

THE COLLECTORS' DIGEST

JANUARY, 1957

VOLUME 11, NUMBER 121

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THE COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Vol. 11 No. 121

Price 1s. 6d.

JANUARY, 1957

Editor, HERBERT LECKENBY,
12 Herbert Street,
Hull Road, York

or

c/o YORK DUPLICATING SERVICES,
12A The Shambles, York.

FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

A GRAND OCCASION. Since the London O.B.B.C. was born I have had a longing to attend the Christmas meeting in "The Rag" at Wood Green. Last month I managed it and how glad was I that I did. It was a soul stirring event, with the biggest attendance, I believe, since the memorable occasion when a number of Northern members journeyed down some years ago.

There was a grand surprise awaiting me for as Bob Whiter welcomed me in he whispered, "We've got Mr. Chapman here to meet you". For that reason alone my trip was well worth while. But there were several others there whom I had the pleasure of meeting for the first time. Fred Rutherford and Clifford Lettey of Bristol (they had picked up Mr. Chapman on the way); Roger Stacey, until recently in Kenya; David Harrison, Reuben Godsave, and Tony Riley, also there were Don Webster and Frank Unwin of Merseyside. Thus all Clubs were represented. As I surveyed the scene my thoughts travelled back to the days when practically all collectors of books of their youth were strangers to each other and I was proud to think that the little C.D. had done something towards bringing them together. Yes, indeed, a very happy evening for me.

During that week-end I also had the pleasure of meeting F. Gordon Cook. We chatted for several delightful hours. My word! the tales

he can tell, especially about Gwyn Evans. Generous, foolish, lovable was Gwyn, a great Fleet Street character and still talked about there even though he has been in his grave for many years.

And as mentioned elsewhere I paid another visit to Fleetway House.

I longed to stay in London longer but duty called. I had to return to get the Annuals away.

* * * * *

FOR THE TENTH TIME. On the day after my week-end in London I spent more of my time at the Duplicating Agency preparing the Annuals for mailing. At 6 p.m. a call was put through to the G.P.O. asking them to collect them. Promptly they complied; a bouquet for Dr. Hill's men. They've never let us down yet.

Soon the reports began to arrive. First from John Cocher, "Wonderful Annual. Engrossed in Blakiana; up to my eyes in Hamiltoniana".

By Christmas Day I had quite a pile of congratulations in similar vein, not only for the contents, but also for the splendid work of the York Duplicating Services.

* * * * *

IN HOSPITAL. Members will be sorry to hear that Isaac Litvak was compelled to spend his Christmas in hospital and unfortunately for some time afterwards. I am sure he would welcome letters from fellow collectors. The address is "Ward C.9, Ashford County Hospital, Ashford, Middlesex." Be sure of the Middlesex, for, of course, there's also an Ashford in Kent.

* * * * *

BOOKBINDING. I have had an opportunity of seeing some of the binding jobs done by L.F. Ashley, 23 Mountjoy, Bridport, Dorset and was greatly impressed by it. His terms are very reasonable too. So if you want any jobs done I strongly advise you to get in touch with him.

* * * * *

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS. For days up to Christmas Day, they came by every post, over hundred of them, from my friends of the hobby at home and

overseas. They make a soul stirring sight displayed in my den. My Christmas was inevitably a lonely one, but it was also a very happy one. God bless you one and all.

Wishing you a very happy New Year.

Yours very sincerely,
HERBERT LECKENBY.

Blakiana

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN

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

In this issue you will find reviews of the S.B.L's for last month. Walter Webb will be doing these as a regular feature, and arrangements are being made for him to have advance copies in order that the books under review may be concurrent with the C. Digest. The space taken up will, of course, be in addition to the normal allocation for Blakiana.

I hope you like the first of the 'Memory Teasers'. Please write and let me know. I also trust you will give me the same fine support, in the way of articles, this year as you did last year.

On behalf of the Sexton Blake Circle, my husband and I welcome your remarks on their feature in the C.D. Annual for 1956.

Finally, to all who have recently - directly and indirectly - paid me such nice compliments on my Blakiana efforts, I would say 'thank you very much'. I only hope that I shall continue to interest the majority of you, even if I cannot please everyone.

JOSIE PACKMAN.

* * * * *

SEXTON BLAKE. 1956by Derek Ford

"Let us sit upon the ground

And tell sad stories of the death of King Richard 11".

W. Howard Baker and a certain well-known King of England share one thing in common it seems - both know how to burn cakes. The "cake" in Mr. Baker's case being the Sexton Blake Library, of which he has become head "chef", succeeding Mr. L.E. Pratt. Of Mr. Baker's first concoction (S.B.L.347) I wrote last year that it was a "ninepenny nightmare"; of his second I thought much better and that there were possibilities. Of what he was really possible I was to find out in 1956.

Taking over from Anthony Parsons - principal contributor since 1945 with a yearly average of six case-books, and only one contribution (357) in 1956 - Mr. Baker turned out six case-books under his own name and five others under the pseudonym "Peter Saxon" in the S.B.L. run from 351 to 372. Surely a S.B.L. record for quantity.

With the "new presentation" which began in case-books 359 and 360, both written by the editor, the Library in the form developed ever since its inception in 1915 and familiar to every keen reader of the Man from Baker Street's adventures, ceased to exist.

"Sexton Blake moves with the times!" explained an editorial about the changes in the October numbers. To any discriminating subscriber it must have seemed a move to Times Square, New York, not the new offices in Berkeley Square, London, so much a pupil of the so-called American "blood, bludgeon-and-bust school" had he become by then. A complete example of this type was Saxon's "Front Page Woman" (363). Additions to the class were Paula Dane, Marion Lang and Miss Pringle, and the tough reporter 'Splash' Kirby. While these types were being developed, Edward Carter - otherwise Tinker - was played-down: "taking care of a territory covering the whole of the North of England and Scotland" (S.B.L.371). Pedro was forgotten in the "move", perhaps to become a dachshund for Miss Dane later on!

Mr. Baker's "recipe" was ably interpreted by his recruits Arthur Maclean, Arthur Kent, James Stagg and Jack Trevor Story, responsible

between them for seven case-books. So alike is the style that Mr. Baker might be all four of these authors, but is not, so we are told. (Confirmed that he is not. J.P.)

Walter Tyrer, John Hunter and Rex Hardinge contributed the three remaining case-books; there were no issues in April due to the printers' strike. What a grand case-book by Hardinge (356) it was, too! It beat everything turned out in the S.B.L. last year by miles.

To complete the record: in February a title page was added; March saw the price increased to 10d., and photographs of film-stars - later "scenes" from the cases - made their appearance; publishing day was changed from Thursday to Tuesday. The editor contributed two "fillers": one a true-life mystery, the other a detective problem. Covers were by De Seta. The new set-up did not feature in the "Knock Out" Blake Strip.

* * * * *

THOSE "MEN OF MYSTERY".

Since the publication of Walter Webb's most interesting article in the December issue of the C. Digest I have met several authors of the 1916 onward period, resulting from which some relative information has emerged. The following will, therefore, no doubt interest readers generally and Walter in particular.

W.O.G. LOFTS.

L.H. BROOKS was the brother of EDWY SEARLES BROOKS and this explains the similarity of the style of writing of these two authors. (This information was given in my article on Mr. H.W. Twyman in the November issue of the C. Digest, at which time no doubt Josie Packman had Walter's article "in hand".) I would have liked to have given further details as to how and why one could hardly tell the difference in the work of these two brothers, but as I should be treading on somewhat dangerous ground perhaps it would be as well to leave it at that.

MICHAEL STORM was most certainly a very mysterious man, and the type of author who shunned the limelight. In the 3rd C.D. Annual it was stated that his real name was Charles Ignatius Semphill, but

this must be incorrect. Semphill was born in 1898 and, according to the "Authors and Writers Who's Who", served in Kenya Police from 1919 to 1928. Storm died in 1916; furthermore, he wrote the Ravenscar and Abbotsrag stories in 1906 to 1908, which would have made him only 8 to 10 years of age at that time! G.H. TEED, I am told, was a friend of Mrs. Storm and 'ghosted' many stories for Storm after her husband's death. When Teed had established himself as a first-class writer he used his own name.

DUNCAN STORM, I am given to understand, was the pen-name of another well-known author, but before releasing the name I am making a final 'check-up'.

PHYLLIS PANTING is said to have been a very attractive girl in her younger days; she was the secretary of George Dilnot (a well-known writer and A.Press director.) It is thought to be quite likely that she became an editoress of women's papers. ARNOLD CLEMENT PANTING was her brother. It is confirmed that he was editor of the Boys' Friend until he served in the R.F.C., when, unfortunately, he was killed in action.

With regard to E. ALAIS, there was an author writing at that time whose name was Alais, but his Christian name was Charles. Whether there is any connection I could not say, but as the name is uncommon there is a distinct possibility.

I have had several conversations with Mr. S. Rossiter Shepherd and, as Walter Webb so rightly says, he is a mine of information on authors etc; but I think the man who could clear up quite a few mysteries on that subject is H.H. CLIFFORD GIBBONS, better known to us as GILBERT CHESTER. Gibbons was a very clever man and a talented musician. He was at one time conductor of an orchestra and, I believe, a relative of the late Carrol Gibbons (of Savoy Orpheans fame). He was also a spiritulist. I have tried very hard to trace him, but without success. His complete disappearance is a mystery that even Sexton Blake would find difficult to solve.

* * * * *

HOW'S YOUR MEMORY? (No.1.) by E.V.COPEMAN

Many and varied have been the tight corners in which Sexton Blake and

Tinker have found themselves in the course of an extended campaign against crime.

Some are unforgettable.

Well, just how good is your memory? The following extract is taken from a Blake story which appeared in.....

And that's the problem. When was it written; what was its title and who wrote it?

If you can remember, full marks to you. If you can't, then why not start re-reading your Blake collection in an effort to find out? (N.B. This story could have appeared in UNION JACK, DETECTIVE WEEKLY or SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY. Blake yarns which appeared in other publications have not been included in this series.)

TEASER No.1.

Blake felt the hard gristle of the man's nose crunch beneath his knuckles. He followed up with a terrific left to the throat which sent the fellow staggering, then, whirling, Blake caught the seaman a savage backhander and leapt for the ladder which led up into the sub's conning-tower.

But as he gained the hatch a gun blazed and he felt sudden searing agony in his thigh. At the same moment half a dozen black-robed monks began swarming swiftly down the ladder from the aperture in the floor over the underground cavern.

Oblivious to the agony of his wounded leg, Blake scrambled on to the conning-tower rail, whipped up his arms and dived into the black and glittering water. He went far under, twisting during the dive and coming up ahead of the black hull of the submarine near where the rocky roof of the cave shelved down to the water. One long breath he took, then under he went again, and now he knew that he was indeed waging a desperate gamble with death.

For he could not come up again until he had cleared this underwater cave and reached the entrance somewhere out by the rocks. Just how far away that entrance was he did not know--- but if he failed to reach it before his tortured lungs gave out he would drown.

Desperately he swam on, his heart pumping furiously and a roaring

in his ears which grew in volume every moment. It was a terrible, nightmarish experience. Once he attempted to break water and his head struck sharply against submerged rock. He plunged down again, his arms and legs moving like those of an automaton.

It was a gamble with death, with all the odds stacked against the detective. But it was the only way of escape. He was all but done, for heart and lungs were being tortured beyond all endurance, and he knew that unless he reached the entrance of the cave within the next few seconds he would never emerge alive. The roaring in his ears had increased to a deafening thunder; he seemed to have been swimming for a timeless age, swimming through a vast ocean of blackness which had neither beginning nor end.....

Not such tame stuff, is it? And needless to say, Blake didn't drown.

But who wrote the story, what was its name and when was it written? The answer will be published next month, but meanwhile, you Blake fans, how's your memory?

CLUE: The author is well-known, though not as a Blake writer, has done comparatively few Blake yarns (worse luck!) and is still living. He was interviewed not so long ago by Bill Lofts.

ANSWER TO BE PUBLISHED NEXT MONTH.

* * * * *

S.B.L. (DECEMBER 1956) REVIEWS.

by Walter Webb.

BATTLE SONG (No.371)

W.HOWARD BAKER.

Concerns the activities of a political movement known as British Action. When Janet Boise, an actress member of the party is found murdered Sexton Blake is called in. Marion Lang is given her first assignment when her chief persuades her to join the party. Through her, Blake uncovers a plot of the highest magnitude - the assassination of Estoslavian Prime Minister, Marshall Ivan Vranner on the latter's forthcoming visit to this country. (We met him in Arthur Maclean's DARK FRONTIER, - S.B.L. No.368). Success to the fanatics

would see Britain on the brink of a third world war and her ultimate ruin. Climax - a hand-to-hand tussle on the roof tops overlooking Cambridge Circus between Blake and a fanatical party member as the latter is about to throw down bombs at the passing Vraner and into the crowds below. Extra long and a real thriller.

Splash Kirby, crime-reporter, is also featured.

Rating.....Very Good.

* * * * *

MURDER - WITH LOVE! (No.372)

JACK TREVOR STORY.

Many people will go to extraordinary lengths in order to obtain money. Few, fortunately, will go so far as to commit murder even to ensure financial security for the rest of their lives. Cliff Delaware was one of the minority. One of the most unpleasant characters ever to be introduced into the pages of the Library, this unscrupulous young American murders his wife, Lini, during their honeymoon in England, in order to gain her inheritance and then fakes his crime to look like a suicide. Then, discovering that a twelve-year-old child, Alison Koestler, the daughter of his wife's half-sister is next in line he plans to kill the child also. The climax with Blake, Tinker and Paula in chase of Delaware and the kidnapped child in two fast moving automobiles makes thrilling reading. Jack Trevor Story, who wrote the book on which the Alfred Hitchcock film, "The Trouble With Harry", was based, is a welcome recruit whose style affords pleasing contrast to that of his colleagues in the new Blake set-up.

Rating.....Very Good.

I will pay 2/- each for SUN numbers 209, 217 and 218. Must be in good condition. I will also pay postage if sent flat, to avoid creasing.

L. Packman. 27 Archdale Road, London, S.E.22.

Wanted. Any copies of Penny Pictorial years 1908, 1909, and 1910 containing Sexton Blake stories. Your price paid.

L. Packman. 27 Archdale Road, London, S.E.22.

POSTSCRIPT.

Whilst in London I 'phoned Mr. Howard Baker editor of the S.B.L. asking if I could see some of those anonymous letters mentioned by Mr. Arthur Maclean in his article in the Annual. I received a cordial invitation to go along.

Well I saw them and I must say Mr. Maclean had not exaggerated. They were disgusting, senseless, several illiterate, and all, of course, cowardly.

I felt confident that none of our members would be guilty of such dirty work and my faith was justified for I recognised none of the writing and only one post-mark was that of a place where we have a member and he is a Hamilton fan only.

I did see a letter from one of our best known contributors. It was like a breath of fresh air after the scurrilous stuff.

Whilst there I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Maclean. Some of our members had got the idea that Mr. Howard Baker was Arthur Maclean as well as "Peter Saxon". Well this settles it, doesn't it? The explanation maybe is that the various authors now work as a team.

I also saw the cover of John Hunter's story "Silent Witness", coming in February, as one of the other authors. Mr. Hunter's story will be looked forward to with special interest to see how he adapts himself to the new order of things.

And here's something else interesting. Ronald Rouse points out that the second February number will be the 1,500 S.B.L. How many million words? Anybody like to count 'em. Then add a similar number of Union Jack yarns, serials in the Boys' Friend, Boys' Herald, Boys' Realm, short stories in Answers, Penny Pictorial, etc., etc., and well, the total would be terrific wouldn't it? Certainly no other character in fiction could come anywhere near it. (H.L.)

(Note. The following should have appeared in a November number, but I am sure it will be agreed that its sentiment is fitting for any time. H.L.)

"THEY SHALL NOT GROW OLD AS WE GROW OLD"

by Harry Broster.

* * * * *

These immortal words come back to us at a certain time every year and with respectful and most times sad memory we pay homage to "they" who died. As we stand silent for those two minutes that day in November many thoughts, mostly of the past, return to us. But inspired by those immortal words, other thoughts recur and "they" could be perhaps the memories of our youth or more materially "they" could be the books and papers we read in those days. "They" never grow old, either of them, thoughts and papers alike. It is perhaps not unlikely either that we who read and now eagerly collect those old papers and books could have other reasons besides nostalgic desires to go back over the years. It might be the memories of our own school-days but again it might be that "they" bring back the glory of those early days, when England was second to none. When we look around us at the world of today, a world where on one hand we cry out for safety for people on the roads and at the same time for more speed, when men work like mad one time to keep our national recovery and then in thousands strike and shatter all they have gained, at the dictation of a few. When the masses clamour for more money for doing less in a land which has no money, when men born and reared on the land are told what to grow on that same land by those who lack the knowledge and initiative to cultivate their own back gardens themselves. When Britain, once so strong, has to kiss the hand of a pretty dictator whose other hand holds behind his back a club ready to strike when you are not ready. Yes and when the good old books cannot be printed through lack of material and, yet the shops are full of cheap junk and foreign slush only fit for the bonfire. A world gone mad and our country bad enough even if better than most. Most of us collectors are able to remember back to those days when Britain led the world in most things. Our thoughts go back to the stories of valour written by authors such as Henty, Stables, Ballantyne and Scott, and many others like them, the deeds of Robin Hood and Dick Turpin, Drake and Frobisher, Kitchener and Wolfe. One and all, with the one theme, the glory and pageantry that was Britain. Even the beloved school yarns were full of that greatness, pluck and chivalry right to the fore. Back no doubt to the days before these so called modern improvements but was the world any worse off, when Britain domineered

over the whole universe and practically owned a fifth of it. Yes, it may not be just nostalgic regret for the lost years so much as the desire to regain in our way, the glory that was ours. Perhaps that glory may return, who knows? Looking around us it is hard to bracket the modern youth with the heroes of the past. But again who knows? The glory returned at Mons and Jutland, it was there when the Wingates, Kildares and Bulkeleys went up into the sky in those September days of 1940 and wiped out the greatest destructive force ever devised. We saw it in Korea. It was there, when a few years ago, two public School boys in the shape of May and Cowdry flogged the cream of Australian bowling all over the field and Australian fields at that. And they will do it again; The Magic which is Stanley Matthews that is the glory of England. The fact that Pat Smythe can beat anything in the world, that is the same glory again. There it is, the thought that it might be this which appeals to us all, at least those of us who remember the early years of the century, the golden era of authors and books alike. "As we grow old we will remember them". Perhaps the two ideas, nostalgia and the glory that was, are in fact one but the old papers and books, "they will not grow old".

LETTER BOX

from Frank Richards.

Dear Herbert Leckenby,

Thanks for the C.D. — always a cheery and welcome arrival. The cover picture brought back memories of the 'dear dead days beyond recall'. What Xmas Numbers there used to be! It is very interesting that it was on Eric Fayne's suggestion that the "Painted Room" was reprinted in two numbers, instead of being hanged, drawn, and quartered in the accustomed way.

I was considerably amused by the quote from the "Mirror: though really to be nicknamed "Bunter" is enough to make Sir Edward boil!!! Our fat friend's sister has recently cropped up in a most unexpected place: someone sent me a cutting from a sporting paper, in which lo and behold! — a googee named "Bessie Bunter" was running in a race. It would have been interesting to see Bessie a winner: but

no doubt she had too much weight to carry!

With kindest regards,
Always yours sincerely,

FRANK RICHARDS.

OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB

LONDON SECTION.

Curriculums and agendas! Why worry at the Christmas meeting when we had ~~representatives~~ of the Leeds, Birmingham and Liverpool clubs present. Formalities quickly finished and then a welcome to artist C.H. Chapman of the Birmingham club, Herbert Leckenby of the Leeds one and both Don Webster and Frank Unwin from Liverpool. What a happy time for our Herbert who was meeting, for the first time some new colleagues. First meeting between him and Mr. Chapman, a happy surprise. Chairman Len welcomed every one and quickly put one and all at their ease. Yes! We had the usual quiz competitions and good reading from Gwyn Evan's "Mystery of Mrs Bardell's Christmas Pudding". Highlight, however, was the personal distribution of the "Annals" that he had brought with him for those that he surmised would be present. A very kindly thought Herbert and it was pleasing to see you so happy amongst your old and new friends. Two new faces at the meeting were Miss Millicent Lyle and Roger Stacey. It will be remembered that Mr. Stacey returned some time ago from Kenya and is a friend of Bill Hubbard, who we hope to see next Spring. Great credit goes to the hosts of the meeting for the arrangements, Eileen and Kathleen for the catering and to the Rutherfords for conveying Mr. Chapman from his Caversham home. There's enthusiasm for you, the two Rutherfords and Cliff Lettey came up all the way from Bristol. Fred Rutherford obtained his reward as he won the raffle prize of number one of the penny "Gem",

Annual general meeting at 27, Archdale Road, East Dulwich, London, S.E.22. on Sunday, January 27th, 1957.
Thus a good start to the Yuletide celebrations and enjoyed by a record attendance.

UNCLE BENJAMIN.

NORTHERN SECTION CHRISTMAS PARTY, December 8th, 1956.

Very evidently the ladies had been busy before most of the men arrived for when we walked in we found several tables for four daintily and temptingly laid. All looked so cosy and homely better than having tea at a restaurant as we have done the previous two or three years. The men salute you ladies!

There was an excellent attendance, too even though Beryl Russell Tom Porter, Harry Broster and Brian Honeysett had been prevented from coming at the last moment.

After tea Chairman Stanley Smith had a few words to say in the manner he does so well. He had also thoughtfully sent off a telegram of greeting to our President, Frank Richards.

From then on until a late hour the real Christmas spirit reigned with a popular Bunter Drive, quizzes and the reciting of a typical chapter from a Christmas Magnet by Gerry Allison, who as usual, had prepared the rest of the programme. There were some handsome prizes.

So reluctant were we to break up, that the York members nearly missed their train for home.

Yes another successful event for the records.

We meet again on January 12th which means another five week interval, worse luck.

HERBERT LECKEYBY, Northern
Section Correspondent.

* * * * *

MIDLAND CLUB. Meeting held November 26th, 1956. Room 9. Chamber of
of Commerce, New Street, Birmingham.

Report from H. H. Broster-Secretary.

This meeting was one we can look upon as a decided success as in addition to a rousing programme by Tom Porter we had the pleasure of welcoming a new Member, Mr. Ron Dickens of Blackheath. A Postal member of the London Club of five years standing and a very keen Hamil-

tonian he should be a valuable addition to the "gang". Formal business was of a varied nature. The next meeting was fixed for December 17th as the usual date, last Monday in the month was out of the question. We were sorry to hear Mr. Dyer had resigned but following on the resignation of Mr. John Handley and young John we were not surprised but we shall miss their cheery company nevertheless. Other matters being settled, we then turned to the library which is going from strength to strength. We can again congratulate Beryl for her good work in this direction and hope there will be further additions. Then came what we had been waiting for, since last month, the sequel to the mystery of the "Friar's Oak". Tom then narrated in his own inimitable style how Pon and his cronies continued to use the secret passage from the "Oak" to the Remove box room, how Prout and of course Coker become involved. How, in true Richards style, an idea of Hurree Singh's to have a rota of watches each night to catch the mysterious raiders concided with a similar idea of the "great" Horaces. How Coker was caught instead of the Highcliffians. We learnt what Prout had to say about it and how Quelch "got back" at his colleagues for his usual criticism of the "unruly" Remove. The latter chapters tell us how Bunter got some treacle not to his liking. How the "Owl of the Remove" by lucky chance found out the secret of the Friars Oak and the secret passage. How the Famous Five did the rest and Pon and Co. were caught red-handed in the Remove passage, and got their deserts at the hands of all people, Mr. Quelch who did not spare the rod: So ended a perfect example of Frank Richard's work, told in a most amusing way with all the "sound effects" by Tom Porter. The applause which greeted him spoke well for the future as this will not be the last of such good programmes. This was the final item in a night which everyone enjoyed.

* * * * *

MERSEYSIDE SECTION - Sunday 9th December, 1956.

Members were slightly fewer this month, partly due to illness and possibly the nearness of Xmas. Nevertheless, a cheery group sat down to hear Don Webster explain the arrangements for the New Year Meeting and Social. This is to be on Sunday, 6th January starting at 4 p.m., with book club business. Tea will be at about 7.p.m. and the evening will finish with fun and games. It is hoped that Sir. F. Bowman, Herbert Leckenby and Len Packman will be with us, so a first-class evening is to be expected. Will all Merseyside members make special

note.

Each member then read what he considered the greatest anomaly to appear in Old Boys' Books, particularly where school yarns were concerned. Here, two favourite authors, Charles Hamilton and E.S. Brooks came under heavy fire.

Among the points raised was the impossibility of Bunter's type of ventriloquism. It was argued that as a very obtuse boy he could hardly carry on learned conversation when imitating such people as doctors or teachers. It was also mentioned that such a backward boy as W.G.B. could never have got himself admitted in the first place to Greyfriars.

Other controversial points raised was the "know all and do everything" character of Nelson Lee, - Harry Wharton's changes of characters and the fantastic scrapes that Handforth got himself in and out of. After the usual tea and biscuits we tackled Jim Walsh's quiz on topical Xmas episodes, taken in the main from Magnet and St. Jim's Stories. This was ably won by our young member George Riley.

As this was the last meeting in 1956, various toasts were drunk - thanks Jim Walsh for the necessary - and it was the hope of all that the year 1957 would see the Merseyside Branch going even further ahead.

NORMAN PRAGNELL.
Secretary.

For Sale 17 Collectors' Digests. 6d. each and 17 Story Paper Collectors No's 41-59. 5/- the lot. E. MAGOVENY, 65 BENTHAM STREET, BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND.

Blue and White Magnet offered for copy of Film Fun with Charles Chaplin on front or inside. GORDON THOMPSON, 53 WALDASEY PARK, OLDPARK ROAD, BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND.

Wanted "Magnets" and "Gems". Will Exchange or Buy. Hundreds of Duplicates D. O'HERLIHY, 17220 GRESHAM STREET, NORTHRIDGE, CALIFORNIA, U.S.A.

* * * * *

NELSON LEE COLUMN

by JACK WOOD

328 Stockton Lane, York.

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With this issue we embark on a new year; what, I wonder, does 1957 hold in store for us? Certainly, unless there is a remarkable change of heart by all concerned, there will be no re-birth either of the Nelson Lee Library or of St. Frank's.

I see that a fellow-member of the Old Boys' Book Club has, in his contribution to the Sexton Blake controversy, suggested that Edwy Searles Brooks might link Blake with either Norman Conquest or with "Ironsides" Cromwell. Maybe Mr. Brooks could also consider bringing Nelson Lee and Nipper into a new Blake adventure, possibly in a yarn of Secret Service adventure in some typically Brooksonian country of fantasy.

Brooks, however fantastic his secret worlds, always had science and topicality on his side. I am sure he could provide a link with say either the Antarctic explorations and their importance to British military and economic strategy, or the new search for the truth of the mystery of Col. Fawcett in Amazonian South America.

As I write, I have in front of me a film catalogue giving details of the Secret Land, which "tells of how the men and ships of the United States Navy set out to explore the Antarctic. Most interesting of all is the part of the film showing aeroplanes over the Shackleton coast discovering a vast area of land without snow". Shades of Brooks and his stories of New Anglia.

I see, too, that Fred Cooke, the newly-discovered "stand-in" author claims to have written several St. Frank's yarns round about 1921. I think the suggestion that some of these were in the N.L.L. is without foundation - all the titles and series for that year bear the Brooksonian stamp - but several St. Frank's stories in the Boys' Realm at that period were definitely not by Brooks and it may well be that Cooke wrote these. With the unfamiliar emphasis on Fatty Little and an obvious attempt to line him up as a Franciscan Bunter, the

stories were clearly by one of the Magnets Hamiltonian "stand-ins".

And now for the answer to last month's Quiz:-

1. Maxwell Scott.
2. A Dead Man's Secret; The Marvel, September 19th, 1894.
3. Dick Starling; St. Ninian's.
4. The Further Adventures of Nelson Lee. (The Mystery of Malton Moor).
5. Nelson Lee Library, No. 112. As Mr. Peter Alvington and Richard Basil Herbert Bennett. To escape vengeance of the Fu Chang Tong. July 28, 1917.
6. Mr. Thorne; Ancient House.
7. Ralph Leslie Fullwood.
8. The Mystery of Limehouse Reach; Nipper at St. Frank's.
9. Ancient House, Blue and Gold, College House, Green and Gold, St. Frank's, Red and Blue.
10. St. Frank's and Ancient House, Red and Blue, Modern House, Green and Gold, East House, Black and Orange, West House, Mauve and Yellow.
11. Lord Pippington, Duke of Somerton, Viscount "Sheets" Bellton, Lord Dorrimore.
12. Professor Cyrus Zingrave.
13. Ancient - Nelson Lee, later Almington Wilkes (married)
Modern - Mr. Stockdale.
East - Mr. Barnaby Goole.
West - Dr. Barry Stokes (married)
14. Ezra Quirke.
15. Reggie Pitt, Cecil De Valerie.
16. Cricket, Making articles of sealing wax.
17. Wallace (no Christian name ever given).
18. Tony Cresswell's
19. "Fighting" James Kingswood.
20. Watson, Pitt, Church, the Handforth Brothers, Christine.
21. Eileen Dare.
22. Sir James Potts.
23. The Earl of Edgemoor.
24. Pitt, Tich Harborough, Nipper (before arriving at St. Frank's.)
Handforth major also played for the Blue Crusaders during Fatty Fowkes's absence.
25. Mr. Barnaby Goole.

A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO YOU ALL.

S.B.L. REVIEWS.January 1957NIGHTMARE IN NAPLES (No. 373)JAMES STAGG.

See Naples and die! A now very familiar slogan, and one which, in view of the sudden and violent deaths which overtake certain of the characters, might very appropriately have been used as the title of the story. Blake never could take a holiday without becoming involved in the meshes of crime, and his vacation with Paula Dane, his honey-blond secretary and assistant, in the sun-drenched Italian city proves no exception to the rule. Soon the pair are being dragged into a pursuit of the murderer with the police, led by Captain Mario Cavicchi, of the Naples Homicide Bureau. An exciting climax with Blake chasing the murderer up the mountainside in the shadow of the volcano Vesuvius. Poised on the rim of the crater the murderer confesses to his crimes and then hurls himself to his doom. A good thriller of the type we used to associate with the colourful Plummer and Rymer stories by G.H. Teed in the thirties. James Stagg, who made a notable debut in "Assignment In Beirut", is even more impressive in this one.

Rating..... Very good.

WALTER WEBB.

THE SEASON OF THE SKYLARK (No.374)JACK TREVOR STORY.

Somewhat out of season, perhaps, but it is the story that matters, and what a fine story this turns out to be! An August Bank Holiday amongst the seaside crowds in Brighton, with Tinker trying desperately to prevent a bunch of crooks known as the Syndicate from taking the life of a beautiful blonde. One of the most oddly assorted gang of criminals since the late Gwyn Evans conceived the well-remembered Double Four, the Syndicate is an international organisation specialising in stolen secrets of medicine and industry, an organisation which has its spies in all the world's factories - men and women without patriotism, whose sole object is financial gain. When blonde, attractive Jill Barratt meets Johnny Weston, a young member of the Syndicate, and persuades him to hand to her a rare drug which had been entrusted to him for delivery to the London headquarters of the Syndicate she becomes a marked woman. Blake has little to do; Paula nothing at all; Tinker, whose assignment it is, is sadly out of touch and is frankly a disappointment, but not so the author, who has given us one of the best

Blake's published for a long, long time. Jack Trevor Story, with many deft touches of real humour, has a knack of saying in half-a-dozen words what many writers take several paragraphs to say - and far more effectively at that!

Rating.....Excellent.

WALTER WEBB,

Exchange Magnets 487,856,861, S.O.L.'s 51,205,223, for Magnets 808,850, 928, 1027, 1310, S.O.L.'s 71, 100, 104, Also wanted Magnets, S.O.L.'s and Holiday Annual 1938. E. MAGOVENY, 65 BENTHAM STREET, BELFAST. N.I.

Wanted. Amalgamated Press pre-war Comics, particularly Film Fun, Kinema Comic, Comic Cuts, Chips, Butterfly and Puck, especially those of the 1920's. Also other pre-war A.P. publication from 1920-1940. Details and prices to ARNOLD KEENA, 11 PEARL AVENUE, EPPING, N.S.W. AUSTRALIA.

Wanted. S.O.L.'s No's. 179 and 184 "Outcast of Cedar Creek" and on the Western Trail. Reasonable price paid. FRED GRIFFIN, 2558, GRAND CONCOURSE, BRONX, 58, NEW YORK, U.S.A.

Wanted to complete collection. No's 27 and 28. School and Sport. STANLEY SMITH, 13 PERCY STREET, YORK.

Wanted "Gems in good condition,
No's. 1106, 1108, 1114, 1118, 1121, 1125, 1129, 1133, 1136 -
to 1142.

"NELSON LEE'S", 1st NEW SERIES.

No's. 54, 55, 137, 138, (Good Condition).

"YOUNG BRITAINS" 1st SERIES

No's. 185 to 232.

ALWAYS INTERESTED IN HEARING OF ANY BOUND VOLS. OF MAGNETS OR GEMS FOR SALE.

WRITE TO:- MR. J.R. SWAN, 3, FIFTH AVENUE, PADDINGTON, LONDON, W.10.

NOTE. Last month in error the volume number was given as 11 when of course it should have been 10 the last of that volume.

HAMILTONIANA

Compiled by Herbert Leckenby

More Snippings from the Newspapers. Before Christmas the Army and Navy Stores had adverts in the "Daily Telegraph" and "Sunday Times" which started like this.

Even in the days of 16 course dinners, the Army & Navy Food Halls were a byword for sumptuousness. It's still the same to-day. And at Christmas time particularly, the Food Halls are among the most stimulating sights of London. Huge cheeses! Enormous turkeys! Haggises like footballs! Ruinously expensive crystallized rarities! Ridiculously cheap sliced cold stuffed turkey! Come and be a Bunter!!

And this appeared in the "Colomist" Victoria, British Colombia, sent to me by Bill Gander. The writer was one Tom Taylor. He evidently knows his Greyfriars but he makes the same mistake, of course, as another writer in an Australian Newspaper some years ago in stating Bunter came to Greyfriars after Harry Wharton. He's quite in error too in thinking Bunter shone as a goal-keeper.

As for Get-There Gunter he appeared in the Boys' Realm Football library but he didn't reign long. The author was Henry. T. Johnson.

THINKING ALOUD

by Tom Taylor.

I see there is mention again in the local press of Billy Bunter, who seems to have transformed himself into little short of a hero. Bunter isn't important but he is a welcome antidote to President Nasser.

One thing is apparent, and that is that a host of grown-ups all over the Commonwealth were Magnet readers in their youth. They won't all be "old school tie" chaps either, which means that these tales of English public school life were avidly devoured by multitudes

of other social persuasions.

I was a Magnet fan myself, having a bent for so-called "penny dreadfuls," although Greyfriars was a delight and not a dread. How truthful these tales were to the atmosphere of a real public school I wouldn't know, nor in those halcyon days did that matter. Enough that Harry Wharton and Co. appeared on the literary scene without fail every week.

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I am now confused, though. I notice that the afternoon paper's London correspondent quotes a Toronto man as saying he "loved" Billy Bunter. Why, Bunter was a fat little sneak!

When I read history I have to believe what the historian tells me; at least until I read his opposite number. But I can remember when Billy was born; typographically, I mean. And that was quite a while after Harry Wharton was packed off, unwillingly to Greyfriars.

Wharton was always the central character of the Greyfriars gang, still is I suppose if the Magnet remains in circulation and doubtless he isn't a day older. He was a churlish youngster to begin with, and not until the bully Bulstrode knocked his block off did he straighten out his inhibitions. Then of course he gave Bulstrode a licking and became the star of the Greyfriars gang. Only Bob Cherry, I think, came anywhere near his skill with the gloves.

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Now unless memory does me serious wrong Billy Bunter was a tubby little beast whose chief aim in life was the tuckshop, who told lies by the square dozen, and who generally was what you'd call a squalid nuisance. He was always having his nose rubbed in the mud for his short-comings. He didn't appear at all in some of the stories, being a minor character who supplied the excuse for the "Ha! Ha! Ha!" of schoolboy mirth.

Not until he became goalkeeper of outstanding skill - no doubt to put Greyfriars on a par with its chief rival, St. Jim's, which also had a rotund goalkeeper, Fatty Wynn - did the author have a good word to say for him.

It is true of course that he may have reformed after I outgrew Greyfriars - even Bulstrode graduated in time into a right good sort -

although that seems impossible. He was beyond the pale.

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Anyway he is apparently all the TV and movie rage these days, which may reflect a kind of poetic justice for the once lowly and despised of Greyfriars School. It may reflect something else too, viz: that the ordinary decent lad isn't good copy for entertainment promoters who prefer the grotesque. Billy will be a comic character, and since even the modern screen doesn't make heroes of nasty little boys he will be glossed to suit his new-found stardom.

Well, good luck to him, even if Hurree Janset Ram Singh turns white at the very idea and hurries back to India. Although why TV promoters should overlook Get-There Gunter in favor of Billy Bunter I shall wonder to my grave. Gunter never saw Greyfriars but he was a human dynamo in schoolboy form who could out-adventure Davy Crockett, Robin Hood and Long John Silver put together. That was why he got there, but now for the life of me I can't say where for the name of the "dreadful" that told of his great deeds has vanished from mind.

What I do remember is that he caused me to stand in front of the mirror, and flex my muscles.

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Now to our own contributors. This from Eric Fayne was crowded out last month:

MUSINGS ON THE ROGUE RACKSTRAW SERIES

by Eric Fayne.

I do not find myself entirely in harmony with Roger Jenkins' views on the Rogue Rackstraw series, though his article is first-class. I cannot agree that the Rogue Rackstraw series was disappointing, - I have always regarded it as one of the best of all the kidnapping series, - but, all the same there is a great deal of truth and wisdom in his comparison of this series with its Rookwood counterpart. The Rookwood series was brilliant, with an eerie quality which was quite remarkable; the Gem series had, however, certain excellent character sketches which helped to make it outstanding. It could be added that the identity of the kidnapper was never in doubt from the first in the Rookwood series, while the mystery was sustained for some

time in the St. Jim's stories.

But Roger really hits the nail on the head when he says that "the Rookwood series was as compact and intimate as the St. Jim's series was amorphous and impersonal". That shrewd and true comment could be applied to most of the St. Jim's stories after the end of the Blue covers, and Roger makes a point which I have been trying to make for years, though I have never succeeded in expressing myself half so well, - that the Gem canvas was far too wide after 1914, and intimate charm was often lost in a super-abundance of characters when one could not see the wood for the trees.

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THEY WERE MERRY DAYS

by W. Champion

My word! is it really fifty years since the Gem first saw the light of day?

The good old Gem was always my favourite, and I am convinced that nothing appeared within the pages of the Magnet that even equalled the best of the St. Jim's stories.

It was my mother (God bless her!) who first introduced me to the Gem, or vice-versa: she used to have it delivered every Sabbath, together with the Sunday newspapers, and it must have been about 1916, when I was seven years old, that I first became conscious of this intriguing-looking blue periodical laying in the hall mat, with the odd-looking characters in abbreviated jackets portrayed on the front cover.

How my mother used to eulogize Talbot in those wonderful far-off days. The "Toff" was the Gem to her ——— and all the other characters were merely there to add colour, as it were.

The first series that I can honestly say I recall reading was when Billy Bunter changed places with his cousin, and came to St. Jims instead of the popular Wally, early in 1919. I thought the whole thing very amusing, and from then on the Gem became the greatest delight in my life. My favourite series has ever been the caravan holiday in the summer of 1919, of which I have written in detail in an earlier C.D. I can almost recall those adventures word for word.

However, there is no doubt that the Gem did go off the gold standard in the middle-twenties, and take second place in popularity to the Magnet; but by that time I was out in the cold, hard World, earning my living, and was not too much troubled by the event. It is only now, years later, that I realise to the full what a tragedy it all was, and how the up-and-coming generation are being deprived of something great and good at the most impressionable time of their young lives.

Long live the heroes of the School and New Houses in our memory!

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Here's some interesting extracts from a letter from Bill Champion:

"At a fancy-dress Ball t'other evening the Managing-Director of a leading building firm went as a perfect replica of the T.V. Billy Bunter - even his cap was spot-on, with the correct number of rings, etc. He is a few years my senior, and I could not resist asking him if he had ever been a reader of the Old Papers. He Had!

Now, amazingly enough, at this same dance, was a lady (well-known to me) who was masquerading as Bessie Bunter, with a pair of the most gorgeous pigtails. My one big regret was that no photographer was present, as I'm sure a picture of the two together would have been darned interesting.

Secondly, I recently wrote to the Editor of the Junior Express, a certain Reginald Taylor, who informed me that the Basil Reynolds who is responsible for the black and white nature-studies which appear in that paper, is none other than the nephew of the late Warwick, and further, this Basil is art-editor in the same department which Mr. Charles Hamilton used to write for. Incidentally, Mr. Taylor added that he himself, used to work as a very young journalist on the Gem and Magnet!

P.S. I enjoyed reading Bill Loft's article in the December C.D.. The Kenneth Newman he mentions does not live far away from me.

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THOSE EARLY GEMS: SOME STRAY THOUGHTS (Continued)

by E.V. Copeman.

In the inside back cover of No.49 is a sketch of a magnet and

and round it are these words: FATHER, SON, BROTHER, SCHOOL CHUM; MOTHER, DAUGHTER, SISTER AND HER FRIEND — THEY ALL READ THE MAGNET LIBRARY. NOW ON SALE. PRICE ½d. I wonder if the man who wrded that ad ever realised that half a century later fathers and sons and mothers and daughters would still be reading about the Greyfriars characters and that the MAGNET itself (like the GEM) would have become in actuality a "collectors' item"!

On the outside back cover of No.49 there are three titles of BOYS' FRIEND 3d. LIBRARY stories given. Two of these are of interest, one being THE BOY BARGE-OWNERS by David Goodwin and the other being THE COSTER KING, a Sexton Blake yarn.

GEM No.66 (15/5/1909) leaves me a little puzzled. It is a story about Mr. Ratcliff and is called THE FORM-MASTER'S SECRET. The cover looks suspiciously as if it were drawn by Val Reading, but again I am open to correction. The half-page sketch on Page 3 showing the Terrible Three looking down on a battered Gussy with a dented topper could be Val's work. So too could the drawing on Page 11 of old-fashioned Miss Glyn with her billowing skirt and huge hat (now becoming fashionable again, incidentally!) and also showing a love-sick Ratty, armed with a box of flowers, in the background. But the sketch at the start of the yarn is definitely the work of somebody else.

The serial in No.66 is BRITAIN AT BAY, which follows on from BRITAIN INVADED mentioned earlier. This was also a reprint from the BOYS' FRIEND, written by the same author and featuring the same chief characters.

Sight of the cover picture of No.71 rather startled me. I recognised the artist immediately though I had never expected to find his work in the GEM, nor to learn that he was associated with Charles Hamilton so many years ago. The title of the story is SENT TO COVENTRY and it is one of the few St. Jim's stories illustrated by Leonard Shields, later to become famous for his sketches of the Greyfriars characters in the MAGNET. His drawings of Gussy in the GEM of 19/6/1909 have to be seen to be appreciated, and the oddly-assorted garments of the juniors are rather bewildering. In the one picture you can see Eton collars and long coats, knickerbockers, straw hats, caps — no dress uniformity at all.

To be continued.