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Collectors'

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Digest



Collectors' Digest

FOUNDED in 1946 by HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 18

Number 205

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REPEAT OF A WARNING:

According to an Australian reader, he sent a "flimsy" to an advertiser in Collectors' Digest, since when (up to the time of writing this) he had received no acknowledgment for his money nor the books he ordered.

We must make it clear that it is not possible for us to "vet" advertisements which appear in this magazine. We should not accept anything of an obviously questionable nature, but if a man sends along a 2/6 announcement, mentioning books wanted and for sale it is just not practicable to ask the advertiser for references as to his character. Especially as the cheats are really very few and far between.

We cannot blind ourselves to the fact that, when a reader has been cheated in the past, he has often been not quite so prudent as he might have been. Our Australian reader sent a "flimsy", which may mean a currency note. All too many of our overseas friends do send

their own currency by unregistered mail. Apart from being illegal, this is an extremely risky proceeding, leaving the sender with no safeguard at all. There is no excuse for it usually. In Australia and Canada, money orders can be obtained for the exact amount in sterling. English postal orders seem to be available in New Zealand and South Africa.

We have advised before - and we stress it again - that largish deals should be made through a third party. This is a protection for vendor and purchaser alike. We advise all readers never to pay in cash. Always by cheque or crossed postal order. No man of any standing at all, whether he has a bank account or not, has any difficulty in negotiating a cheque. If he claims it would be awkward for him to receive a cheque or crossed postal order, there is something fishy. Leave him alone.

Collectors' Digest cannot vouch for every advertisement which appears, but it is always ready to act as a third party in any deal. If the man to whom you make the suggestion is unwilling to use the third party system, he is either very suspicious - or very untrustworthy himself. We think the latter. Give him the air.

LOOKING FORWARD:

Another year stretches ahead of us. For a moment we can look back at the year which is gone, one of the most successful in C.D. history. During that year we presented three enlarged numbers, including our famous Double Number. In years to come, that one will be as precious as famous tales like "Bob Cherry's Barring Out" and "The Mystery of the Painted Room." Since No. 200 appeared there has been a constant demand for it - a demand which we have been unable to meet at this office. Every copy went during the first week of issue.

Our 12 issues for 1963 are now being bound. A year of the Digest makes a delightful volume of the right size, and the binding can be copied, year after year, till you have a lovely string of books on your shelves. It can be done quite inexpensively.

Now to look forward. In 1964 we shall do everything in our power to make sure that C.D. surpasses itself.

THE BLURRED IMAGE:

The third Greyfriars story in LOOK & LEARN, which commenced in the issue of mid-December, proves to be the opening tale of the 10-story Muccolini Circus series of 1936. The selection of what was a summer story for presentation early in the Christmas season may seem odd, but one has ceased to wonder at anything.

It is, at any rate, a genuine story. Pruning, though drastic and uninspired, just gets a pass mark in this first instalment. Gentle shrinkage seems to be a lost art these days.

It seems that LOOK & LEARN readers have not tumbled over one another to express their joy over these stories (no comments, please), and this latest story, according to rumour, may be the last.

The niggardly, almost contemptuous, presentation which the stories have received has been a great disappointment to our readers, as my large mail-bag shows. We have nothing to add except regret that the image of a much-loved writer has been blurred in this way.

THE EDITOR.

DANNY'S DIARY

JANUARY 1914:

It's lovely to hear the muffin-man ringing his bell, these winter afternoons. He walks along with his muffins on a tray which he balances on his head. He has the tray covered with a dark green cloth, and he carried a big brass bell. He comes past our house most afternoons about three o'clock, and Mum often buys some muffins which are seven for threepence.

The big event of the month has been the publication of a new halfpenny coloured paper called "Chuckles." It is really wonderful value for money, and they gave away a bar of toffee with the first issue. The paper is a kind of comic, with plenty of stories as well. On the front page are Breezy Ben and Dismal Dutchy, who are drawn by Mr. Tom Wilkinson. The editor says that Mr. Wilkinson is a very famous artist who has been hung up on display in an Academy. Frank Richards has a series of tales about Courtfield Council School, all about Dick Trumper and Solly Lazarus, and these stories introduce the Greyfriars boys. They are not so good as the Magnet stories. The first story in this series was "The Founder of the Feast." There is also a series about Ferrers Locke, the famous detective who has often appeared in the St. Jim's tales. The first one of these stories is "The Stolen Document." Also in Chuckles is a serial by Arthur S. Hardy called "Fighter and Footballer" but I don't often read serials. Mr. Hardy writes a lot of sport- ing tales.

At the beginning of the month Mum and I went to the Popular Picture Palace where we saw "The Chinese Death Thorn," a very exciting film about New York's Chinatown. We also saw "Enoch Arden" which was in two reels. A very sad film, and Mum cried a little.

In Pluck, which I have just bought, they told the story of "The Chinese Death



Thorn," and gave some scenes from the film, but the story was a bit different from the film. It was a Kalem film.

The local council has put new lighting in Harmer Street. They are kind of arc lights, which give a brilliant blue light when they are burning, but they pop and crackle and sometimes go out. It is a big improvement in street lighting.

The Magnet has been good all through this month. The first story was "Ructions in the Remove" in which Lord Mauleverer lost a £50 note, and everybody thought that Herr Gans, the new German master, had stolen it. Eventually Trotter, the page, found a bit of the charred note in Mauly's wastepaper basket, and it turned out that Mauly had used the note to light the gas.

"Held Up" was a very exciting story in which Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry were kidnapped and carried off on a kind of pirate steamer called the "Seamew." "The Right Sort," the third tale, was about a new boy called Archie Darrell. Bunter, who has an uncle who is a maths master in a school in the north, recognized Darrell as a boy who was expelled from the northern school, so Bunter did some blackmailing.

The last story in the Magnet this month was "Trouble with Highcliffe" in which a boy threw a snowball containing a stone at Mr. Mobbs, the Highcliffe master.

When my Gran went home after Christmas she gave me some money, so I have been able to buy plenty books. I bought Puck, which I don't often have. This has a serial called "J. O. Jones" by Warren Bell. It is quite good, though it is a bit silly, I suppose, reading a serial like this, as I shan't be able to afford to buy Puck every week.

I also had Chips, which has a new serial called "The Heart of the Slums," about a girl called Bessie Trent, who, although she has been brought up in dirt and filth and poverty, still manages to do good deeds with her golden heart. I can't quite see why poverty and filth should always seem to go together in stories. I am very poor, except when Gran gives me a tip or Dad opens his heart, but I am only filthy sometimes.

I have had Comic Cuts every week. There is a new Secret Service serial called "Thumbs Up," and the Martin Steele stories are going on as usual. Sebastian Ginger, the office boy, makes me laugh. One week he found a note, after a football match.

It woz a noat, signed by Korkey, as follers:

"Ear-wiv the 12 siggeret pickchers 4 the 12 goles, as promised."

I new in a minit wot it ment. Our gole-keeper ad bean bribed 2 let the uther side win.

"Ar me!" I sghed. "Footbawl ain't the kleen gain! it used 2 B."

I maid the same remark to mi muvver wen I arsked er 2 wash sum ov the mud out of mi footbawl shirt, and she woz inklined 2 agree wiv me.

"I kaw! it a dirty gain," she sez; & wen I thort of players like Filpot Bottels, wot kan B bort, I kride alowd:

"Alarse, ow trew!"

The Gem has been a top-notchter this month. Cecil Cavendish was a new boy who left Tom Merry to drown under the ice, and so he was "Not Wanted."

In "D'Arcy's Delusion" the chums found out that Gussy was buying a lot of cigars and tobacco, and they were horrified. It turned out that Gussy had fallen in love with Miss Chunn, the tobacconist's daughter.

"Hard Pressed" was a good story in which St. Jim's First Eleven was to play the Isthmians. But Cutts had a villainous cousin called Spencer Dodd, who had betted against St. Jim's winning. By trickery, Cutts got several of the best men stranded on the journey, so they could not play in the game. Luckily, Kildare was able to play Tom Merry, Fatty Wynn, and Kangaroo - and St. Jim's won after all.

The last story of the month, "Earning His Living" was a scream. Gussy took a job. In fact, several jobs. He helped Mr. Liversedge, the butcher; Mr. Piper, the news-agent; and Mr. Mopps, the barber. In the end, he was still out of a job.

It has been rather a disastrous month for me, and I must say I think Freda, Doug's lady friend, is a cat. She paid a special visit to my mother to (continued on page 11)..

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSEPHINE PACKMAN, 27, Archdale Road,
East Dulwich, London, S.E.22.

CICELY HAMILTON - HER RISE TO FAME

(Concluding "Name The Author")

By WALTER WEBB

The turning point in Cicely Hamilton's career came with "Diana Of Dobson's," a play she was working on while still turning out Sexton Blake stories for Willie Back's U.J. Result - an abrupt cessation of her well-written Blake stories, and the total disappearance from the pages of the boys' periodicals of her pen-name, "Max Hamilton."

"Diana" was produced at the Kingsway Theatre, and proved an immediate success, although, financially, Miss Hamilton did not derive from it the full benefits her efforts deserved, this being due to a natural uncertainty as to whether the play would click with the public, or not.

At that time, Lena Ashwell - later to become Lady Lena Margaret Simson - was managing the Kingsway, and it was part of her policy to open a door to the young writers of the day who, hitherto, had no chance of a production. There was of course no certainty that the play would make money. The gamble as to loss or gain had to be taken by Miss Ashwell, and the risk was great. Cicely Hamilton, at that time quite unknown, was offered a sum down or a percentage of the receipts. Not unnaturally, she chose the safe course, and, although the amount she received has not been divulged, it could not have been anywhere near the sum the play made for others and it is no secret that Miss Ashwell came in for a good deal of criticism on this score, for there was no doubt that on other terms Miss Hamilton would have benefited to a much greater extent. Well, that is as may be, of course; but things have to be looked at from both points of view, and the critics here seemed a little harsh on Miss Ashwell, particularly as when she left the Kingsway after having built up her position in the theatre by many years of hard work, she lost in the enterprise every

penny that she had saved in her profession.

It is interesting to recall that Lena Ashwell was the sister of Roger Pocock, who served with the Royal West Mounted Police and founded the Legion of Frontiersmen. Pocock was an intimate friend of David Goodwin and T.C. Bridges, another early Blake writer, and, for a time, all three lived together in Great Ormond Street.

Cicely Hamilton's reminiscences of her participation in the suffragette movement deal with the less familiar activities of it. She walked in the first Woman's Suffrage procession - a march from Hyde Park Corner to Exeter Hall - organised by the National Union of Woman's Suffrage Societies. Carrying banners designed by members of the Artists' Suffrage League, they drew interested crowds of sight-seers, for, in those days, women on the march were a novelty.

Women artists formed their own suffrage society, as did women writers and actresses. Cicely Hamilton was a member of both. A means of raising money for the Cause was entertainment of the propaganda type, and this was where actresses, and, particularly, Miss Hamilton, came in, and her happiest memories of the movement were in the arrangements of and the taking part in those performances the suffragettes put on for militants and non-militants alike. They even had their own weekly magazine, "Votes For Women," price one penny, copies of which were distributed all over London from every conceivable point - even from the stairs of the horse-buses, that wheezed and groaned their laborious way round Trafalgar Square.

Some years ago, Miss Hamilton, a naturally law-abiding citizen, recalled an amusing tug-of-war she had with the Inland Revenue. When a Women's Tax Registers League was formed, she was, somewhat reluctantly, persuaded to join, and thus, having committed herself, wrote to the district collector informing him that she would not pay her income tax. The collector was somewhat taken aback when the authoress pointed out to him that although she rented the house her position in regard to distraint was most favourable since all the furniture, save for some odd bits and pieces, was the property of her sister - and she was not a tax resister! A few weeks' respite, and then the authoress received word that a sale of her goods had been decided on. After writing back particulars of the furniture available, which consisted chiefly of a strip of old stair carpet and a kettle, the authorities were, apparently, discouraged, for the sale did not take place. The cool relations between Miss Hamilton and the Inland Revenue were forgotten when relations of a far greater import - those between England and Germany - were broken off, and the world

was plunged into war.

It is a tribute both to her courage and to her patriotism that Cicely Hamilton, like the Army nursing sisters, exposed herself to the same great dangers as they did; for, when entertainment for the troops was put on national lines and "Concerts at the Front" came into being, she teamed up with Lena Ashwell, who had striven from the very outbreak of war to provide such concerts for the brave Tommies who had come to France prepared to sell their lives for king and country.

The first of these concerts, which often took place in spite of German advances, was held in the Harfleur Valley, and it was here that Ivor Novello, who had just written "Keep the Home Fires Burning" sung it for the first time, while the Base Commandant and all the military dignitaries helped in the chorus.

The "Concerts at the Front" had its several departments; selection of artists, the organisation which raised the hundred thousand pounds necessary to meet the expenses; direction and transport of the parties; theatres at the front; lone entertainers for the front lines; repertory companies; and, later, distinguished lecturers.

Cicely Hamilton came into the latter two categories, and was, in fact, in charge of the Repertory at Abbeville when a bomb destroyed the theatre and the hostel, so that both theatre and concert parties had to sleep out in the forest. It was from this experience that Miss Hamilton derived her excellent book, "William an Englishman."

But the war had its lighter moments. Even the terror of a night spent besides the searchlights amidst a hurricane of bombs could not quell the spirit of one of the actresses - a Scottish girl - who bewailed the fact that she could not sleep. It was no act of war that deterred her from slumber, only that she had lost her pink flannel nightgown, and sleep was just not possible without it. How the lady eventually overcame her embarrassment has never been recorded.

Her experiences under shell-fire gave added sincerity to Cicely Hamilton's work, and this was particularly noticeable in her Christmas Miracle play "The Child in Flanders," which was performed by Lena Ashwell and her players, ("The Roundabouts"), every Christmas for some years. For the same reason, that sincerity was reflected in the work of the performers. An old tale, often told, not always convincingly and often superficially; but the acting of Miss Ashwell and her players made it intensely real and very moving. Two of the three Tommies who took part in the play, who sought shelter for the night at a French farm having lost their way on Christmas Eve - Leslie Banks and Ben Field - are perhaps remembered by old theatre and film goers.

Although the play was a great success for several years, the spirit slowly faded and the atmosphere which had made it so moving disappeared.

To wind up this little episode of her work at the Front, it is only fair to say that Miss Hamilton's little dispute with the Inland Revenue prior to her departure for France was settled amicably. The authoress paid up her arrears, and so brought to an end her activities in the Suffrage Campaign.

The twelve plays she wrote between her break from Sexton Blake and the outbreak of war had made the name of Cicely Hamilton very well known, and her star shone even more brightly during the post-war period. Books and plays continued to flow from her fertile pen, and it goes without saying that of the many thousands who sat in theatres all over London and watched the productions of her plays, there must have been hundreds who, at some time or another had been readers of the Sexton Blake stories; yet, it is safe to say, that not one member of those many audiences ever dreamt that the author of the play they were watching had also at one time in her career written stories about the famous character. Truly, one of the best kept secrets in publishing.

The woman thriller writer has long laid claim to be given a footing on the same literary pedestal as her male partner in crime. Today, looking at such mistresses of their art as Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Margery Allingham, and a few others, the mere male who would seek to dispute the justification of such claims would be fool-hardy, indeed.

Yet, how strange that, in so far as Sexton Blake is concerned, this claim was proved in the earliest days of the century, when a lady in her early thirties, having the temerity to filter into an arena essentially male, not only proved that she possessed the required ability to write a good yarn, but that in her presentation of the Blake character, could rise superior to all her male colleagues. Graydon, Goddard, Lomax, Hayter, Alais....all were her inferiors, in this respect.

The Blake statistician has much on which to look back in pride, for his record book is crammed with names - some quite famous - who, over a period of 70 years, have brought enjoyment to millions of readers. The name of a woman writer therein is a piquant anecdote - one of those pleasurable discoveries that makes the task of a researcher so well worth while.

Like Charles of that ilk, Cicely Hamilton died in her 80's. She was, in fact, just 80 when she passed away, unmarried, on the 5th December, 1952, at Glebe Place, Chelsea, her home for many years.

Sexton Blake - "UNION JACK" - Official InformationNo. 3.By W. O. G. Lofts

Readers who have the Vol. of CHUMS for 1909, will no doubt be aware of a page of photographs of popular contributors. Captain Frank H. Shaw, Mr. Arthur Mayne, Mr. S. Walkey, Mr. Julian Linley. Our old friend Mr. W. B. Home-Gall who was a proved Sexton Blake U.J. writer - writing at least Nos. 68 (28.1.1905), 98 (26.8.1905), 107 (28.10.1905), 121 (3.2.1906), 139 (9.6.1906) and possibly others. The last photo on the page shows Mr. L. J. Beeston, an elderly gentleman with high winged collar and Kitchener moustache; pince-nez, and looking rather like a severe schoolmaster.

Mr. L. J. Beeston was indeed, like Mr. W. B. Home-Gall, a Sexton Blake author in the UNION JACK, and positively wrote the following stories.

- No. 221. 4.1.1908. THE HOUSE OF FEAR.
- No. 239. 9.5.1908. SEXTON BLAKE PAVEMENT ARTIST.
- No. 263. 24.10.1908. THE WILLOW COURT MYSTERY.
- No. 274. 9.1.1909. THE ADVENTURESS.
- No. 318. 13.11.1909. BRIDGE.

Others not yet identified, may have come from his pen.

I must confess that I have read very little of L. J. Beeston's work in other fields - contributor to BOYS FRIEND LIBRARY 1st series, BOYS REALM, a serial in the NELSON LEE LIBRARY (Old Series). He probably contributed to many other papers. The late Herbert Leckonby once stated that L. J. Beeston who wrote in the very first Vol. of CHUMS also used the pen-name of 'Richard Camden'. (This needs confirmation). He is reputed to have had a vigorous, witty style, but also an audacious habit of serving the same plot up time and time again, with hardly the slightest attempt to give it a new twist. For example. Boy possesses marvellous camera or bicycle, another boy declares he will perform three difficult (and ridiculous) feats. Owner of camera offers it if feats are successfully performed. They are! Of course!

But readers had better judge whether L. J. Beeston was a successful Sexton Blake writer or not.

SEXTON BLAKE YACHTSMAN: No. 408 (5.8.1911) Written by COLIN T. BAINE!

And to close this instalment, yet another new name is revealed as having penned a Blake story. BOYS REALM, BOYS JOURNAL, and the MARVEL are other papers he contributed to. Nothing else is known

about the writer, except that he was reputed to have been something of an authority on yachts - which explains the theme for his story. Any other data about this new author will be given in a later instalment.

DANNY'S DIARY (continued from page 5)...

tell her that she had seen me kick a lamppost. It was true, of course, but what a sneak she is! A boy told me that if you kick the lamppost hard enough, the gas-light will come on. And so it will.

Freda told my Mum she felt she ought to tell her, as I might damage the lamppost. Mum said I might damage my shoes, which was much more important.

Then, to top it all, my Headmaster called to see Dad. He said I was making no progress at school, and he thought I had too many other interests. He said he hoped I didn't go to moving pictures. I think Dad was nearly as scared of the Head as I am. After all, they decided that I go to the pictures too much, that I read too many dreadful weekly papers, and that I spend too much time writing my Diary. The Head said "Diary, indeed! What nonsense! The boy must think he's another Peeps!"

Now who the dickens was Peeps?

Dad gave me a dreadful warning. Either I improve at school - or - only one visit a month to the pictures, only one paper a week from the bookshop, and my Diary will be banned entirely.

What an awful to-do! Anybody would think I was keeping a second home. At least, that's what Doug says. He takes my side. He's a good sort in his way.

WANTED: Good loose copies or bound volumes containing any of the following: MAGNETS - 52, 131 to 149 inclusive, 195, 205, 237, 238, 239, 277, 318, 319, 353, 400, 417, 422, 435, 469, 706, 719, 751, 752, 753, 762, 763, 809. Most issues between 821 and 890, 900, 921, 924, 925, 936, 938, 940, 942, 943, 946, 951, 965, 967, 988, 996.

GEMS - Many issues between 400 and 500. Many issues between 800 and 879. Also Nos. 925, 935, 953, 954, 956, 975, 980, 984, 985, 989, 990, 992, 993, 998, 1129, 1150. POPULARS: 183, 190, 370, 385, 396, 452, 455, 466, 474. EARLY PENNY POPULARS: Nos. 12, 13, 45, 47, 48.

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Hamiltoniana



LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 72: NOT FLAWLESS, BUT —!

Roger Jenkins's article in the Annual was thought-provoking. Though entitled "Flaws in the Diamond" it devotes only its first half to the flaws. The second half concerns the substitute writers.

As to the flaws - well, I am not certain that they were really flaws at all. If they were, then one gets the impression that Roger had to scrape the bottom to find them - and that is something of a compliment to Charles Hamilton.

I think that topographical details were important in maintaining illusion. When slips occurred, as they did occasionally, they were due to a faulty memory. The astonishing thing is not that there were topographical slips, but that there were so few of them, considering the author's enormous output and the range of his work. Such slips were only obvious at all to someone who read the stories closely over a number of years.

The abandonment of the Black Rock was surprising, for it featured a good deal in the early Magnet. But abandonments, both in topography and characterisation, were by no means unknown in the Hamilton story down the years.

When I was a lad, the names of the starring characters never struck me as anything but perfect. Whether they originated in Burke's peerage and Debrett I could not say even now - I accept anybody's word that they did - but I don't see that it matters. Charles Hamilton was, to some extent, the victim of his own popularity. His stories ran for such a very long time. Tom Merry was created early in 1907, and it may have been fashionable at that time for authors to give their heroes symbolic names. As I wrote a month or two ago, Arthur Augustus was a typical dude of Edwardian fiction, but a few years later he was dated. Readers did not notice it. It was not the author's fault his work was so popular that, by demand, St. Jim's

and Greyfriars went on and on and on.

Roger comments that by 1915 when Rookwood was created Charles Hamilton had had time to learn by his mistakes. Perhaps that is true. Yet, though Rookwood may have been more flawless than St. Jim's and Greyfriars, it had nothing like the same success. Nor do I believe that Jimmy Silver ever caught the imagination of readers as Tom Merry did.

Astonishing, I think, was the repetition of names. Most inexplicable of all was the use of Mr. Quelch and George Wingate at Clavering in the spring of 1907, and then to find the same names and identical characters at Greyfriars in early 1908. Not flaws, perhaps, but certainly oddities. And long, long afterwards we found names like Punter and Poynings continually cropping up.

I agree with Roger about unpleasant names for unpleasant people. For the record I would mention that Snipe was not a Hamilton creation. It was an editorial name given to Levison for a time in the reprint period when stories were printed out of original sequence.

I don't think the Happy Family names ever bothered me much, but I was unhappy over names like Professor Balmcrumpet. That sort of thing lowered the standard of the papers with a bump to comic paper level.

I do not really agree with Roger that the way in which Greyfriars boys read the Gem, or the way in which Gussy once met Martin Clifford, shattered illusion. At any rate, it always had the reverse effect upon me. More shattering to my illusions were the Greyfriars Herald and Billy Bunter's Weekly supplements. But we all knew that the author had nothing to do with those.

As an adult I find very few real flaws in the diamond. I think that the adverb "quietly" was used too frequently. I think that "Ha! Ha! Ha's" and "Yarochs!" were quite superfluous. I am surprised that, at any rate in later years, they were not blue-pencilled. I agree with Roger that there was an air of gentle patronage in the presentation of the so-called working classes, but I am sure it never gave offence. I believe that ninety per cent of Charles Hamilton's readers were of those working classes and of the middle class which, as Roger so truly says, never really existed in the stories.

I had my own pet aversions among themes, as who of us has not? Long series, in my view, were a mistake. I believe, as I have said before, that the very long series came about on account of the need of the author, in later years, to make one plot last as long as possible.

It irritated me when, almost invariably, Charles Hamilton

translated any piece of foreign language used. Monsieur Charpentier always translated his French expressions into English. It is the only instance that I can call to mind of Charles Hamilton ever writing down to his readers.

But these criticisms are really carping. Charles Hamilton's achievements were so immense in turning out wholesome and readable stories in huge quantities for boys, as both Roger and I fully agree, that one has to be carping to find fault.

In all but one point, I fully agree with Roger's masterful summing-up of the substitution question. Roger tells us that the dearth of genuine stories in the Gem in the late twenties was due to a bitter argument which the author had with the editor of the Gem. I find it rather hard to accept this, though I presume that Roger obtained his information from Charles Hamilton himself.

I discussed the Gem more than any other paper with Charles Hamilton, and he never told me anything of the sort. The editor of the Gem was also the editor of the Magnet, and surely a dispute with one would have been a dispute with the other. I believe that Mr. Down was the editor at this time, and the author always spoke of him as the easiest of men with whom to co-operate.

Furthermore, the trend of ever-increasing substitute work was clear during most of the twenties. Even in the earlier twenties the genuine stories, though consistently excellent, were regrettably short. In 1924 there was a large number of substitute stories. In 1925 more than half the stories were by substitute writers. In 1926 there was a mere handful of genuine stories. 1927 showed an improvement, when Charles Hamilton contributed the summer series of Tom Merry & Co in Canada. 1928 had only the Victor Cleeve series of four tales. In 1929 there were no genuine stories at all.

In 1930 and in the first six months of 1931 there were about eight genuine stories. After the reprints started, new stories were no longer required from anyone for the Gem.

In my opinion, had there been a bitter dispute over the Gem, Charles Hamilton would have written no new stories at all for it in those years. My view is that he had other fish to fry, and just had no time for many Gem stories.

Finally, I do not agree with Roger that in the Gem of the middle twenties onwards, the imitations were "very cleverly done indeed." He is, of course, speaking of his personal reactions to these stories, but I find it surprising that he should have found it necessary to read several chapters in some cases before becoming certain that the

story in question was an imitation. Such was never my experience. I recall the bitter disappointment I used to suffer when, week after week, I used to look in vain for a genuine story.

I do not know which particular substitute stories Roger has in mind, but I can think of none in that period which I would regard in any way as approaching the real thing.

* * * * *

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOES

No. 71: A HIT OR A MISS

W.O.G. LOFTS: One could never speak of a substitute Sexton Blake writer, though one could refer to substitute "character writers." No other writer could ever write a Granite Grant story like W. W. Sayer, the creator. With regard to the reprinting of the old Gem stories, the following is an extract from a letter received from Mr. R. C. Hewitt, who was a sub-editor on the Magnet and Gem in the 30's.

"The Gem reprints were selected by Mr. Arthur Aldcroft, who was in charge of the Gem at that time (under Mr. C. M. Down). He typed them direct from the volumes, and he had instructions to use genuine Charles Hamilton stories only. It is quite possible that a few substitute stories crept in, but this was unintentional. A few genuine stories had to be omitted as they were dated from some reason or other."

HARRY BROSTER: I think you have hit on a very sensible and wise view of the substitute writers and their stories, and I think you are dead correct. Just as we all accepted the various authors of Sexton Blake, so would we have tolerated the substitute writers, had their names been disclosed. Some of the sub yarns were putrid stuff, but they have suffered more since the disclosure that they were not genuine. Yours is a good point, and I think injustice to the well-meaning but inferior sub-writers would have been avoided.

FRANK LAY: I can appreciate that some discerning readers could detect some sub-stories, but I fail to see how anyone could detect them all, as, even now, there is still argument as to whether some stories are subs or not. Like all authors with a huge output and deadlines to meet, C.H. turned out some pot-boilers.

As regards deductions as to authorship from internal evidence so ably put by Laurie Sutton and Walter Webb, these deductions have so often been proved wrong that I feel they take up space that could be put to better use. But Laurie Sutton is quite correct in refusing to accept authors' statements as to stories they wrote even 20 years ago. But what about the dozens of sub-stories which he says are still credited to C.H.? From your own statements you should be able to settle this. Can you? I should very much doubt that Fern ever ghosted for C.H. I regard him as one of the poorest of the A.P. authors.

ERIC FAYNE adds: I presume that Mr. Sutton was referring to many substitute stories which are not shown as such in the London Club's Gem catalogue. In a review of this catalogue in Collectors' Digest for October 1962, we made the following observations: "The only criticism one can make is that substitute stories might have been indicated as such, even when the name of the actual writer was not known. As it is, one gets the overall impression that Charles Hamilton wrote even more stories for the Gem than he actually did."

However, the fault lay with the compilers of the catalogue. It did not mean that, in the minds of any experts, substitute stories were credited to Charles Hamilton. Personally I do not believe that any sub story in the Gem or Magnet would deceive an expert, but I think one might have doubts on certain stories which were genuine but not up to the usual standard of Hamilton.

'HAMILTONIANA' (continued on page 22).

By
W. O. G. Lofts

WEARY WILLIE AND

The artist who lived in South London, was greatly puzzled when the elderly gentleman, who knocked at the door of his old Victorian house, asked if he could have a look inside and see where the great Tom Browne worked.

Travelling right from the Midlands for this special purpose, this elderly person when being shown the interior - spoke enthusiastically about Tom Browne and his work, and eventually left perfectly satisfied that his long journey had been worth while. The artist sensing a news story about this contacted the local editor of a Blackheath newspaper, and in turn I was eventually approached to give what details I could about Tom Browne for an interesting local news item; but for the start of our story on Tom Browne's greatest creations we must go back to one day early in 1896.....

"Tom," said the editor kindly, "I am very pleased with your type of work. I'm looking for a new idea to fill the front page of CHIPS and I think you are just the man who can help me."

When Mr. G. H. Cantle uttered those words, one day early in 1896, to the struggling young artist who stood before his desk, he could not possibly have dreamed that the artist in question would not only create a pair of brilliant comic characters, but that they would run for no less than 57 years!

"I want something amusing, of course," went on the editor. "Something which will catch on with the public." So Tom Browne, the artist, set out from the Harmsworth Brothers offices at 24 Tudor Street, E.C. to seek inspiration from somewhere. Inspiration which would not only enable him to please his editor, but might possibly

ON SATURDAY NEXT

July 2nd:

Weary Willy and Tired Tom will introduce their two sons.

LITTLE WILLY

and

TINY TIM,

to the readers of the

WONDER. 1d.

Don't fail to get a copy of the
Special Summer No.

OF THE

WONDER. 1d.

LITTLE WILLY and TINY TIM

will appear every week in the
WONDER. ONE HALFPENNY.



"We'll, Tim," says Willy they'll please the readers of

ND TIRED TIM

By
W. O. G. Lofts

glean him further commissions in the future.

Young Tom Browne was a very ordinary fellow and had experienced poverty and hardship from a very early age. Born at Nottingham in 1872 he had to leave school at the tender age of 11 simply because he had become a valuable asset to the family as a breadwinner. His first jobs were as errand-boy, first to a milliner's and then in the lace market. A little later he became apprenticed to a firm of lithographic

printers at the magnificent sum of a shilling a week! Because of this he turned his hand to any odd jobs he could pick up, including designing labels for cigar boxes.

At the age of 17 Tom discovered his own possibilities as a humorous draughtsman - to amuse his friends he would frequently make comic drawings depicting incidents and people that had caught his fancy; but this was really little more than an idle occupation.

One day, however, a friend persuaded him to send some of his drawings to a comic editor in London - and Tom was astonished when he received, almost by return of post, 30/- from the James Henderson paper, SCRAPS.

This sum representing at least three months' wages from his present firm, a dazzling prospect of wealth seemed to open before him; but it was not until a few years later, when Tom had finished his apprenticeship, that he was able to make his way to London and to find himself in the position related earlier.

Walking down the nearby Embankment and studying the various types of down and out humanity which always seems to gather by London's famous river Thames, his attention was caught by the appearance of two tramps. One was short and fat, the other tall and thin; and mentally



ally, "they're certainly 'Chips' of the old block, and we hope of 'The Wonder'."

noting the possibilities of portraying them in comic humour, Tom Browne later sketched out a short strip in six cartoons. The very next day, he presented them to the editor of CHIPS for his approval.

Mr. G. H. Cattle, needless to say, was delighted and suggested that the short, dark, unshaven tramp with spiked hair, tattered Eton jacket and small straw hat (and usually smoking a clay pipe) should be called Weary Waddles; whilst the other, who was tall and thin, with white goatee beard, white frocked coat and hillbilly hat, should be known as Tired Timmy. They first appeared on the front cover of ILLUSTRATED CHIPS No. 298 (New Series) 16th May 1896, in an adventure entitled 'Innocents of the River.' There, was of course, no account as to how the pair had become tramps in the first place - except a brief mention by one of them of the other's days at Oxford!

A few weeks later, however, in Issue No. 310 the names were changed to Weary Willie and Tired Tim, as it was considered these were better and slipped more easily off the tongue. The success of Tom Browne's creations was instant and enormous. Such was the popularity of this pair of quaint rascals that from their first appearance in every third issue they quickly became a regular front page feature. It has been reported that in those days of the halfpenny paper and comic "boom" they had a circulation of over 600,000 weekly - and above all a net profit of over £25,000 a year. (Approx. £100,000 today). This made it urgently required for other comic editors also to have comic tramps featured on their front pages, but although there were many imitators of Tom Browne's style none of them could wholly ever capture it, consequently he had the market at his mercy. At one period he was turning out no less than seven sets of six drawings apiece for the weekly comic papers. Strangely enough, however, although Tom Browne created other tramps such as Slim Jim and Fat Freddy - also called Freddy Pie-Face - none of them ever caught on with the public as did the famous pair in CHIPS.

In 1898, the companion comic paper THE WONDER thought up the novel way of presenting Weary Willie and Tired Tim - not as a rival to CHIPS - but by having their sons instead! After all, who was not to know that they might become just as famous as their fathers? And so they duly appeared in comic strip form. Little Willie and Tiny Tim were extensively advertised as commencing in THE WONDER issue dated No. 284, 9th July, 1898. "Willie," murmured Tired Tim with a smirk, in this issue of THE WONDER, "our sons are CHIPS of the old block. Well, boys, are you going to join your honourable parents, or would you rather strike out for yourselves?" "Please Pa," crooned Little Willie, "we'd

rather strike - Whatho!" "Yes'm," lisped **Tiny Tim**, "but we'll be on our own - we've had some of your advice and it hurts." And so the sons of two famous fathers had their own adventures each week. But after a run of a year the last strip portraying them, showed a policeman leading them off to "chokey" - from which (unlike their famous parents) they were never presumably released to appear in further adventures!

Meanwhile the adventures of Weary Willie and Tired Tim continued to appear weekly in CHIPS. Apart from Tom Browne many 'ghost' artists had portrayed the famous pair from time to time - in slightly different form and variations of dress, and introducing minor characters such as Gussy the flea (as large as a dog - and how the lovable Hamilton's Gussy would have been horrified to have a flea named after him!), a baby elephant, and a talking parrot. But about 1900 Tom Browne, who had steadily made quite a name for himself in other fields and was now a recognised black-and-white artist and painter with some repute (with pictures hung at the Royal Academy) decided to terminate his work in the comic paper field and concentrate on better things. It was also generally known that the continual "grind" of supplying six or seven sets weekly of comic adventures caused him even to dream about them! In short Weary Willie and Tired Tim with other comic characters had simply got on his nerves!

It has been extremely difficult to name the immediate successor to Tom Browne. As already mentioned, many 'ghost' artists had drawn the strips at odd times when he was ill or otherwise unable to do so, and these illustrators had included Val Reading, Arthur Clarke and C. H. Chapman (who both, of course, illustrated Billy Bunter), Phil Swinerton and Arthur White. Up to the first World War all these artists, plus A. B. Payne (of Pip, Squeak and Wilfred fame), Fred Bennett, had also drawn Weary Willie and Tired Tim at various periods.

The end of the 1914-18 war saw a big change in the format of many of the early comics. Up to that time they had been intended for the adult market and had indeed contained many fine serials - much re-read today by collectors; but now the contents were aimed at the juvenile reader. About this time another artist, H. P. Jenner (called Arthur) took over completely the Weary Willie and Tired Tim comic sets and he continued them right up till 1926. Richard (Dick) Newton Chance, son of a famous theatre critic, and father of John Newton Chance (John Drummond the Sexton Blake author) was editor of the main Penny Comics then, and he styled himself 'Cornelius Chips' in his editorials, as well as relating at times the amusing adventures of the famous tramps.

Percy Cocking, a well known artist, took over from 'Arthur' Janner, and was obviously the most successful artist since Tom Browne himself; for he portrayed the two tramps continuously without a break on the front page for over 27 years - in fact, right up till the very end.

What wonderful adventures Weary Willie and Tired Tim had in this period! This was of course my own boyhood, and I can still remember going down our local market place to buy and exchange comics to read of their adventures. More often than not they ended up in prison, always being released in time for the next week's adventure. They received large bags of money as rewards, spending the lot on mammoth feeds in luxury hotels with beautiful girls. Being chased by outraged cooks, who found their pies missing from the window ledges. Mayors presenting Weary Willie and Tired Tim with silver cups for races won with trickery most of the time. Getting the best of bruisers, and dudes, and dandies. Those were the good old days, and probably today most of the themes would be considered corny, but we simply loved them. Many of the plots were editorially suggested, and it's astonishing how a short joke could be spread into twelve picture strips to form a most amusing story theme. e.g.

Editorial theme: The Tramps are selling newspapers in the street and shouting out 'Great paper swindle.' Man buys paper, and exclaims - "Bah!" after reading the paper quickly - "this is yesterday's paper." Say Weary Willie and Tired Tim running away quickly, "Yes, that is the great Swindle."

The coming of the second World War saw the closing down of many of the weekly comics, but CHIPS, probably because of its high circulation, was able to continue, though it only appeared every two weeks, still drawn of course by Percy Cocking. It was not until this date that the first CHIPS ANNUAL appeared which had as its main characters Weary Willie and Tired Tim. But this only ran for three issues until 1941. For some unknown reason it did not catch on.

The gradual decline of the two tramps started after the end of the last war, when the old style presentation of comic humour was considered outdated for the new generation of readers, by the powers concerned. Tom Browne, the creator of Weary Willie and Tired Tim had died way back in 1910 aged only 38, and had never lived to see his characters become almost a national institution. Strangely enough all the other artists have also passed on with the exception, of course, of Mr. C. H. Chapman, and the reader can gather the fantastic amount of research it has taken to compile this article in the circumstances.

The final issue of CHIPS was dated 12th September, 1953, and it had a grand total of 3,003 issues, including six of the first series in 1890. That grand old man of the stage, the late Bransby Williams, once said in an article in the NEWS OF THE WORLD....

"Death from natural causes," states the foreman of the jury, Yes, but from what cause? That was the question I asked when I read that never again would a schoolboy be seen reading a copy of CHIPS. Through most of my 83 years, generations of boys have grown up with them, and although the memory of Weary Willie and Tired Tim may be assured of immortality, nothing remains but the inquest and the verdict."

The very last illustration of Weary Willie and Tired Tim (in CHIPS No. 2997) had the following caption underneath;

"You're the funniest customers I've ever seen," Murgatroyd Mump the Millionaire roared. "You can stay here for as long as you like and the very best of luck to you both," which is all we can say, isn't it?

It certainly is, and as Weary Willie himself says: "This looks a job for life." Surely no better ending - and happier landing - for the famous lovable pair of tramps after 57 years of wanderings and adventures in the pages of CHIPS.

FOR EXCHANGE: First Large Series LEES, 17, 18, 19, 25, 27, 29, 60, 63, 65, 66, 67, 73, 75, 81, 84. Small 543. GEMS 1559, 1579, 1580, 1582, 1585, 1589. FILM FUN 1024, 1939. GREYFRIARS SCHOOLBOYS OWN 85.

WANTED: MAGNETS 808, 809, 826, 843, 899, 961, 963, 1005, 1011, 1013, 1027, 1028, 1035, 1072, 1078. SCHOOLBOYS OWNS, ROOKWOOD, 174, 170, 182, 198, 202, 206, 220, 284, 308, 341. ST. FRANKS 285, 288, 300, 303, 306, 309, 312, 318, 336, 345, 366, 369, 372, 375, 405, 408. OLD KINEMA KOMICS, FILM FUNS.

THOMPSON, 53 WALLASEY PARK, BELFAST 14.

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BILL LOFTS REPLIES TO CRITICS

In reply to Messrs. Sutton and Crollie who have commented in recent issues of the Digest concerning my article in last year's Annual, I do not question the internal evidence they offer. I can only say that my list of substitute writers in the Magnet was compiled from the official records of the time. I have no doubt that Messrs. Sutton and Crollie are right - and I also am right.

In those days, the closing stages of the war and the time immediately following the end of the war, there were many apparent anomalies in the A.P. records, but I believe the explanation in this case is simple. It is known that editor Pentelow was somewhat, shall we say, eccentric in his presentation of some of the stories - he would insert items of his own even in the work of Charles Hamilton.

The most feasible explanation, in the case of stories quoted by Ron Crollie, is that the editor had some indifferent stories sent to him from various sources. Out of his own pocket, he probably paid small sums for these stories. He then turned over this indifferent material to one or the other of his assistants to knock into shape, more or less. Finally, the story was published, and Pentelow was paid for it. This is, of course, to some extent guesswork, but it is founded on a keen study of conditions in the editorial office at that time. It explains why a story may show none of Pentelow's style, and yet he may be shown as having been paid for it in the records.

It should be added that though a few irregularities of this kind may occur in my list, the majority of the stories credited to him were actually written by him.

Even coming to the present day, I can reveal an example of how several authors can have a hand in one story. The story in Sexton Blake Library No. 523, entitled "Murder by Proxy," was written by M. Marquis, B. Hopkins, Arthur MacLean, and W. Howard Baker - and was published under the name of "Richard Williams."

* * * * *

GEMS OF HAMILTONIA (No. 3, New Series)

There was a wild, discordant shriek from the darkness below, and with a sudden gasp the juniors turned and fled, Blake with the rest.

They scrambled out of the stairway, and into the ruins above, the lantern knocking against a fragment of masonry, and going out.

"Wun for it!" gasped D'Arcy.

And they tore across the ruins towards the quadrangle.

Outside the limits of the old chapel Blake called a halt. The other fellows

reluctantly stopped.

"Pway come on, deah boy!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"We -- we haven't finished our prep, you know," said Digby feebly.

"I've got to feed Towser, too," said Herries.

"Faith, and I've got a letter to write to me grandmother," muttered Reilly.

Blake did not move.

"What did you fellows bolt for?" he demanded.

"Well, you bolted, too."

"I just followed to bring you back," said Blake cautiously.

"Oh, rats!"

"Yaas, wathah, wats! You wan like anything!"

"Well, I'm not running any further," said Blake resolutely. "I tell you it must be a jape, and very likely the bounders, whoever they are, are watching us all the time. Nice set of asses we shall look!"

"Weally, Blake --"

"I'm going back," said Blake determinedly.

"Blake, old man --"

"Blake, deah boy --"

"Remember the prep --"

Jack Blake snorted, and marched back towards the crypt, lighting the lantern again to show the way.

"We can't desert the silly ass!" muttered Digby. "Come on!"

(There will be a special competition in a few months' time in connection with this present series of Gems of Hamiltonia. Watch for future announcements.)

CONCERNING THE ORIGIN OF GREYFRIARS AND ST. JIM'S * By D. R. Spiers

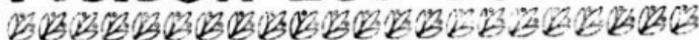
Towards the end of the second World War, while travelling back from leave to a military base in Hampshire, I left the London train at Reading, in Berkshire, with over two hours to wait for my next connection, which time I decided to spend in exploring the town. Leaving the station and walking down Friar Street, I came upon a Church bearing the well-remembered name of Greyfriars; reading the large board outside, I learned that it was built in 1285 by the Franciscans, was surrendered to Henry VIII at the Dissolution, and since then had served in turn as Guildhall, poorhouse, school and gaol before being restored in 1863 to its present use as a church of the English Order. After exploring the deserted buildings adjoining the Church, and in spite of a great deal of very wishful thinking, I concluded that it must be just coincidence and, though rather reluctantly, dismissed it from mind.

That was seventeen years ago. Recently, after many travels, I returned to live in Hampshire, within easy distance of the Berkshire border and some fifteen miles from the town of Reading, where, in spite of many delays and setbacks, I have been working for some time on an attempt to produce an accurate scale-map of Greyfriars School and the surrounding districts; this to fulfil a long-outstanding ambition. Progress has been sure but very, very slow; i had got as far as an

actual location for the fictional Pegg Bay at Pegwell Bay in east Kent (suspected after correspondence with the late Frank Richards), and did in fact produce a rough provisional map, based on the data so far obtained, but was far from satisfied owing to the difficulty in linking up the coastal and inland areas. Mr. Gill's letter in the April issue of the C.D. seemed to be a pointer in the right general direction, and did at least serve in confirming two points on which I was already reasonably sure, (a) that the map in the Autobiography was incorrect, and (b) that Pegwell Bay, as stated above, was the actual location for Pegg Bay. Incidentally, Mr. Gill was quite right in questioning the orientation of the Autobiography map; this map, which is a copy of the one originally shown in Magnet 1672 of 2/3/1940, is quite inaccurate and must be very misleading to many students.

My wife, who has the happy knack of finding odd things I need, unknowingly gave me my next lead; on returning from a visit to Reading, she remarked that she had found some very old buildings near the centre of the town and thought they would be of interest to me. They were, indeed, for they proved to be the ruins of the old Abbey of Reading, a Benedictine monastery dating back to 1121, and, still more surprising, they were just a very short distance from the Greyfriars Church which I had found by chance in 1946. Older readers of red Magnet days may remember several references to the 'old Abbey of Greyfriars.' Also on this site is another church (St. Laurence), also dating from 1121, with a tower which is very similar to that shown in some of the old Greyfriars illustrations; an area which was formerly the outer courtyard of the Abbey (complete with fountain); the buildings of St. James's Church and School; and the prison behind the Abbey ruins, which is situated exactly where Herr Hosenblum's Academy was, again according to early red Magnet stories. I think, however, that the final discovery was the most significant of all; browsing through a local second-hand bookshop, I came upon an old print copy showing the Abbey and district as it was, including the nearby Thames together with some of its many islands. Comparing this illustration (and local Ordnance Survey maps) with data and maps collected from Magnets and Holiday Annuals for my own rough maps, the result was rather startling. However, personal opinions apart, I am not rash enough to state that this area, in conjunction with the Kent area, is definitely the original location of Greyfriars and/or St. Jim's (in part), for such a statement would need much more in the nature of proof than I can put forward at this stage. Nevertheless, I am sure that there are far too many points of similarity here for any explanation (continued on page 26)..

Nelson Lee Column



CONDUCTED BY JACK WOOD

Obviously, my first thoughts this month must be to wish all my readers a very Happy and Prosperous New Year, coupled with the thought that it will be 70 years ago next September 19th, that Nelson Lee first made his debut in *The Marvel*. To run, in one publication or another, for nearly 40 years - a proud record!

And now, from nostalgia to more mundane concerns. I see that in the latest admirable C.D. Annual that Vernon Lay is comparing the *Castleton Twins* series by E. S. Brooks with an earlier story in *The Boys Friend Library*, 'Scorned by the School' and 'The Cad of the School.' These, he suggests, had been thought to be by L. J. Beeston, but they were, of course, reprints of *Dreadnought* serials by Brooks under the name of Comrade. *Twins* were a popular feature of several plots by Brooks, and other writers, for many years.

Neil Beck in his review of *Some Christmas Lees* in the same Annual suggests that 1918 was a "missing" year for seasonable fare. Not so, of course, for it was in this year that Jack Grey took some of his friends to his new-found home at *Grey Towers* (in Berkshire, I believe) at the invitation of his father, Sir Crawford Grey. The former Boy from *Bermondsey* found plenty of thrills in a typical Brooksian Christmas of snow, ghosts and villainy.

Continuing my additions and amendments to Bob Blythe's comprehensive guide to the realms of Brooksiana. On pages 44 and 45, we should add *Conquest in the Underworld* (1962) and *County Down for Conquest* (1963) to the novels by Berkeley Gray, and *The Body in the Boot* (1963) and *Murder with a Kiss* (1963) to those by Victor Gunn.

In the list of *Conquest* novels, I would suggest that *Six Feet of Dynamite* is most probably the developed novel form of the story *One Man Blitzkreig* promised for No. 590 of *The Thriller*, but apparently never published there. The *Conquest* yarn *Mr. Ball of Fire* is an almost word-for-word re-hash of the last St. Frank's serial to be published - *Black Hand at St. Frank's* which ran in *The Gem*.

In the Victor Gunn novels, Ironsides of the Yard would appear to be a reprint of Thriller 556, while Nice Day for a Murder is a repeat of The Fatal Wager (NLL 2nd New Series No. 10) and Dead Man's Warning comes from the opening theme of the Dacca the Dwarf series in the 2nd New Series NLL.

Regarding the information concerning St. Frank's on page 47, the headmaster's name should read "Malcolm" Stafford, while Dr. Morrison Nicholls should come between his name and that of Nelson Lee. Mr. Clifford, in his time a Franciscan Larry Lascelles or Dicky Dalton, should be deleted as he was replaced years ago by Mr. Arthur Blake and the various football coaches.

On Page 48, in Study F, Dodd's Christian name is Jerrold (not Gerald). In the Ancient House Remove studies, K, L, M and N were empty, and so are X, Y and Z in the West House.

And that's enough for now. At a future date it may be possible to detail the originals for the Gerald Swan Library stories of Westchester and Whitelands (Jack Cook sorted those out some years ago) and also to cross-check the Boys Realm authorships. As well as completing gaps in the Conquest and Ironsides series before 1950.

Again, all the best for 1964 and happy reading.

CONCERNING THE ORIGIN OF GREYFRIARS & ST. JIM'S (continued from p.24)..

on the grounds of coincidence alone, remembering also Frank Richards' love of the Thames and Mr. Chapman's association with the district.

In closing, I may add that I can find no indication of an alternative location in the Kennet valley area, as suggested by Mr. Gill, though it is possible that there may be a connection there with St. Jim's.

WANTED: Magnets Nos. 829, 873, 875, 882, 884, 888. S.O.L. No. 60.

DR. R. WILSON, 100, BROOMFIELD ROAD, GLASGOW N.1.

NEW BUNTER SHOW HITS BULLSEYE (from p. 32) of the Famous Five. From the stalls, if you glimpse him, you realise that it's Billy Bunter's grandfather in disguise. This is a cash-hit show!!!

BILLY BUNTER MEETS MAGIC is playing daily at 2.30 at the Shaftesbury Theatre 11 January 18th. Don't miss it, and please shout "Hallo, old man" to Eric Fayne before you pass into the bright lights of the West End of London.

In next month's issue of COLLECTORS' DIGEST, Eric Fayne contributes an article "WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO BE A MINNOW AMONG THE WHALES IN THE BUNTER SHOW."

News from the Clubs

MIDLAND

Meeting held 26th November, 1963:

There were apologies from Ted Davey and Gerald Price and as John Tomlinson could not get away, the attendance was down to eleven members. The quiz prepared by Jack Corbett was one of his trickiest. Thirteen items and the most anyone could get right was four. The prize for the winner (Jack Bellfield) will be awarded at the Christmas meeting. Such was the first item. The Collectors Item was Monster Library No. 1 (November 1925). A fine mint copy containing the reprints of the Summer Holiday Series (The Treasure Hunt). The Collectors Item bearing the exact date of the meeting was Magnet No. 1606 (26/11/38) exactly twenty five years old. One of the famous Gilbert Tracy series. Norman Gregory introduced a discussion dealing with the relative merits of barring outs as compared with school versus village (town) rivalry, in other words "Town versus Gown". Warren Bell and P.G. Wodehouse were more for the "Town and Gown" idea though Frank Richards showed an overwhelming fondness for barring outs. An extract from the Daily Telegraph announced the death at 100 years old of Rev. John Kearns who quelled the last known barring out at a public school. Ray Bennett gave a talk on the various and varied items of "tuck" most favoured by the characters of the different school stories. From the spartan menu of meals in "Hall" so much hated and despised by Bunter (and others) he passed on to tuck shop fare and gradually to the wonderful Christmas meals we had at Wharton Lodge and Eastwood House. We enjoyed this though it made most of us a trifle peckish. - As Bunter would have remarked, 'we hadn't had anything since tea.' The Library raffle was won this week by Win Partridge whose luck seems to be changing just a little. The evening finished with a reading by Madge Corbett.

HARRY BROSTER Secretary.

MERSEYSIDE

Meeting held Sunday, December 12th:

For our Christmas meeting we had a full house, and we were pleased to see again Frank Unwin, after his long absence through illness, and Jim Walsh. Jim may miss other meetings for domestic and business reasons but we can always depend upon him for Christmas. Armed with the usual bottle of wine, he arrived to perform what must by now be his own special privilege of toasting absent friends, and the health of the club. It is on occasions like this that we would like to have with us once again such stalwarts as Frank Case, Don Webster, Ernie Stein, and that grand old man, who unfortunately is no longer with us, Mr. Switzer (The Dick Turpin of the O.B.B.C.)

Among the correspondence received by Norman Pragnell was one from David Hobbs of Seattle, U.S.A. He has asked us to make a tape recording of one of our meetings. This is rather a tall order, but at our next meeting we will discuss the possibility of making some recordings.

We were pleased to receive a Christmas card from Bette Pate and members of the Australian Club.

Alf Hanson, Manchester, sent us two excellent drawings, one of "Nipper being sacked in disgrace" and the other of "Sports Day at Greyfriars." In November Alf also sent us a drawing of "Plot Night at St. Franks," to which I referred in the November report, but which, although posted in time for publication, was lost in the post. As I said then, some of us had had the privilege of seeing Alf's work at the Manchester meeting and I felt then, as no doubt did many others, that the quality of it was at least the equal of the best which ever appeared in the old papers.

We had two quizzes, one by Norman Pragnell and one by Bill Galley. The first was won yet again by George Riley (I think he is becoming a case for the Monopolies Commission) with Frank Unwin and Jack Morgan sharing second place, and the second was won by John Farrell with Norman as runner up.

Bert Hamblett very kindly donated a 1929 Holiday Annual to the library which is now beginning to look healthier, and it was also decided to purchase the four S.O.L.s. offered for sale by Eric Fayne in the December C.D.

I would like to take this opportunity of extending best wishes for the New Year from Merseyside to all our friends in the English Clubs and to our overseas friends in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the U.S.A.

Next meeting Sunday, January 12th.

BILL WINDSOR

LONDON

Hume House, resplendent with its newly decorated wood grained walls, took on a happy atmosphere of St. Frank's College and this tended to make Lordship Lane, East Dulwich more like Grays Inn Road. The reason for this atmosphere was the attendance, as guest of honour, of Edwy Searles Brooks, famous Nelson Lee author. A record attendance was present.

Bill Loft's gave a reading from the Fleetway House magazine feature "Famous Characters of the Amalgamated Press." This time the subject was topical, Edward Oswald Handforth. Mr. Brooks held the stage for the most of the evening and answered numerous questions about Nelson Lee, Sexton Blake etc. He indulged in many reminiscences and memories of his connection with the Amalgamated Press and continued right up to date with his Berkeley Grey and Victor Gunn writings. The autographs he signed were very numerous. Amazing how the time passed, there was a long interval whilst the company enjoyed typical Yuletide fare ably served up by the ladies and prepared by Josie Packmen. Even during this interval there were several informal chats going on between Mr. Brooks and his many admirers. It was a meeting that will remain long in the memories of all present. Both the Nelson Lee and Hamiltonian librarians Bob Blythe and Roger Jenkins were very busy loaning out books and papers for Christmas reading.

Don Webster proposed votes of thanks to the hospitable Packmans and to Bob Blythe for his efforts in getting Mr. Brooks to attend this memorable Christmas meeting.

Next meeting at 71, Olive Road, Cricklewood, London, N.W. 2, on Sunday, January 19th. Kindly advise Bill Norris if attending either by letter or phone GLadstone 8148.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

NORTHERN

On Saturday, December 14th, we had our Christmas Party, the 14th since the Club was founded in 1950 and, although two or three regulars were unavoidably absent, twenty of us assembled in anticipation of an enjoyable evening. Fortunately the weather was favourable, as, although cold enough, there was no sign of fog, so those who had travelled from Manchester, York, Mansfield, and other places outside the Leeds area were not worried about travelling conditions.

At 4.45 we all tucked into the tea spread before us, and a very fine feed it was. The ladies, bless them, excelled themselves this year. Library business followed, and then it was a case of fun and games, all formal business being set aside for the occasion.

First, to test our wits, we had 'Out of the Bag,' a series of questions on the hobby and general subjects. There were two teams, under Geoffrey Wilde and Frank Hancock, and if a competitor, or any of his team-mates, could not answer a question, it was passed over to the other side, who got double points for a correct answer. Geoff's team won a close contest, their star performer being Ron Hodgson with 16 points, while Bill Williamson scored a similar number for Frank's team. As usual, the Club provided a number of valuable and useful prizes, and these two had the first choice - but there was a prize for everybody.

An excursion into the drama followed, but it wasn't a kitchen sink affair this time, the title being 'Dire Distress,' a tragedy of Big Hall, by William Wibley, which in fact was taken from Magnet No. 1655. Geoffrey Wilde, complete with mortar-board, and with Frank Hancock's stick borrowed for the occasion, made a very imposing Dr. Locke, and Gerry Allison, with makeshift whiskers, made a good Gosling whose function was to hoist the unhappy Nugent (Alf. Hanson) for a flogging. Other Greyfriars characters were played by various of our male members in this short and very amusing effort.

Then we had supper, after which Geoffrey Wilde proposed a vote of thanks to the ladies for providing such good fare.

To wind up the evening we had a puzzle by Frank Hancock, 'Hidden Names.' A page of prose, with a number of words missing, was given to each competitor, who had to fill in the words, and these, read in conjunction with what went before or after, would reveal the surnames of 24 Hamilton characters. Only Gerry Allison got all 24; Geoff. Wilde being next with 22, Jack Wood and Molly Allison being joint third with 17.

By now it was 9.45, and our very enjoyable Christmas Party came to an end; a fitting climax for the Club to the year 1963, which, in spite of two or three sad losses, has on the whole been a happy and successful one.

Next meeting, Saturday, 11th January.

F. HANCOCK Hon. Sec.

Yours Sincerely

Interesting Items from
the Editor's Letter-Bag

LEE ROWLEY (Paris): I have been reading with renewed interest the Bunter the Billionaire series. Perhaps I have discovered the magnificent mansion in the Champs Elysees that Jarvis had leased in Bunter's name; perhaps I have found the bar "Le Chat Noir" where Horace James Coker had his "argument" with Tiger Bronx. Alas, the former is now a newspaper office; the latter a strip-tense cabaret. But imagination coupled with nostalgia can do wonders, and the series which depicted Bunter as a fat pig in clover is now a very real one to me.

LURIE SUTTON (Orpington): I was saddened to read of the passing of Mrs. Harrison.

I only knew her from the Surbiton meetings, but, as you so truly say, she was indeed a gentlewoman. It seems significant that D'Arcy and Tom Merry should have been her favourite characters, for she possessed the finest qualities of each - the noble character of Gussy and the sunshine smile of the Shell captain. If she leaves sadness on earth, there will surely be joy beyond at the uniting of sister Una and brother Charles.

DAVID HOBBS (Seattle): Quoting from Magnet 1453. Bunter: "I suppose we shall keep up some style in Courtman Square."

"We're not going anywhere near Courtman Square. We're going to a place called Polpelly, on the coast of Devonshire," said Vernon-Smith.

Have many other readers called your attention to this?

(Frank Richards created Polpelly. Mr. Maurice McLoughlin has purposely centred his play there in memory of the Polpelly series of nearly thirty years ago. We believe the gesture will make happy large numbers of Frank Richards' old boys. -ED.)

ALAN STEWART (Bermuda): On the strength of the Greyfriars stories in LOOK & LEARN I took out a 6-months' subscription and looked forward eagerly to the first issue. What a disappointment! The Bunter story was placed on the back page - and oh, the tiny print! All would have been overlooked if the story had come up to expectation. Thank goodness the illustrations are genuine. When one thinks of all the wonderful tales Hamilton wrote, then to be served up with sub stories. Why must it always be Bunter? I'm sure the modern generation would enjoy a real meaty Greyfriars yarn - Quelch versus Wharton, for example. Why don't you approach the editor as our worthy representative?

(Oh, sir, we wrote to the editor, but he did not reply. Years ago I wrote to editors regularly, and always had a jolly reply. Times have changed, sir. To-day they spell Courtesy with a small 'e'. -ED.)

BEN WHITER (London): What a grand surprise to see Henry Webb's wonderful drawing of Pip, Squeak, and Wilfred, the erstwhile famous Daily Mirror pets of the 1920's. Many thanks for an excellent Christmas Number.



NEW BUNTER SHOW HITS BULLSEYE



BILLY BUNTER MEETS MAGIC is a glorious romp for the young in heart of any age. Gay, sparkling, joyous - there is something for everyone in this grand show. Every member of the company is happy to be appearing with the most famous schoolboys in the world, and the happiness of the entire company gets infectiously right across the footlights (actually there are no footlights on this fine modern stage) into the audience. It is the thrill of a lifetime to hear the shrieks of laughter from the juvenile (and not-so-juvenile) audience. The essence of the production is speed; it moves at an incredible rate. Any old boy who looks down his nose and tries to find fault with a show like this should be given a chairman's flogging on the third Sunday of the month and write out, five hundred times, "I must not be an old curmudgeon."

The story is flimsy, yet holds the interest. The Greyfriars chums are due to spend Christmas at Polpelly (top marks and a bonus to Maurice McLoughlin for introducing this heart-warming touch.) Polpelly was the scene of one of Frank Richards' greatest Christmas series. Hundreds and hundreds of sentimental adult hearts must leap exultantly at the Shaftesbury Theatre when Polpelly comes so naturally into the conversation. The show opens on the last day of term in the form-room at Greyfriars,

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condition.

LOT 107 - Book "Autobiography of
Frank Richards" Oct. 1953.
Excellent condition.

Executrix: Mrs. I. Carpenter,
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NEW BUNTER SHOW HITS BULLSEYE (continued from page 30)

and a mysterious visitor finds his way into the scene. He likes to call himself Captain Hartley-Wright, Mr. Quelch thinks he is Mr. Sharpe, and later on we hear him called Higgins, yet all the while he bears a most striking resemblance to David Nixon, that chap we all love so much on television. At any rate, even at the start, he succeeds in making a square pig look round.

However, the Famous Five do not reach their intended destination. Their motor coach is wrecked in the snow near Polpelly, and the chums find themselves in a mysterious old mansion on the Cornish coast. The hall of the house is replete with oil paintings, secret panels, and a chest which squeaks violently when it is opened. The owner of the house is a fiery old gentleman with a gouty leg and a wheel-chair, and we suspect him as soon as we see him. Our suspicion hardens when we note that the gouty leg is a false appendage, and the old gentleman flashes light signals from his windows. And where does Billy Bunter come into all this? He's there - an uninvited guest - don't you fret!

This year, there is an exceptionally strong cast. As always, the acting is impeccable. In fact, it is magnificent. Never for one moment is the smallest bit of action allowed to approach caricature. Lesser actors might so easily put on an indifferent performance, a condescending performance, which would ruin the show. It never happens here. The sterling efforts of the Bunter cast could not be finer if they were performing the most dramatic play from Shakespeare.

David Nixon - lovable, gentle, charming, and brilliant - is a great asset to the show. With a world-famous man in the cast, there was always the possibility that he might steal the show, so that it was really a Bunter show in name only. But not with a man, with a star, so great as David Nixon. He gives an altogether delightful performance, fitting into his part like a hand in a well-fitting glove. It is only in the glorious finale that he makes the stage his own, and produces from nowhere the most fascinating, the most lovely family of rabbits which you ever saw.

What can we say of Peter Bridgemont as "Billy Bunter"? He is utterly superb. There is no other word for his performance. The agility, the verve, the breathless acrobatics of this amazing young man have to be seen to be believed. His energy is terrific. How he still comes up smiling after two hours of it is one of the miracles of the Shaftesbury Theatre.

And what a pillar of strength is Michael Anthony! Those of us who have seen previous Bunter shows have ceased to marvel at his versatility. Last year he was brilliant as a clown, this year he hides his own fine personality and good looks under the guise of an old man in a wheel-chair. He never puts a foot wrong, and in a brief duel with Billy Bunter it is clear that both could put up a great performance in "The Three Musketeers." A triumph of stagecraft, this duel. But, ye gods, how these two work! It's terrific.

Clement McCallin appears for the first time as Mr. Quelch and gives a tip-top performance. Henry Moxon gives an excellent cameo as a Cornish coastguard, and it is a joy to hear the Cornish brogue come rolling off his tongue. The Famous Five, as a team, are perhaps not quite so good as last year, but nevertheless they are more than adequate and do a rattling good job. Peter Sanders as Bob Cherry, and David Griffin as Johnny Bull are back from last year's production, they are splendidly cast and give bright, convincing portrayals. Knocking the daylight out of the piano is our own Eric Payne. Resplendent in blazer and school tie he might, from the circle, pass at a pinch as one

(contd. page 26)