

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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CAMPING and OUTDOOR NUMBER!

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The MODERN BOY

EVERY MONDAY
WITH PERRY MARSHALL
NO. 225
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Collectors' Digest

FOUNDED in 1946 by HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 19

No. 225

SEPTEMBER 1965

Price 2s. Od.



Here's Wharton, the junior skipper of games.

A captain admired by all readers. Though slooters and frowlers may call him hard names,

He's always the keenest of leaders.

The captain must toss before cricket begins,

For that is a duty most pressing; A lot may depend on the way the coin spins—

Here's wishing him luck in his guessing!



DISTRIBUTION

Once again we return to the problem of distribution, and the difficulties which hopeful readers experience in obtaining copies of books which, one assumes, the publishers wish to sell.

I have just been browsing over a *Girls' Friend*, published as long ago as 1910. The editor was advertising his new paper "The *Girls' Home*." He said: "There are now huge stacks of the *Girls' Home* on the counter of every newsagent in the country."

And, of course, there were. For the simple reason that periodicals were supplied on a system of sale or return. The giant circulations of long ago were due to the fact that periodicals were set out attractively on counters and were thus easily obtainable.

Nowadays, so far as weekly magazines are concerned, it should be easy to obtain them by ordering them in advance, if one bothers to take the trouble. But even when the *S.B.L.* was put out every month by Fleetway, it was often impossible to obtain it.

Paperbacks are distributed under a different system. Newsagents and bookshops order a quantity from wholesalers, merely stating the class of reading they require. Titles and authors seem to count for little. The wholesalers cannot be bothered to select some special title which a customer may want.

Reader Carbin of Rugby writes as follows: "I ordered the new Sexton Blake series in January from the W.H. Smith branch in the town. The first six I received on time, but since then - no S.B.L's. I call each week but am told they know nothing about further copies. There are a number of newsagents in the town, and one very big bookseller with a large display, but never a Sexton Blake Library anywhere."

Reader Parsons of Tranmere tried all over the place to get the Armada Bunter Books. He was told that the wholesalers had never heard of them. In July, Mr. Parsons, in despair, wrote to me, and I was able to supply his needs.

The experiences of Messrs. Carbin and Parsons are not unique. Their disappointment finds parallel all over the country. Not a week passes without my receiving a letter from some reader who has met with similar frustration. This year I have posted off hundreds of S.B.L's and Armada Books to readers who could not buy them locally.

In our view it is a disgraceful state of affairs. It is high time that British publishers and wholesalers put their own houses in order.

THE FINAL BUNTER STORY

Most of us will recall the enthusiastic excitement with which we looked forward to the return of Greyfriars in 1947. When "Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School" appeared, perhaps we felt just the slightest twinge of disappointment that the author did not seem to have that sense of occasion which we were experiencing. But as the years crept by, almost unnoticed, most of us have loved these books, and value them.

It has been a remarkable saga, sparked off and maintained for several years by Charles Skilton, a publisher who saw that a great gift was lying dormant in the early days after the war. Let us not forget our debt to Charles Skilton as we look back down the years over that long stream of yellow-jacketed volumes which, because the name of Bunter figured in every title, we have come to call collectively "the Bunter books."

It would be idle to suggest that the post-war Greyfriars ever quite equalled the stories of the golden age of the Magnet and the Gem. Charles Hamilton's real forte was the series of great length.

Nevertheless, every one of his post-war Bunters was competent, immensely readable, and contained plenty of excitement.

This month the last of the Bunter series is in the shops, but there is little doubt that the most popular of them will be reprinted again and again and that it will be quite a few years before the familiar jackets disappear entirely.

THE ANNUAL

This month we send you the order forms for Collectors' Digest Annual of 1965. Once again, it is our aim to make this the greatest Annual of them all. It is surely a good aim to have. The Annual will be bringing you a great variety of splendid articles, stories, and pictures to entertain you over the distant festive season. Whether it is the best Annual of the lot for you will depend on your individual taste, but the book will contain something for everyone. Remember, the Annual is unique. In many ways, it is the most remarkable volume in the world today.

On the order form is space for an advertisement, if you feel inclined to insert one. Announcements in the Annual are inexpensive - still only 2d per word. If you like to advertise for your wants or send greetings to your hobby friends, you will be helping towards the heavy production costs of the volume.

Next month I will lift the curtain and tell you of some of the treats in store in the 1965 Collectors' Digest Annual.

THE EDITOR

CAN ANYONE HELP THE LONDON OBBC? - The Hamiltonian library needs the following to complete broken series:-

Magnets: 253. 751. 820-822. 858. 859. 1071.
 1072. 1074. 1075.
Gems: 755. 780.

Offers gratefully received by Roger Jenkins, "The Firs," Eastern Road, Havant, Hants.

WANTED: GEMS up till No. 1379 then 1452, 1512, 1526, 1531. Write with price required to:-

LOFTS, 56, SHERINGHAM HOUSE, LONDON, N.W.1.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS: Jim Cook's permanent address is Flat 2, No. 4, Springleigh Avenue, Mt. Albert, Auckland, New Zealand.

B L A K I A N A

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

SEXTON BLAKE

(Exactly 50 years ago the following verse appeared in the Magnet Library. It was published anonymously, but it is fairly certain that the writer was Mr. G. R. Samways. Whether or not we liked Mr. Samways as a writer of substitute stories, there is no doubt that he was unequalled, down the years, for his contributions in verse.)

Who has not heard of Sexton Blake,
The best detective living,
Before whose presence scoundrels quake
And feel a dread misgiving?
Through his ingenious master-mind
Great issues have arisen,
And rogues of every sort and kind
Have found a path to prison.

From north to south, from east to west,
The great detective travels;
With never-failing skill and zest
Great secrets he unravels.
Affairs of State, of broken vows,
Or any petty meanness,
Are quite sufficient to arouse
His wondrous sense of keenness.

A cheery youth, with heaps of grit,
Clear-headed and persistent,
Who always makes the best of it,
Is Tinker, Blake's assistant.
Through thick and thin, he firmly means
To serve his friend and master;
And many a time he intervenes
To save him from disaster.

(cont'd)..

These two, with Pedro counted in,
Will evermore be famous;
And he who thinks that wrong will win
Is quite an ignoramus.
With grim resolve and iron will
They catch red-handed daily
The candidates for Pentonville,
For Dartmoor, and Old Bailey.

The world applauds you, Sexton Blake!
From strength to strength continue!
Still further captures may you make
Requiring nerve and sinew.
Please carry on! Don't ever stop!
Enthral us, oh, so sweetly!
If you should ever "shut up shop"
We'll pine away completely.

(The Sexton Blake Library is exactly 50 years old this month.)

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JOHN HUNTER: A Tribute - and Memories of a Very Popular Author

By W. O. G. Lofts

Another link with the past has been broken. News of the death of John Hunter was indeed sad for me, as not only was he the very first personality that I met in our hobby, but we became great friends from our very first meeting.

We had unfortunately been out of touch for some time, due to John Hunter's serious illness, which made contact impossible. Ironically enough, I only learned of his death whilst perusing a boys story of his in proof form, which is to appear in a new boys paper entitled "THE RANGER" in the Autumn.

I say this in all sincerity. Were it not for John Hunter's kindness, interest, and enthusiasm for my desire to find out things connected with our hobby, quite likely the name of W. O. G. Lofts might not have appeared in the collecting magazines.

My great interest in Sexton Blake started whilst I was out in the Burma Jungle during the second world war. Returning to England, I read every Blake story I could lay my hands on. Being a very quick reader, I could read easily two complete S.B.Ls. in one evening, so the current issue of two per month, was completely inadequate for my

tastes. The late Bill Martin used to send me small parcels of them from time to time - and whilst staying at a Hotel in Blackpool; he sent me along a parcel of COLLECTORS' DIGESTS which I had never seen before.

I became quite interested in their contents; but I must admit, rather peeved at the comments at times in the BLAKIANA section on the writings of JOHN HUNTER - whom I personally thought was one of the best writers of the current series. BLAKIANA it should be mentioned in the early days, was conducted by a Maurice Bond, and in the writer's opinion he inserted things which most certainly would not have been permitted by Mrs. Packman today.

Criticise an author by all means for what he writes - but to insert such short items as...

"I SEE THAT WASHOUT JOHN HUNTER IS STILL WRITING.

I DO WISH HE WOULD STOP."

I thought was going too far - so putting pen to paper, I wrote to JOHN HUNTER c/o THE EDITOR S.B.L. saying that despite what other readers might think, I personally liked his stories - and I hoped he was not too worried by remarks made by people in COLLECTORS' DIGEST.

On returning to London, I found a lengthy reply from JOHN HUNTER awaiting me. He not only expressed delight in hearing from a reader of his, but confessed that he had never heard of COLLECTORS' DIGEST before. He also, amongst other things, wished to meet me some time, as he wanted to have a long chat with me.

Shortly afterwards, whilst on another weekend holiday at WORTHING, and staying at the BEACH HOTEL - I met JOHN HUNTER for the very first time. My first impression was of a very large man, complete with a Winston Churchill type of floppy hat, twinkling eyes, and a man who soon put you at ease, with his great sense of humour. I must confess that in those days I was a very shy person, and no great shakes at interviewing at all. His interest in CHUMS was tremendous, and his stories of authors, and the current Sexton Blake writers at that time, seemed endless. Not only wishing me to send the COLLECTORS' DIGEST on to him each month, JOHN HUNTER stimulated my interest so much about our hobby, that as mentioned earlier, I doubt if I would have started all my research if it were not for his influence.

Amusing enough, in those days of the Sexton Blake saga (1952) there was as much controversy about the format and policy of the stories as there is today. Maurice Bond, apart from seemingly having a one man vendetta against the writings of JOHN HUNTER, had a great bee in his bonnet on the sudden naming of TINKER as EDWARD CARTER.

JOHN HUNTER was the writer who first used this 'nom de guerre' - and gave me the reasons for using it. As Mr. Hunter did not wish to be drawn into any controversy over the matter, owing to his pressure of writing work, his comments about this, and other hobby matters, have been somewhat suppressed in the past, though he had no objection to me writing about them in later years. So I am betraying no confidences in the circumstances.....

"When I started the first number of the 3rd series Blake's in 1940 with 'Raiders Past' we were told that the Library was in future to become an adult publication gradually through the years - but it must be done slowly. . Regarding our Mr. Carter! I originally used the name as a nom-de-guerre to cover Tinker's identity when staying at hotels in 'enemy territory.' The original Tinker, you know, was what, in those days, was called a street Arab - a ragged little boy with no shoes and stockings. Hence the name. But if you are to bring the Blake saga up-to-date - there just aren't swarms of barefooted ragged children running our streets these days, as there were, tragically enough, then - I write of half a century ago - and thus the original Tinker would be a grotesque unreality if persisted in. After all the editor, has many letters from readers who want to know the real name of Tinker, and if you want to have some intelligence in the S.B.L. you cannot visualise him registering at an hotel baldly as 'Tinker' - though he still can be called the name as a term of intimacy and affection by his closest friends. Keeping up to date, I thought he might as well have a name."

Modesty, was another great factor in John Hunter's character. Derek Adley wrote an article praising his stories and saying he was the best Blake writer. Mr. Hunter replied to me as follows.....

"Mr. Derek Adley says some very nice things about me in the current C.D. and I'd like to thank him for doing so - and disagree. I think that Tony (Anthony) Parsons is far the best Blake man. I see that he mentions that it was Tony Parsons who gave the name of Edward Carter to 'Tinker' - sorry but it was JOHN HUNTER. How well I remember reading in the C.D. of being hauled over the coals for attaching a label to that sacrosanct character !!! Autre temps, autre moeurs.

"I believe I have mentioned it before, but I would like to say what a wonderful publication the COLLECTORS DIGEST is - full of interesting facts and topics - and it is excellently produced. I'm only sorry that I have just not the time to take part in any of its

activities. I have to type off the last five chapters of a Blake story on Sunday - and who says that writing is an easy occupation?"

Later, I used to have lunch with JOHN HUNTER at his home - a beautiful house a few yards from the sea-front in West Worthing. He was very happily married with sons and daughters, and used to keep a large cockatoo that talked in his front room. Before lunch we used to go to the WINE LODGE a large hostelry on the sea-front, where he introduced me to several authors of pre-war days. It was only after several meetings that I realised that he was the double of RICHARD DIX the famous rugged handsome film star of pre-war days.

Probably, one of the most interesting bits of information that JOHN HUNTER ever told me was in fact long before the son of the creator of SEXTON BLAKE was contacted via THE DAILY TELEGRAPH some years ago.

"I believe I told you, that I used to know Harry Blyth, the son of the creator of SEXTON BLAKE, very well. My parents used to live at Broadstairs, and I was always visiting them, and various hostelries in and around the town. In one of them - The Neptune - I saw a white haired man playing that game in which a ball with a long cord is used for the knocking down of miniature skittles, and I got to know him. He seemed to have a chip on his shoulder over his father selling the copyright of Sexton Blake in 1893 for a very low sum - though I don't think anyone could have possibly realised that the character would still be going strong some 60 years later!"

Whilst on the subject of Broadstairs - Mr. John Hunter had this to say about Charles Hamilton...

"The man was a genius, and, with his brilliant brain, no one could really understand why he continued to write for the juvenile market, which was - let's face it - poorly paid in many cases. I never cared much for Bunter and it always has astonished me how the character is easily the most popular today. Personally I liked Tom Merry, the ideal schoolboy, and Hamilton could really write a brilliant story without the fat owl of the remove barging in. Another school story writer who could have gone far as H. Clarke Hook, son of the creator of Jack, Sam, and Pete. He wrote really brilliant school yarns under the name of ROSS HARVEY in CHUMS - a paper which I think the finest ever to appear on the market and which started me off on my career."

Christened ALFRED JOHN HUNTER, his real name, he started writing for CHUMS around 1916 whilst serving in the army in the first world war. He used this name for his first few stories then dropped the

ALFRED as JOHN HUNTER sounded better. His stories became so popular, and so many editors were seeking his services, that work was always plentiful and more than he could cope with. His first contribution for Amalgamated Press was THE BOYS REALM, edited by John Nix Pentelow, whom he called a very nice chap, who gave a young author plenty of help and advice. His stories of Motor-Racing, Football, Sport in general - and almost every other topic under the sun, were very popular with boy readers.

His first Sexton Blake story was written in August 1935 No. 489. (2nd Series) THE CASE OF THE FATAL FILM - and the third story of his Nov. 1936 No. 549 (2nd Series) CROOK CARGO, introduced CAPTAIN DACK. Suck was the striking personality of this character, that I always believed he pushed Sexton Blake somewhat in the background, though Blake always got the credit in the end for solving the case.

John Hunter wrote in all 55 Sexton Blake stories - the last in May 1955 (3rd Series) No. 335 The Mystery of the Vanished Trainer - plus one yarn under the PETER MERITON pen-name, and some of his CAPTAIN DACK yarns were published in book form with the inclusion of Blake.

Good natured, kindly, gentle, (although maybe brutal in some stories), friendly, helpful, and above all giving advice to me on first starting my hobby writings - I shall always be grateful, and remember that big man with a big heart, the one and only JOHN HUNTER.

REVIEW

Richmal Crompton
(Newnes. 10/6)

WILLIAM AND THE POP SINGERS

Though this one is not at the top of the William hit parade, it contains plenty of chuckles, and a new William book is always as welcome as the sun in a wet summer. Perhaps there is just a little too much of the Outlaws and not enough of the old favourites like Ethel, Robert, Mrs. Bott, & Co. But Richmal Crompton is never less than entertaining, and her admirers, their name is Legion, will be delighted to have another William book on their shelves. There are six longish stories of William in this latest volume.

Books and magazines beautifully bound in leather or buckram by expert craftsmen, at reasonable prices. Repairs also carried out.

A. WESSELY, 22 MONMOUTH ROAD, LONDON, W.2. ENGLAND.

HAMILTONIANA

DO YOU REMEMBER?

By Roger M. Jenkins

No. 55 - MAGNET No. 100 - "NUGENT MINOR"

When the Magnet discarded serials towards the end of its career, and the Greyfriars story ran from cover to cover, it was sometimes alleged that the additional length of the Greyfriars story was achieved solely by padding. Whether this is true or not, there is no doubt that the double numbers in the early days were full of good things, and few collectors would like to have had any episodes omitted from the penny number dealing with Dicky Nugent's arrival at Greyfriars.

Charles Hamilton, quite early in his writing career, must have come to the conclusion that what he wanted to portray was human nature in its various facets. He had tried writing science fiction, but soon realised that weird happenings, improbable possibilities, and gimmicks like strange pets and other unusual possessions were not for him. After all, it is human nature alone that has an abiding interest: habits and customs change with the times, but the various types of human beings are always recurring. That is why this Magnet tale of 1910 still retains its fascination today.

Charles Hamilton also probably realised that relatives of leading characters could produce dramatic situations where affection or loyalty could clash with the claims of duty. Marjorie Hazeldene, Wingate minor, and Vi Valence were noteworthy examples of this. Dicky Nugent, of course, was another.

Dicky Nugent was the apple of his mother's eye, the spoilt darling who came to Greyfriars in a sulk, and found indifference or hostility on all sides (except for his elder brother, who spent the rest of his school career worrying about him). Dicky antagonised the fags, who ragged him, and was tricked by Bulstrode and Bunter, and landed in trouble time and time again. Who has not known a similarly indulged and petulant young boy? And who can read the climax of the story without appreciating the touches of human nature so aptly displayed by a master hand? One can tire of reading about trips to the moon, but one can never tire of convincing characterisation, of action and re-action, of a chain of events that flows naturally from one source.

Longinus, a literary critic of some two thousand years ago,

declared that it was of the utmost importance for an author to be able to feel himself into the midst of a situation he was describing. There can be no doubt that Greyfriars really lived for Charles Hamilton, and that the story of the injury Nugent minor inflicted on Wingate, with its unexpected sequel, was described by someone who seemed to be an eye-witness.

The story was reprinted in the 1927 Holiday Annual (one of the best in the sequence) and was there illustrated by C. H. Chapman in his most impressive style. This was undoubtedly one of the most moving of the early Magnet stories, and also an early indication that St. Jim's was not going to have everything its own way in the years to come.

* * * * *

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 91 THE UBIQUITOUS BUNTER

Billy Bunter is not every reader's cup of tea. Most people would agree that Frank Richards overplayed Bunter in the post-war years. Nevertheless, most people enjoy Bunter.

Our Merseyside Club correspondent commented last month that "so far as many of us are concerned, Bunter has never ceased to be detestable."

It was, of course, a biased comment. Four years ago we ran in this magazine a contest to find the most popular character in old boys' fiction. Hundreds voted - and Billy Bunter came second. The great majority of our readers are fond of Bunter. We can be fond of Bunter, yet still agree that he has been overplayed.

Was Bunter the mainstay of Frank Richards' success in the past thirty years? I have no doubt at all that Charles Hamilton himself believed so. I asked him once why he did not occasionally let Bunter take a back seat in a story. He replied: "My publishers insist on Bunter. They want Bunter to figure in every title."

In later years, after Bunter had received so much publicity, that was true I do not doubt. I am not so sure that it was true of the earlier post-war years. It was the farsighted publisher, Charles Skilton, who introduced Charles Hamilton to the world as a writer between stiff covers. It would be interesting to know whether Mr. Skilton actually wanted Bunter stories. Somehow I fancy that he left the choice of style and subject to Charles Hamilton.

There is no doubt at all that reporters and writers of articles plugged Bunter. He received all the publicity. It was not

surprising that the B.B.C. also plugged Bunter, under the circumstances. The sponsors of the stage shows were quite decided that audiences wanted nothing but Bunter.

When everybody and everything was pointing to Bunter as the money-spinner, it is by no means strange that Charles Hamilton came to the same conclusion. He was right about the importance of the title, though it is a question whether Harry Wharton or Greyfriars in a title would not have had equal pull with the name of Billy Bunter.

The manager of Bentall's book department, discussing the Spring Books, told me that the stories with Tom Merry in the titles sold very quickly. Titles like "Down and Out" and "Through Thick and Thin" remained in piles in the shops. I was told exactly the same thing at a big book department in Reading.

Before the war the Amalgamated Press - and, no doubt, Charles Hamilton as well - decided that Billy Bunter was the big attraction of the Magnet, which was sub-titled "Billy Bunter's Own Paper." But twenty years before that, editor Hinton had come to the same conclusion. In 1915 he decided to put "Tom Merry's Weekly" on the market. He changed his mind. He brought out the "Greyfriars Herald" instead. Why? Because he would have Bunter to add spice to the Greyfriars paper.

A few years later, Charles Hamilton, with so many irons in the fire, had to abandon either Greyfriars or St. Jim's. He decided to concentrate on Greyfriars. Fairly obviously because at Greyfriars he had the one whom he considered his star creation.

Ted Davey of Solihull wrote me recently: "To me one thing is clear. The Armadas are only much the same as the previous Bunter Books in essence. We shall not really get vintage Greyfriars as long as Bunter is regarded as the principal character. I would have thought that the Armadas were a splendid opportunity to try and push Bunter out of the limelight to some extent, and thus portray a rather truer picture of the real Greyfriars."

Vintage Greyfriars! But how much Vintage Greyfriars should we find without Bunter playing a fairly major role. Not a lot, I fancy.

The Armadas carried on with the idea that Bunter is the star attraction. Bunter figured in every title. In actual fact, the Professor Sparkinson series was not really a Bunter series at all. Alonzo Todd was the star. Fantastic though it was, it was, in my opinion, a very fine series with exceptional characterisation work. In Armada, it was so heavily pruned that its real worth was lost, but in its day I would have regarded it as Vintage Greyfriars.

The Mauleverer Towers series, with Orris, was certainly Vintage

Greyfriars. There were few better Christmas series than this. Most readers just love Frank Richards' Christmas series, but Billy Bunter played a substantial part in all the best of them. So where do we go from here? True, in Armada, the Mauleverer Towers story was spoiled by bad pruning, and this was due to the fact that it was reprinted from the Schoolboys' Own Library, often notorious for slap-dash cutting. But in its original form it was Frank Richards at his best.

Robert Miller of North London writes me: "I am puzzled by this obsession with Bunter. I have always regarded the Fat Owl with affection and amusement, but a run of 30 and more stiff-cover books of Bunter, and now four more Bunters by Armada, is, I submit, overworking the fat frabjous frump a bit. There are at least 99 other chaps at Greyfriars who deserve the spotlight now and then - not to mention St. Jim's and Rookwood."

Words like those find an echo in all our restless bosoms. I myself hope that the publishers of any future stories will not select only the Bunter starring vehicles, but they certainly cannot find many stories in which he does not play a substantial part. I, personally, think that the word "Greyfriars" in a title would be as effective as the name "Bunter." I also think it unlikely that we can persuade any publisher to accept that view.

In fact, those who decry Bunter are ploughing the sands. For Bunter is Greyfriars. Charles Hamilton made him so. The author believed that he was giving the majority of his readers what they wanted. I daresay he was right.

Let us make no mistake. Plenty of those who decry Bunter do so simply because they are anti-Hamilton. They find Bunter's ample behind an adequate target for a boot - but they would decry any Hamilton character who won such phenomenal success.

Those of us who remember Charles Hamilton with affection should be glad and proud of Bunter. The old fat man is not only the most successful schoolboy in fiction of all time; he is also the world's finest schoolboy character creation. And it is Bunter himself who really suffers most from his own ubiquity.

If, by our carping, we succeed in convincing publishers that we want no more Bunter, (and the same thing applies to some extent to Sexton Blake), he will not be replaced by any other much-loved character of the old days. If we believe that we can replace Bunter with Harry Wharton or Tom Merry or the chums of St. Frank's, I fancy we are backing a very doubtful starter indeed.

CONTROVERSIAL ECHOESNo. 89. WHEN IN DOUBT --

SYD SMYTH: I've always been fond of barring-out series so long as they do not go to wild extremes, as you point out yourself. The Brander series is indeed the best - beautiful job of writing. The Popper Island series had the advantage of the charm of English countryside as a background - real holiday reading matter. High Oaks is something to treasure.

ROBERT WHITER: I think there is no doubt that the Brander series topped the rest. I remember how I appreciated the imitation placard: Famous Kent School in Revolt. I notice you make no mention of the other Rookwood rebellion when Mr. Greely was dismissed and the Fifth walked out. I seem to remember Hansom's father buying a building in the vicinity, rather like High Oaks. I've always loved barring-outs, even the Hacker series. I know it was overdone, but I still liked it.

GERRY ALLISON: Frank Richards may have originated the well-known saying "When in doubt -- etc." In Collectors' Digest No. 62, Tom Hopperton quotes him thus:- "They used to say at the A.P. that a 'barring out' was a sure card to play."

Like you, however, I was not too keen on these stories. They called for a larger suspension of disbelief than I was able to muster. For instance, I could not believe the school authorities would overlook the simple plan of cutting off the rebels' water supply.

Of course, this solution could not apply to the Popper Island Rebellion, but my enjoyment of this most delightful series was marred by the thought of the necessary latrines for thirty-odd well fed schoolboys on that tiny island. Whilst the discomfort of the poor gunman who spent long days up the giant oak tree was awful to imagine.

My own favourite barring out was the one at Cedar Creek in support of Miss Meadows, who had been evicted as Headmistress by Mr. Peckover. In this excellent story the probabilities were not too seriously outraged, and the girls and weaker members were sent home before the trouble began. A most satisfying series.

JOHN TROVELL: I agree with you that the Brander Barring-Out Series was the greatest of them all.

It is to be regretted that the announcement of Test Match souvenirs, denied the series the cover illustrations it so deserved, but the large double page title illustration by Leonard Shields in "All Busy On The Greyfriar's Front" was a splendid indication of the

excitement and action to follow.

The High Oaks and Popper's Island rebellions were notable for the part that dear old Mauly (aroused from hibernation) played on these occasions, and if not strictly barrings-outs were delightful reading.

As you remark mature eyes can spot the odd flaw that was never apparent to youthful readers, who revelled in the fun, action, and defiance of unjust authority

NICHOLAS BENNETT: I have always enjoyed Barring-Out stories, and have most of the Magnet series of this type excepting Brander. My three favourites are Popper's Island, Jeffreys, and Hacker. I have just read the Silverson series in the Gem. I was not keen on the Gem before this, but am now a confirmed St. Jim's fan.

(Maurice Kutner writes on the "Popper's Island" series in Collectors' Digest Annual for 1965. - ED.)

NEW BOOK COMING

In early October will be published BILLY BUNTER'S HOLIDAY BOOK, featuring stories of Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood by Charles Hamilton. Price 2/6.

GEMS OF HAMILTONIA. No. 23 (New Series)

Frank was silent.

"Well, Frank?" said his lordship at last, with a faint smile.

Frank started a little.

"Speak freely, my boy," said Lord St. Austells kindly. "I am anxious for you to accept my offer. I want to take you with me to England, and see you rise to your proper place in the world. But I shall not be offended if you refuse."

"Thank you, sir," said Frank, in a low voice. "I shall always be grateful for your kindness, but --"

"But --" smiled his lordship.

"I'd rather not leave my chums, sir - and my home here," said Frank. "And, although I could accept your kindness, I - I think that I ought rather --"

"I think I understand," said Lord St. Austells. "You would rather fight your own way through the world than be beholden to anyone."

Frank coloured.

"Not exactly that, sir," he said. "I would (cont'd on p. 22)..

NELSON LEE COLUMN

CONDUCTED BY JACK WOODHUMOROUS GLEANINGS

By "Leeite"

Many humorous incidents occur in the pages of the Nelson Lee. Invariably Handforth is involved. In the African series of 1919 we read of Handforth's eagerness to experience a sandstorm. The following extract is from 'Neath African Skies, No. 214, old series.

"It'll be fine sport" remarked Handforth. "We might run into a sandstorm, if we have any luck."

"Luck!" I echoed. "Bad luck, you mean."

"Rather not. Good luck, you ass!"

"You've never been in a sandstorm, Handy," I said grimly. "You don't know what they are like, or you wouldn't talk about good luck!" Edward Oswald smiled.

"I've read about sandstorms in books" he said "I should think they're rippin' sport. They come up all at once, you know, just when you're crossing the desert. An' you have to shelter in caves, and all that sort of thing."

"Caves!" said Pitt. "In the desert?"

"Well, they do have caves in the desert sometimes," said Handforth. "Besides, think how refreshing the rain would be, after marching along under the scorching sun for days --"

"Rain!" I yelled. "You silly ass! How can you have rain in a sandstorm?"

"There's always rain during a sandstorm," said Handforth stubbornly. "And I reckon it would be very cooling --"

"You wouldn't think a sandstorm cooling," I said grimly. "If a caravan gets caught in a sandstorm there is very little chance of anybody surviving. The sand gets everywhere. It chokes you, and the heat is suffocating."

"But couldn't you shelter?" asked McClure.

"Of course we could shelter," said Handforth. "If it comes to that, what's wrong with the caravan itself? You only need to shut the door and the windows, and block up the chimney."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What the dickens are you cackling at?" snapped Handforth.

"He thinks we're going across the desert in a giddy caravan - like the gipsies use!" grinned DeValerie. "A caravan in this instance, Handy, means a party of people - carriers and camels and all that sort of thing. There's no vehicle of any kind."

Handforth snorted.

"Rot!" he said firmly.

"DeValerie's right," I chuckled.

"Then why the dickens is it called a caravan?" demanded Handforth. "A lot of silly rot, I call it. I've a dashed good mind not to go to that oasis at all. I'm blest if I see the fun of walking."

And Handforth stalked off, arguing with Church and McClure.

* * * * *

SNEAKING

By H. Chapman

I have always thought that the stories of St. Frank's, Greyfriars and St. Jim's, which many of us have enjoyed over the years must, on the whole, have had a good influence on their readers.

Of course, they did err a little at times. Rather too much emphasis was put on games and sports of all kinds, and a boy who enjoyed study, or who worked at his studies whether he liked them or not, was not always popular, and was even looked upon as rather a freak.

Our heroes were always fine, well-built, healthy boys, good at games, whereas the 'rotters' were often thin, weedy individuals, more fond of 'pub crawling.' This would probably hurt the feelings of quite decent readers who unfortunately suffered from poor health and who were not very robust and therefore not athletic.

Then again, I always thought they sometimes showed rather poor taste in the way they poked fun at the deaf boys.

However, apart from these small failings, the stories taught good behaviour, healthy living and thought for the feelings of others.

Indeed the standard was so high that I have wondered at times how many of the readers were able, or even willing, to live up to it.

Smoking, gambling, breaking bounds, cheating, were all frowned upon by boys and masters alike.

There was one 'crime' however, which was considered, by the boys at least, as worse than all the others rolled into one. This was sneaking, or tale-telling.

The subject cropped up at times in most of the stories, and oh the lines, gatings, floggings and expulsions our young heroes endured

rather than sneak.

I have just finished reading a short St. Frank's series in which sneaking is the main theme. This is in Nelson Lee New Series 152-157 "The Sneaks Paradise."

Dr. Stafford being away for a time, St. Frank's has a temporary Head, one Dr. Morrison Nicholls, a very able scholar and a kindly man, but he has one "bee in his bonnet." He believes in sneaking. He thinks that if the boys were encouraged to tell tales about each other, fewer school rules would be broken. He decides to put his theory to the test during his short stay at St. Frank's.

Of course, the school is divided on the subject, especially the Remove (everything happens in the Remove). Nipper and all the true-blue boys refuse to take part in the scheme, but Gore-Pearce, Teddy Long and the rest of the rotters revel in it. They split on Nipper & Co. at every opportunity and cause them much trouble in the way of lines, gatings, floggings, etc., and finally Nipper is almost expelled (rather than sneak).

However, the scheme fails in the end, and Dr. Nicholls admits he is wrong - that while it is all right in theory it fails in practice.

All of which brings me to the point of this article. I do think that perhaps, where sneaking is concerned, our heroes Nipper, D'Arcy, Wharton, etc. were just a little too heroic; too fond of turning the other cheek, and being martyrs.

Certainly I would not approve of tale-bearing in the ordinary way, but neither can I see myself doing lines, being flogged, gated, etc., for something I had not done if I was able to give a true explanation of the events, and looking back, I do not think many of my old school mates would have done so either.

Still, perhaps it did us good to set us a high standard to live up to, even if we did not quite reach it.

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; 386 to 400; 417; 422; 435; 752; 753; 762; 763; 773; 809. Most issues between 821 and 890; 900; 921; 924; 925; 936; 938; 940; 942; 943; 946; 951; 965; 967; 988; 996. GEMS: 493; Some issues between 801 and 832. Also Nos. 935; 953; 954; 956; 975; 980; 984; 985; 989; 990; 992; 993; 998. POPULARS: 183; 190; 452; 455; 466 474. Early Penny Populars: Nos. 12, 13, 45, 47, 58.

ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, GROVE RD., SURBITON, SURREY.

DANNY'S DIARY

September 1915

Charlie Chaplin is becoming all the fashion. Last month the Funny Wonder started to have him on the front page.

This month the Home Companion and several other papers have been giving away lucky horseshoes and Charlie charms to mark the Chaplin comedy "Champion Charlie." Pluck has given a free art plate of Charlie, and is running a story called "Charlie's New Job," by Sidney Drew, from the film. And now the Boys' Friend has started telling Chaplin stories with actual photographs from the films. The series has started in the last Boys' Friend of the month, with pictures all over the cover and continued on an inside page. The first film dealt with is "Charlie, the Tramp."

A Rookwood series is running in the Boys' Friend, all about the Head's nephew, named Gunter. When Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd hear that the Head's nephew is coming to Rookwood, they each want to bag him for their own "side." Jimmy gets him, but he turns out to be a terrible customer from America. He smokes cigars, chews tobacco, spits, and is a bully. In the last story of the month he was expelled but refused to go. He shut himself up in the Tower, and continued to be a great nuisance. The titles of the stories were "The Terror of Rookwood," "Ructions at Rookwood," "The End of His Tether," and "One Against the School," but the series is not finished yet. I am enjoying it very much.

The Gem has been pretty good this month. "Your Editor at St. Jim's" was a quaint story, written simply and solely to advertise the Boys' Friend. Knox finds that a great many boys are reading the Green 'Un, and they get into trouble, for Mr. Latham thinks it is a penny dreadful, full of murders.

"The St. Jim's Volunteers" was weak, not to say putrid. Grundy started a cadet corps, and they dug up all the St. Jim's cricket pitches. So silly.

"The Honour of a Jew" was very good. Julian, who was the ward of Mr. Moses of Rylcombe, refused to stay at St. Jim's when he learned that his uncle was a moneylender. But Mr. Moses repented and stopped his bad ways, so uncle and nephew became friends again.

"Mason's Last Match" had plenty of action, but it was a bit on the sloppy side. Mason, a sixth-former, had a feud with Knox. Mason's father crashed in an aeroplane which caught fire. "Good heavens!" said Kildare. "He will be reduced to ashes."

I never heard even a big boy talk like that. It wasn't the real Martin Clifford, of course.

A new monthly book, costing 3d, has come out. It is the Sexton Blake Library. Doug bought the first story which is called "The Yellow Tiger." He read it and then gave it to me. It brought in Yvonne, Wu Ling, and Baron Beauremon, but I found it rather hard going, though Doug liked it. I exchanged it with a pal at school for the Charlie Chaplin Scream Book, price 2d, but I wished afterwards that I hadn't.

We have been to the pictures plenty of times this month. We saw Blanche Sweet in "The Warrens of Virginia." Blanche Sweet is insipid, so Mum says. She is very fair and has a tiny mouth. In the same programme was a comic called "Pimple's Royal Divorce."

Another time we saw Gaby Deslys in "Her Triumph." I think Gaby Deslys is a French girl. She is rather nice. In that programme was a screaming Keystone called "Fatty's Chance Acquaintance." Fatty Arbuckle makes me roar.

A new Mary Pickford film was "Dawn of a To-morrow." It was lovely, and it was accompanied by Fatty Arbuckle and Mabel Normand in a Keystone called "Mabel and Fatty's Washday." Dad laughed like a hippopotymus. Finally this month we saw Albert Chevalier and Florence Turner in "My Old Dutch," and Mum had a good weep.

The war is responsible for such a lot of awful things. The Magnet this month has lost its red cover which it has had ever since it started. It seems there is no further supply of the red dye. So the Magnet now has a white cover, though the red one will be brought back as soon as possible.

The first tale in the Magnet this month was splendid. A real winner. Gosling had to leave for a fortnight, owing to the wounding of his nephew, so Greyfriars advertised for a new porter. A Mr. Bunn, who gave Captain Gadsby as a referee, got the post. Bunn gave Greyfriars a high old time. It was Ponsonby in disguise. I loved this tale.

In "Backing UP Bunter," Mr. Bunter made a lot of money on the Stock Exchange, and sent plenty of good tips to Billy. Then Mr. Bunter came a cropper, the tips stopped, and Billy got into debt. Harry Wharton & Co put on a benefit concert to help him.

"Coker's Canadian Cousin" was the first one with a white cover. Coker kept bragging about his cousin in the army, so Skinner employed an actor named Snooks to come to Greyfriars, pretending he was the cousin.

In the final story "A Lancashire Lad's Luck," a magazine offered a prize for a short story. Linley, Bunter, and Fish entered for the competition. A fairish tale.

"Tom Merry's Weekly" is due to appear soon as a weekly or monthly paper, and the editor thinks he may bring out the "Greyfriars Herald" as well. He asked readers who liked the idea of a weekly Greyfriars Herald to send him postcards, but he now says that the result has been disappointing. He hasn't received many cards. He says the Herald would need 100,000 readers to be a success.

There was a train crash in the middle of the month. An express from Kings Cross Leeds came into collision with a truck at Newark. One passenger was killed and four injured.

There have been quite a few zeppelin raids this month, with one big one on the East Coast and another on London. In one week 38 people have been killed and 124 injured. I haven't seen a zepp yet. If we get one over our way I don't know whether I shall be scared or a bit excited. Of course, the zepp raids only take place on very dark nights. We know there will be no raids when there is any moonlight. So we always feel a bit wobbly on any very dark, quiet, moonless night.

----- ECHO OF DANNY

On more than one occasion in the past we have highlighted inexplicable oddities of the POPULAR. Danny, in the extract from his diary for September 1915, refers to the four stories of the Gunter series which featured in the Boys' Friend that month.

Actually the Gunter series went on to be completed in 6 stories. Both Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd were anxious to secure Gunter, the Head's nephew, for their respective sides. Jimmy bagged him, and then wished he hadn't, for Gunter turned out to be a horrid character. Eventually it transpired that the new boy was not the real nephew at all. The real Gunter had allowed his place to be taken by a bullying ranch hand.

And now we go forward 5 years for the Popular oddity. 1920 was a curiously unsatisfactory year for that paper. When the Popular resumed in 1919, the former policy of an old story of Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood was resumed. After a time, there came the ominous announcement that new stories of the famous schools would feature in the Popular. These new stories were all substitute tales. The Greyfriars stories of this type continued for nearly two years, but St. Jim's soon disappeared apart from short oddments, and the Rookwood stories were resumed within a few weeks.

The Gunter series, which had covered 6 longish tales in the Boys' Friend, was squeezed into ONE short story in the Popular, under the title "A Bad Egg." Why on earth was this done? There is no clear reason at all why, when they were republishing the old tales, they should have ruined this series by just publishing a small, doctored

chunk of it. As we see it, the only feasible explanation is that they had not the complete series in their files at the Amalgamated Press.

GEMS OF HAMILTONIA (cont'd from p. 16)..

gladly be beholden to you if there was need. But I belong to Cedar Creek, and I will stick to Cedar Creek. Some day I shall return to England - some day I hope I shall be earning my living with my pen. But until then --"

"It will not be easy," said Lord St. Austells. "You would start under better auspices, Frank, if you accepted my offer."

"I know it, sir. But difficulties were only made to be overcome, weren't they?" said Frank with a smile.

Lord St. Austells laughed.

"Well, I am disappointed, but perhaps you are right, Frank," he said. "Anyhow, we shall part good friends; and in the future - when it comes - Frank Richards, the celebrated author, will always be a welcome guest at St. Austell's House."

On the following morning Lord St. Austells left the Lawless Ranch. They took leave of him at Kamloops, and rode back to the ranch, Frank in a thoughtful mood. He knew what he had given up; but, on reflection, he was far from regretting his choice. Bob Lawless slapped him on the shoulder as they rode up the well-known trail, with the steers grazing around in the rich grass, and the calling of the cattlemen sounded musically from the distance.

"You're not sorry, Frank?"

"I'm glad to stay, Bob."

"I guess I was afraid you would go, old chap," said Bob, with a little catch in his voice. "We'd have missed you, the Cherub and me. And you're glad you're staying?"

Frank smiled.

"Jolly glad, old fellow!"

And Frank was more glad than ever, the next morning, when he rode up the familiar trail to Cedar Creek, amid the scent of the pine-woods.

WANTED: Collectors' Digest Annual 1948. Holiday Annuals. Populars Nos. 161, 162, 168, 170, 172, 173; Magnets Nos. 1277, 1283; Boys' Friends.

38 ST. THOMAS RD., PRESTON

URGENTLY WANTED: Magnet No. 773

ERIC FAYNE, EXCELSIOR HOUSE, GROVE RD., SURBITON, SURREY.

NEWS FROM THE CLUBS

MIDLAND

Meeting held Tuesday, 27th July, 1965

A slightly improved attendance at the Arden Hotel for our July meeting. There were nine members including Mervyn Adams, still a schoolboy in the 5th form at Lichfield Grammar School - a boarding school. He is in the unique position of being able to compare his own life with that of Harry Wharton & Co. in whose adventures he takes such delight.

The collector's items for this month were provided by Ivan Webster. Ivan brought along a beautifully bound copy of Red and Blue Gems in which was the anniversary number - the Gem for July 27th 1935 - "The Stage-Struck Schoolboy" featuring Monty Lowther in the title role.

The programme for the evening was informal but the acting secretary provided three items. The first, a set of riddles for amusement only was given containing examples such as "Why is the Shell the most miserable form at St. Jim's?" - answer - "Because there is only one that is Merry."

A quiz followed which was called "Odd one out." There were ten questions each consisting of a set of four or five names. In each set of names there was one name that was different in some way from the rest. The correct answer was obtained by writing down this odd one. I wonder if you would solve this one - Frank Richards, Ralph Redway, Charles Hamilton, Martin Clifford, Owen Conquest. The winners of this quiz were Ivan Webster, Norman Gregory and Gerald Price.

An amusing episode from the very first Bunter Book published - "Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School" was read by Jack Bellfield.

It was good to see Jack and Madge Corbett, Win Partridge and Gerald Price with us again. Each of these can be trusted to bring something to our meetings of interest. This very pleasant and happy gathering broke up at 9-30 and we look forward to seeing them all again on August 24th.

J. F. BELLFIELD - Correspondent

LONDON

The August meeting was held at Blakiana, East Dulwich, hosts

Josie and Len Packman. Here in the very room that the club first met, the bust of Sexton Blake gazed down upon the very fine attendance. The book-cases with the Sexton Blake Libraries and Union Jacks plus other books dear to the hearts of the hosts helped to make the ideal setting for this gathering. There was a report about the progress of the Sexton Blake catalogue.

Don Webster, in the unavoidable absence of Bob Blythe, gave a good report on the month's progress of the Nelson Lee Library.

Roger Jenkins also reported good progress re the Hamiltonian library and followed this up with a very humorous passage, read from Schoolboys' Own Library, number 286, "Bunter Gets the Boot." This was vintage writing by Frank Richards and it was enjoyed thoroughly by all present.

It was given out that Billy Bunter's Holiday Annual would be published on October 1st, by Fleetway Publications.

Ray Hopkins conducted a quiz in which the chairman, Brian Doyle, gained first place. Nicholas Bennett was second and Don Webster third. Later on, the joint efforts of Dob Webster and Eric Lawrence were enjoyed in the form of another quiz. The Don conducted it and it was left to the only lady member present, Josie Packman, to romp home an easy winner. Roger Jenkins was second and jointly in third place were Brian Doyle and Nicholas Bennett.

A discussion and some criticisms of the forthcoming publications were indulged in, these new issues being Prospectus, Bunter's Last Fling and Magnet number one. Another item to appear about August 29th is the Boys' World Annual. This contains an article on old boys' books and papers.

Finally the Margate outing on September 5th was discussed. The coach will start from outside Woolworths, Vauxhall Bridge Road at 10 a.m. sharp.

And so the end of another merry meeting.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

MERSEYSIDE

15th August, 1965

The section was near to full strength for this meeting. Unwelcome news at the outset was that Norman Pragnell, loyal member for so many years and enthusiastic and conscientious Chairman for the past three, had resigned from the Section for personal reasons. Nobody has worked harder for the success of the Merseyside Section than Norman, and the loss will be felt very keenly. It is hoped that his

great interest in the OBBC will bring him back to the fold before long. In consequence of his resignation, Bill Windsor was elected Chairman and the writer of these notes Secretary.

Pat Laffey introduced a novel and most interesting quiz called "What's in a name?," which was thoroughly enjoyed by all, and which must have entailed a fair amount of preparation. Then followed a little brain-teaser entitled, "Bunter's likes and dislikes." Only Walter Pritchard cottoned on to the clues in the given examples, which were unintentionally misleading, so it proved to be a one-horse race, with an all-correct solution from Walter, making him an easy winner.

The discussions were varied and interesting, and the suggestion was made that consideration should be given towards re-issuing our news-letter, "The MERSEY FOGHORN," which found favour a few years ago, especially with our Merseyside exiles. It was agreed that everything possible should be done towards that end.

With "summer" and holidays now drawing to an end, next month's meeting will revert to the usual second Sunday, i.e. September 12th.

FRANK UNWIN

NORTHERN

Meeting held on 21st August, 1965

In the absence of Geoffrey Wilde, Elsie Palmer again officiated this month, there being sixteen members present. Elsie remarked how nice and restful it was to meet each month and lose ourselves in the world of old boys books for two or three hours, and forget all about the trouble and tension, international friction, etc., in the world to-day. On these nights our world never changes.

Gerry Allison informed us that, after his recent severe illness, he has now retired from work, and we all wish him a long and happy retirement and hope to see him at the meetings for a very long time to come.

The usual interesting batch of correspondence was read out, and Fred Cockcroft telephoned Gerry to say that he had got an advance copy of the new P. G. Wodehouse book, which he is donating to the club. We were pleased to hear that next month Roger Jenkins will be with us, and will collaborate with Breeze Bentley in a special programme.

Frank Hancock had compiled a quiz of 40 questions, dealing with the hobby, literature in general, and general knowledge. Members divided into two teams captained by Elsie and Jack Wood, each team being given a question in turn, and Elsie's team won a narrow victory.

A reading by Jack Allison came next, this being a story with a

golfing theme from 'The Clicking of Cuthbert,' by P. G. Wodehouse. It was most amusing, and Jack's rendering was very effective.

Refreshments followed, and then we had a word-building puzzle, this being won by Bill Williamson. Then Harry Lavender gave us a quiz, 'Who Said This,' being a number or questions or phrases spoken by various people in the old boys books and comics. Bill Williamson, in top form to-night, was again the winner. After a short discussion on general topics the meeting closed.

Next Meeting, Saturday, 11th September.

F. HANCOCK Hon. Sec.

the postman called

(Interesting items from the
Editor's Letter-bag)

ROGER JENKINS (Havant): I am heartily in agreement with you about the hobby being a Milch Cow. Since 1945 I have written well over a hundred articles on Hamiltoniana, involving countless hours of research and consideration. It has all been done purely for the love of the hobby, and it has never occurred to me to try to make money out of this nor do I wish to do so now. I am not implying, however, that others may not quite legitimately hold a different opinion.

What I do assert is that they are not free to copy parts of other people's articles and sell them as original work. This does not apply to all professional writers on the hobby, but twice in recent years I have had the dubious honour of seeing my own researches and critical opinions copied and published as professional work by other people. Other amateur writers have also been milked like this, including Herbert Leckenby after his death.

The hobby with its amateur magazines can thrive only in an atmosphere of honesty and mutual trust. If amateur writers go on finding their work plundered by others, contributions for the C.D. will gradually dry up, and in the end the Milch Cow will no longer yield anything at all.

LURIE SUTTON (Orpinton): I really must comment on the remark in the report of the July Merseyside meeting, that as far as many of them are concerned, Bunter has never ceased to be detestable.

I feel rather sorry for those who feel that way! I should like to raise my voice on behalf of those of us who recognise our debt to Bunter for the laughs and entertainment that he has given us over so many years. While I am on the subject I would also dispute Roger Jenkins' earlier assertion that Bunter was detestable before 1920.

Of course the Owl is irritating at times, but what glorious consolation when his eavesdropping sets in motion a brilliant plot or series; how moved we are when he screws his little courage to the sticking-point on the odd occasions. How we admired him when he carried the exhausted Flip through the snow to Mauleverer Towers after pulling him out of the lake. How he moistened our eyes when he sent his mother a marzipan-iced cake in her illness, and spent a £50 reward in sending her to Bournemouth for a holiday. Who hasn't had his appetite whetted and savoured the fragrance of sosses and chips as Billy perspires over the frying-pan in the study or by an evening camp-fire in a hiking yarn?

Trimble is a different kettle of fish, and I like to feel that I am on the side of their author in detesting Trimble and having always a warm spot for the dear old Owl!

NICHOLAS BENNETT (London): I enjoy Danny's Diary immensely, but one month he is intelligent and the next he is not. For instance, he did not know what "Sin" was! Yet he could tell a sub story from the real thing.

(We put this point to Danny. His reply was terse. He wrote: "Tell that young chap it wasn't a matter of intelligence. In 1915 I saw Tom Mix in clean westerns; not Jane Russell in 'The Outlaw.' I collected Gems and Magnets; not anatomical pin-ups. I knew plenty about the Gem and Magnet, but little about Sin. But there wasn't a lot of intelligence in telling which tales were not written by the regular writer." So now we know. - ED.)

W. H. WHITER (Wood Green): My schooldays taste for reading was the Aldine, Nugget, Police Budget, Famous Crimes, Old-Time Boxing, Ally Sloper, Punch, Springheeled Jack. I also purchased the first numbers and became a regular reader of the Marvel, Pluck, Union Jacks, Boys' Friend, Big Budget, and the Buffalo Bill series. I had the pleasure of meeting Buffalo Bill in person on his visit to London.

(Mr. Whiter, a wonderful-84-years-young, is the father of our own Ben and Bob. Mr. Whiter writes the beautiful copper-plate hand for which Bob is so well-known to his correspondents. - ED.)

FRANK HANCOCK (Leeds): I see another of the old-time artists has passed on - Gilbert Wilkinson. Though latterly better known as a newspaper cartoonist I remember when he used to illustrate stories in the Happy and Merry magazines in the 1920's. Among his contemporaries were such as Arthur Ferrier, Graham Simmons, Toby Hoyn, and of course Thomas Henry, who was illustrating the William stories as they were

published. I wonder if he ever did any work for the old boys books or comics?

FRANK UNWIN (Liverpool): In regard to the Blake novels. I think the answer is to be strictly selective and buy only those stories which appeal to our particular tastes. Undoubtedly, the sex element completely ruins many a good yarn, and I now avoid these like the plague. We should know our writers by now. Martin Thomas is a "must" for me. I recently read his "Laird of Evil," and I have never enjoyed a Blake yarn more. Blake, Tinker and Pedro were at their pre-war best, and it was a real tonic. More power to his elbow. As you will gather, I have no standing order for the S.B.L., but I glance through each one in the shop and buy only those that appeal to me.

S.B.L. REVIEW

W. HOWARD BAKER
(Mayflower 3/6)

THE FUGITIVE

Every aspiring private detective should have a secretary. For preference, she should be tall, blonde, and beautiful. Which goes for the established practitioner, too. Ask Blake. The anti-Daneists, who have long avowed that he should, as in the past, work only with Tinker, fail to appreciate that he is less of a machine than a human being, and, as such, possesses many of the interests and the cravings of the ordinary man in the street.

This is a modernised version of the historic "Frightened Lady," which launched Paula Dane into Blake's orbit way back in June 1956, and transformed him from the gaunt, ascetic, and somewhat lonely figure of the austere years into a more solid and younger figure of a man, relaxed by a lessening of severe self-imposed discipline, for, as he told himself, in Paula Dane he found a very desirable young woman who made his world a little brighter and made him feel that little bit younger.

The bond of friendship has strengthened since the occasion of their initial meeting, when she pressed her lips against his in gratitude of his promise to help her escape the clutches of her nauseating relative, Simon de Courcy and the brutal Joe Turk, and, from the modern viewpoint, his character is much easier to believe in than the old. The meeting at the Malibu Club, and Paula's attempted kidnapping in the affair of her legacy, can be aptly termed historic as a story; but as a case it ranks among the more ordinary in Blake's files.

Without getting quite the same kick out of this version as I did from the original, I enjoyed re-reading it, and consider it well

worthy of re-issue.

Walter Webb.

R E V I E W S

1/6.

MAGNET NUMBER ONE

Fleetway Publications

For large numbers of readers, every other sensation will be deadened in the delight at possessing a facsimile of what has long been the most prized collectors' item in old boys' books. For the few who already possess the original there must be a great deal of pride that such an undertaking has been successfully carried out. And let us pause to think what an enormous compliment the whole thing is to the memory of Charles Hamilton.

Thirty, twenty, even ten years ago, the idea would have been laughed out of court. And now it has happened. Number One of the world's most famous story paper is on the market again.

An official tells me that 80,000 copies have been printed - and they are ready to run off more if they are required. And might it not occur to someone that if No. 1 sells 80,000 copies, Numbers 2, 3, 4, 5, and so on, ad infinitum, might sell equally as well, week by week.

This reproduction is good. Unspoiled in any detail, the reading matter is clear, with only just the slightest patchiness here and there. The colour of the cover is as near the original shade as makes no difference, and reminds us how attractive papers were when their covers were of a different tint from the interior. Covers of this type are almost unknown to-day, more's the pity.

Mark our words. For a spell, the Magnet is going to make every other periodical on the stalls look very small beer. Even the outer jacket which proclaims the jewel within is oddly attractive, though that matters little.

 J.S. BUTCHER
 (Cassell. 30/-)

GREYFRIARS SCHOOL - A Prospectus

The appeal of this book is so specialised that it is remarkable to find it professionally published. That it is so published is a gigantic tribute to the world's greatest fictional school - Greyfriars. For that reason, if for no other, we should support it.

We feel sad that we cannot wax very enthusiastic over what the author must surely have found a labour of love. It could have been a thrilling and utterly delightful treat for Greyfriars fans. If it

is not exactly that, the failure would seem to be due to the limited knowledge of his subject possessed by the author, and to a concentration on statistics. It is like hors-d'oeuvre served as the main dish.

The Latin motto and school badge of Greyfriars are given. There are well-drawn plans of the immediate neighbourhood, and of the various floors of the school itself. There are lists of masters and boys. The Remove list includes Delarey, but the Sixth Form list makes no mention of Sykes. There is a list of ages, weights, and heights of all the boys in the Remove, if you consider such details noteworthy. The "Bird-in-Hand" is named as one of the local hosteleries.

In a weak list of relatives, under "The Ogilvy Brothers," we are informed that Ogilvy has six brothers, all of whom are in the army. There is no mention of Paul Tyrrell, Brian Mauleverer, Miss Amy Wharton, and heaps of others. Some years ago the C.D. Annual published the entire adult life of the Magnet tales. It is a pity that the author of "Prospectus" was unable to refer to it.

Mr. Quelch's name is given as Horace Henry Samuel Quelch which is reminiscent of a Who's Who of long, long ago.

The book is extremely well-produced, and the map forming a frontispiece in colour is attractive. Thirty bob may seem a good deal to pay for a work which will not provide a very long browsing, but most of us will support it for old times' sake. Published as it is, it is certainly a novelty. We must remember that if it is a reasonable success, the publishers may be persuaded to give us something further in the old school's name in the future.

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Frank Richards
(Cassell. 11/6)

BUNTER'S LAST FLING

This is the last of the remarkable post-war series of Greyfriars stories. The tale is readable, and there is nothing to offend the more discriminating fans.

A relative of the Bounder's, one Derek Vernon, comes to Greyfriars. His expenses are paid by Smithy's father, his evil genius is another relative, George Vernon, and his hope is to get Smithy disgraced and himself made the heir to Mr. Vernon-Smith's millions. Unfortunately, the author has chosen a theme which will remind older readers of the Bertie Vernon series and the Smedley series. But this new tale has little of the power, the brilliance in writing, or the charm of those series.

Derek Vernon is too lightly sketched to make much impression. Vernon-Smith is oddly out of character at times, though Redwing is

pleasantly portrayed. Coker, also, is quite happily handled.

Contrivance is clumsily overdone, for it is not really important to the plot that Bunter should know what was going on. Bunter, by chance, goes to a small station named Redclyffe Halt. Ponsonby & Co, also by chance, go to the small station named Redclyffe Halt. An empty crate is on the platform, and Pon & Co bind and gag Bunter, and nail him up in the crate. All this with a porter of some sort presumably in the vicinity. Then, for no credible reason at all, Derek and George Vernon come to the small station named Redclyffe Halt to talk over their evil plans, within hearing of Bunter in the crate.

Action is swift in the story. There is but little real comedy, Bunter plays a comparatively minor role, and the Famous Five are unimportant. There is no padding, and much of the writing is a good deal more restrained than in the last few Bunter stories. This is no disadvantage.

In the end, Mr. Vernon-Smith arrives back from America just in time for the exposure of Derek Vernon. In an utterly false ending, Mr Vernon-Smith decides that, as Greyfriars has no further use for Derek Vernon, the boy shall be sent to Highcliffe.

For plenty of Greyfriars fans this, a rather more serious type of tale than usual, will make an attractive addition to the series. And no doubt plenty even of the discriminating will wish to have it in their library.

A passing thought. Did Charles Hamilton ever refer to Mr. Prout as "Paul Pontifex Prout?"

THE CASE OF THE STAG AT BAY

Wilfred McNeilly
(Mayflower 3/6)

This was an August issue of the Sexton Blake Library, and we only say a few words about it now because we believe that it will appeal to all Blake admirers of earlier days. Look at the title. It has a nostalgic lilt. There is no sex in this story. There is no shuddery violence. The killer is a secret sniper. Pedro is well on the scene. Once or twice he is called the "old dog," but the author will outgrow that sort of thing. Tinker is well to the fore, and he is only "Edward Carter-ed" very rarely. The new look Blake organisation does not feature anywhere. Several times Tinker warms the heart by using the term "guv'nor." It is a clever whodunnit, and should please everyone. Set in Scotland, with descriptive

passages of the Vale of Glencoe and Ballachulish, it is a thoroughly readable mystery thriller. This one is heartily recommended, and we hope that Collectors' Digest readers will give it the support it deserves from the old guard.

Wilfred McNeilly.
(Mayflower. 3/6)

DEATH IN THE TOP TWENTY

We have just gone out of our way to draw attention to a new Sexton Blake story which we believe Collectors' Digest readers will thoroughly enjoy. We are not so sure of this one.

"Death in the Top Twenty" is rather a sordid little tale with sidelights of seduction, abortion, murder, and a drink-swilling clique who bathe in the raw. The background of the pop-singing world, with its weird slang, seems authentic, but it is rather pleasant to see that Blake hasn't much time for weirdies with long hair or screaming girls with dirty necks.

Early on we find Blake, Tinker, and Pedro at Baker Street, slightly reminiscent of the old days, except that they are now in a £27,000 penthouse. But soon operations switch to Berkeley Square, for Paula and Marion have parts to play in this one. Later, into the picture come those latter-day regulars, the hard-drinking Duke of Derwentwater, and his equally hard-drinking and beautiful wife who calls Blake "Sexy."

The plot of the reticent pop-singer, with a double who deals with the fans, is novel, and it swings along at a spanking pace. The story reads easily, even if you should feel that Blake and Tinker are miscast in this type of thing.

E.F.

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