Redgate respectively; but even these very easy ones did not necessarily come to mind straight away. Gratters to the winner, Mrs. Brown.

After Norman's talk and further discussion, Mr. Handley Junior referred to his forthcoming reading centred around American Frontier Life. This again stimulated a lively discussion but soon it was time for "Lights Out".

EDWARD DAVEY.

MERSEYSIDE SECTION - 11th MARCH

The scene at Waterloo House for the meeting resembled a Collector's Dream for the members were busy sorting out periodicals of all types - and ages - for the forthcoming Exhibition at Bootle Library (April 9 - 21). There were "Victorians" such as Deadwood Dick, Claude Duval, The 1<sup>st</sup> Marvel, Frank Reade and other "Aldines" (kindly loaned for this occasion) together with the various issues of Magnet, Gem and Nelson Lee, plus the ld. Popular, Union Jack, Chums, and the popular comics of yesteryear. Finally, a Sub-Committee comprising Messrs. N. Pragnell, P. Laffey, E. Coldwell and the Chairman were elected to attend to the final details. The second half of the proceedings opened with a "Tom, Dick and Harry" quiz, and this resulted in a narrow win for Jack Morgan, and John Burke as runner up. The evening was wound up by a discussion on the settings of Greyfriars stories and may be resumed at a later date.

Next meeting. APRIL 8th, 6.30 p.m. when we hope "our Horbert" will honour us with his presence.

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WANTED TO BORROW OR PURCHASE

Early Gems carrying the illustrations of WARWICK REYNOLDS. Top price paid for issues of the above if they are in good condition. JOHN L. JUKES, Stafford Lodge, Crosby Road, Westbourne, Bournemouth, Hants.

FOR SALE: Several Hundreds of Answers, Pearson's Weekly, John Bull, Tit-Bits, Years 1920-1939. Mint Condition. Most Never Been Opened. 3d. per copy. Lots preferred. Refer Editor-C.D. C.E.F. VENNIMORE, 25 BYRON AVENUE, WEST HOUNSLOW, MIDDLESEX.

Wanted - "School Friend Annual" years 1928, 1929 and 1930. Your price paid. LEONARD PACKMAN, 27 ARCHDALE ROAD, EAST DULWICH, LONDON, S.E.22.

WANTED: Pre-War Science Fiction, U.S.A. Mags. only. F. VERNON LAY, 167 WATFORD ROAD, HARROW, MIDDLESEX.

FOR SALE: Collectors' Digests Nos. 68, 71, 76, 78, 79, 80, 82, 86, to 93, 95, 97, 99 to 103, 105, 107, 108. 9d each or 17/6 the lot. D.B. WEBSTER, 7 CROSBY ROAD, SOUTH, LIVERPOOL, 7.

# GOSSIP ABOUT FRANK'S



By JACK WOOD, NOSTAW, 328, Stockton Lane, York

I thought Frank Unwin's article would provoke some discussion among ardent, though from my point of view not always very vocal, Leeites. Norman Pragnell, of course, has sprung nimbly to Nipper's defence, and so has Jim Cook.

Norman writes:

It was with the greatest interest that I read Frank Unwin's refreshing article on the alleged strength and weakness of the stories of Edwy Scarles Brooks. It is all the more the pity that he has allowed his obvious bias against Nipper to affect the accuracy of his writing. Even when discussing soccer Frank Unwin must surely find himself in error. Why is it ridiculous to compare Finney with Matthews? Did not the Selector have to ponder over the respective merits of these two great players for many years when selecting England's team?

That amounts to a contradiction appears when discussing "Lost World" stories. To say in one breath that these stories were almost real and in the next breath to refer to them as "rather ridiculous" hardly makes sense. It is however when dealing with Nipper that Frank Unwin makes his most serious mistake. Let us read his words again. "A smart Alec", "One who was never at fault, whose judgment never failed him." Perhaps we should look at just a few examples of Nipper's alleged infallibility.

Firstly, the classical series dealing with Ezra Quirko. Surely it was Browne alone who was capable of exposing Quirko's

plots, for Nipper, while believing Quirko was a trickster was unable to do much about it. Next let us take the case of Bernard Forrest's return to St. Franks. Did Nipper see through him? No, definitely not. It was Handforth here who exposed Forrest up to his old tricks. And then that wonderful jape when the Moor View girls kidded some of the juniors that St. Frank's had been turned into a school for young ladies. Here Nipper was kidded all along the line by a plot that a six year old should have seen through. Lastly we can turn to Nipper's head long clash with Nelson Lee when St. Frank's was in disgrace. Here he proved himself irresponsible when he considered a mere football match rather than the good name of the school.

No, Frank Umrin, Nipper was no perfect schoolboy, but he was a born leader, and why not? He had been trained by Nelson Lee, and there was none better for such a job.

Apart from Nelson Lee himself, Nipper was the finest personality to appear in the "Old Papers" and it is to be deeply regretted that for long periods Nipper was to be relegated to a back seat to allow Handforth to hog all the limelight.

Before letting Jim end the discussion, for the time being at any rate, perhaps I may add a point or two of my own. Nipper's alleged infallibility, of course, was always a source of trouble, and I think the fault lay not so much with Brooks as with the history of the character.

Nipper had long been established as a definite personality by his creator, Maxwell Scott, in whose able hands he had become a leading light at St. Ninian's (more about that in the Annual from Percy North, I hope) and an associate of the Prince of Wales.

That was the character, with that of Nelson Lee, whom Brooks had to mould into the answer to the Magnet, the Gem and the other Papers. It was a hard task, because Nipper just was different, and Brooks made a good job of it. He was allowed a long run with the stories "narrated by Nipper" plan, which obviously could never work effectively throughout as Nipper could not be in more than one place at a time. There were several letters to the editor about Nipper's apparent priggishness and the reply was always that Lee's training was responsible for his naturally superior judgment.

Nevertheless, eventually the stories were told in the third person, and while the reader lost the personal approach, he gained in the story's credibility. As Norman says, Nipper was often very

human, but that does not detract from his soundness as a leader in planning superbly for a barring out (another thorny subject, I know!). With his detective training, that was not unnatural, but another sample of Brooks's thoroughness in planning his stories.

And now, over to Jim Cook, who in the form of an open letter to Frank says:

Dear Frank,

Naturally, I read your article in the C.D. and I liked it. But poor old Nipper! Doesn't anybody like him?

Being a London street urchin he would, of course, be "streets" ahead of any "cotton wool" college boy in planning and scheming. Then with such a Guv'nor as Nelson Lee there's no telling how high old Nipper would get in that fantastic but lovable world created by E.S. Brooks. And high he did get, you know. He was the "Power behind the throne" all along the line.

If you recall the Moat Hollow series that Brooks wrote at a time when old Edwy had the boys of Dothboys Hall in his mind's eye, you cannot have failed to have loved Nipper for his part in that memorable role he played as Protector.

Do you remember the time when he was expelled for an "attack" on Kenmore and he came back to St. Frank's disguised as a new boy?

Do you remember - oh, Frank old man, how Hamiltonia will chuckle over the discomforture of the Lee-ites. Fullwood's metamorphosis was sudden, but have you ever seen a convert? I have, and it happened overnight. I do believe when you wrote that article you were surrounded by ice and snow and perhaps you had flu?

Yours very sincerely,

J.W. COOK.

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And now Bernard Thorne has something to say to Jim.

I have just finished reading James Cook's excellent article in the February C.D. His treatment of this top-flight series of Edwy Searles Brooks leaves nothing to be desired.

There are, however, one or two points on which I would like to comment.

Jim is amazed at the lack of enthusiasm shown by Leeites for this particular series. I would like to assure him that no series has greater popularity among the many Leeites with whom I



correspond. My letter files show countless instances of regard, not only for this series, but also for Ezra Quirke, who must rank among the top five St. Frank's characters with all who still enthuse over ESB. I can assure him that "this remarkable and enthralling achievement" will live when many other school tales are forgotten.

Finally, may I through the medium of the C.D. join the many who must be offering their thanks to Allah and Jim for his first-class article.

With kind regards,  
Very cordially,  
BERNARD R. THORNE.

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GENEROUS EXCHANGES or your price for certain Magnets in the 400's and Nos.1000 - 1300. Badly in need of Nos. 906 and 907 for binding. Lists welcomed. CHARLES VAN RENEN, BOX 50, UITENHAGE, SOUTH AFRICA.  
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(Here are some interesting recollections told with many touches of humour which I am sure will appeal to all whether members of the Clubs or not. H.L.)

MEMORIES AND HIGHLIGHTS OF THE O.B.B.C.

by Charles Wright

The events in this short resume of the O.B.B.C. are written down at some hazard and are not in chronological order; that must remain for the historian of the future.

The O.B.B.C. was founded by Bob Blythe and Len Packman, but what happened at that first meeting I do not know, as I was conspicuous by my absence. But about that time I paid a visit to Alfred Horsey, of Walthamstow, who informed me of the formation of the club, and I turned up at what I think must have been the second meeting, where, incidentally, I first had the pleasure of meeting Eric Fayne; but the great surprise for me was meeting Ben Whiter again, as the last time I had seen him was in 1917 when we were at school together! It is true we have rather less hair now than we had then, but our love for the old books has stood the test of time.

Much water has flown under the bridges since that memorable

meeting, and we have since then had gatherings at Wood Green and Dulwich, our two main venues, and also at Greenwich, Hove, Brighton, Surbiton, Stanmore, Blackheath and Holloway. Many are the memories they bring back: the meeting at Frank Keeling's at Stanmore, when he had to unscrew the door and take it off to accommodate us. I remember it was a boiling hot day and we decided to hold the actual meeting in the garden; a splendid idea! But alas, Frank kept ducks and they decided to hold an opposition meeting, and so loud was the incessant quacking that the speakers could not be heard, so we had to retire into the house, leaving the ducks triumphant. On that occasion we had two guests, Eric Parker, the Sexton Blake artist, and Kenneth Brookes, the illustrator of many 'Nelson Lees' and 'Gems'.

Then there was a meeting at Greenwich in the early days, when Harry Homer turned up very late, having been to a Scottish International match or meeting somewhere, and he came striding down the road with a Scotch hat perched very much on the side of his head and walking very erect in case he spilt a drop. We were also favoured at this meeting by a visit from Peter Cushing, a charming man, who is now better known than ever through the medium of T.V. Also at a Greenwich meeting Harry Homer brought along Douglas Cardow Robinson, the cad of St. Fanny's, who told us that the name Cardew was taken from the 'Gem'.

Many of those who were there will no doubt remember the very pleasurable visits to Eric Fayne's school at Surbiton, with the fine feeds admirably served by 'Madam', and after the meeting the adjournment to the little school cinema where Eric used to run through a programme of cartoon pictures, and many's the laugh we have had over the old Mack Sennet comedies. There was one occasion when we were all to be surprised by a visit from Wheeler Dryden, wellknown in Hollywood, but unfortunately he wandered all round Surbiton without finding us, and was rather upset about it.

However, the world wagged on and the heavens remained in their appointed place. Incidentally, it was at Surbiton that I and a few other members first met Herbert Leckenby.

Then there were our annual visits to Hove, first at Friar Road and then at Raphael Road. We usually made a day of it, meeting at Victoria under the clock, and then talking books all the way to Brighton. We then split up and went our various ways,

meeting again at John Robyns' delightful residence, where 'Robby', being an ardent Pearl White fan, used to be very happy to show us an instalment of the Pearl White serial "The Clutching Hand", which brought back memories to many of us, when we used to go to the so called 'Picture Palaces for a penny, to follow up this (to us then) 'Thrilling Serial'. The last couple of years, however, has seen Brighton as the venue of our 'annual', at the home of Gladys and Bill Jardine, who, in addition to furnishing a real Bunteresque spread usually has a surprise of some sort up his sleeve, such as a quiz recorded on a tape machine, or a printed menu with a poem and a map on the back. Charming hosts, Bill and Gladys. These 'annual' meetings always coincide with 'Our Herbert's' London visit, so of course the poor chap always has to make a speech; however, Herbert enjoys it, we enjoy it, and everyone is happy.

Dulwich has also furnished its quota of memories, both at Archdale Road and Hume House. The two high spots were when Edwy Searles Brooks paid us visits, and generously and good-humouredly answered all the questions that were fired at him from all parts of the room. These two visits were arranged by Bob Blythe, who was at that time the Editor of the Nelson Lee Column in the C.D. I have met many of the stalwarts of the book world, both at O.B.B.C. and private meetings at Dulwich, such as the Rev. A.G. Pound, from Birmingham; H.A. Smith of Diss, in Norfolk (who I remember had two enormous suitcases crammed with books, and I bought two beautifully bound volumes of 'Robin Hood Library'); Old-timer Harry Dowler, of Manchester, and Maxwell Scott authority; Don Webster, Chairman of the Liverpool branch of the O.B.B.C.; Clifford Beardsell of Stockport; Leslie Branton of Hull; Ernest Hubbard of Sheffield and many others.

We also had occasional meetings at Bob Blythe's place when he lived at Holloway, at which time his famous Nelson Lee complete collection was always on view; his window also afforded a good view of Cliff House!

Two or three meetings were also held at Ron Deacon's house at Blackheath. Ron, of course, is an ardent Science Fiction fan, and a good number of these books were always available for those who were interested.

The saddest meeting of all was at Wood Green, a Christmas meeting I think, when in the midst of the enjoyment we were quietly informed that Bob and Ben Whiter's charming mother had just passed away; so we all silently departed.

After the formation of the O.B.B.C. there soon followed branches at Leeds, Birmingham and Liverpool; in fact Len was up North at the Inauguration Meeting of the Leeds branch, and he very kindly gave me the photo that was taken on that occasion and which is now in my hobby scrap album. An Australian branch was also formed, and although I haven't heard a lot about it of late, it is, I believe, still functioning.

Early on, through the efforts of Bob Blythe, an exhibition of Old Boys Books was held in the Islington Public Library, and a very good display it was. Unfortunately, some kind person 'knocked off' three of Bob's early Nelson Lees, but they were, I am glad to say, replaced some time later.

One of the greatest highlights was the discovery - or resurrection if you like - of Mr. C.H. Chapman, the famous 'Magnet' artist, through the shrewdness and perseverance of Bob Whiter. He had paid us several visits and a charming old gentleman he is, as all who have met him will agree.

Numerous are the guests that have been at the meetings at different times; Mr. Gorfain, the Editor of the Silver Jacket; Mr. Vennimore, who has so many No. 1's, all in mint condition as if they had just come off the press; Don Wicks, who blew in from Australia; Gerald Campion, when he was chosen to be T.V.'s Billy Bunter (I suppose those of us who were present can boast of seeing the great W.G.B. in the flesh); Mr. Arthur Harris, the "Comic King", who graced our last January meeting; members from other branches, and on occasion a postal member who was in London either on business or a holiday.

I have memories of the reporter and photographer from 'The Leader' who came to Wood Green for information and photos at a meeting there, and upon which an article duly appeared in that periodical; memories of Mr. Mortimer doing conjuring tricks; Harry Homer with his spectacles tied together with string, the result of making acquaintance with the bottom of a ditch! If I recounted them all, this article would go on for a long, long time.

Bob Whiter, the indefatigable, on one occasion had a T.V. set installed for the meeting, so that we could watch "Billy Bunter of Greyfriars" which at that time was being depicted, and while looking in we were photographed by the local paper, also arranged by the enterprising Bob; but my personal enjoyment was somewhat marred by the fact that I was nursing a carbuncle on my neck!

To be continued.....