

STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Vol. 26 No. 311

NOVEMBER 1972

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Vol. II. No. 37.

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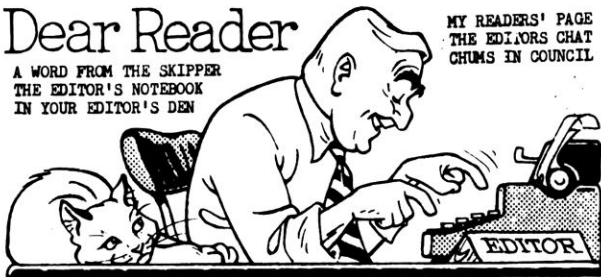
NOVEMBER 1972

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Dear Reader

A WORD FROM THE SKIPPER
THE EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK
IN YOUR EDITOR'S DEN

MY READERS' PAGE
THE EDITORS CHAT
CHUMS IN COUNCIL



ALL OUR TO-DAYS

Down at Gravesend in Kent, the local paper has been in the throes of a heated correspondence which was sparked off by a young lady who returned to the town after spending a number of years in Canada. She did not like the changes she found in her old home town, and she wrote to the paper to say so. Perhaps she didn't like the rush, and the din, and the litter, and the masses of concrete, and the hideous creations round the double-garages, and the queues at the clicking tills

which eat up the grotesque decimal currency which has done as much as absurd wage demands to cause terrifying inflation, and the dirty books sprawling over expensive modern counters in chromium-plated shops, and the giant roaring lorries, and the dirty advertisements for dirty films on dirty hoardings which fence in another building development, and senseless vandalism, and lots more.

The young lady expressed what most people are thinking, but Gravesend is only one among hundreds of similar towns. "Kingston is filthy," writes someone in the local paper; "What have they done to our lovely little town?" asks somebody in the Farnborough News; "What on earth has happened to Camberley?" enquires somebody else in another local paper; the "lovely hamlet" of Grantchester, immortalised by Rupert Brooke, is "now a disgrace" according to the Council for the Protection of Rural England - they blame litter-louts, heavy lorries, and the lack of street cleaners; and speaking of Madingley, a near-by village, they use the word "terrible." "They've built right in the middle of a street of thatched houses, a row of buildings which look like public conveniences." And so it goes on, all over the country. The England we knew and loved is disappearing. The loveliness is being lost.

Grossly excessive packaging is a main cause of litter (and this elaborate packaging has to be paid for - by us!). English people drop their rubbish where they stand, and English children are no longer taught in schools to be tidy.

For the ugliness, the planners are to blame. If there has ever been a planned development which has not been disastrous, I have yet to see it. Basingstoke used to be a quaint, sleepy little town of considerable charm. The planners have made it into the ugliest town in the south of England. But there are countless Basingstokes, all alike in their planned ugliness. Soon these planners and developers promise that they will get to work on Piccadilly Circus, and, naturally, those wily money-makers are busy turning it into a slum in advance, so that it will be impossible to preserve any of the original beauty.

TOOTHACHE AND BOILS

An article destined for great popularity in our forthcoming C. D. Annual comes from the enthusiastic Bob Blythe, who gives us, mainly by

extracts from the original letters of E. S. Brooks, the story of that writer's connection with Greyfriars and St. Jim's. In reading these letters, I am struck by the human factor which shows Brooks apologising for the late arrival of his "copy," a delay caused by such occurrences as an attack of toothache, a painful boil on the neck, and the arrival of visitors. Any one of us, famous or otherwise, is likely to suffer from any of these little happenings, but it is quite obvious, as Brooks makes clear, that such happenings could play havoc with the schedule of a prolific writer.

I have always contended that substitute writers were essential for any long-running and regular series, if the runs were not to be broken. And Hamilton, whose daily grind must have been a fearful strain, was as liable to a boil on the neck as anyone else. And who could write happily about St. Jim's while a boil on the neck was making life intolerable?

While on the subject of the Annual, another article to give you many laughs over Christmas, comes from Laurie Sutton who looks at the unintentional humour to be found in the incongruities of the lesser substitute writers. This article is one long chuckle.

Have you ordered your Annual yet? We cannot print many extra copies to allow for those who have forgotten to reserve their copies in advance.

PLEASE VOTE

I believe that, in the main, we give readers what they like. But in order to get an idea of what is popular and what isn't, we are running this month a little voting competition. On a separate sheet, included loose with this issue, you will find grid one, in which you are asked to give marks to your favourite items in C.D. You may award a total of 20 marks in all. Not more than 10 marks may be given to any one particular item. Place the marks you award (up to a total of not more than 20) in the larger grid. The result of this ballot will be helpful to me in arranging our future programmes.

To add to the fun, we are including a little competition. In the smaller grid, place the code letters of the items, in guessed order, of what you think will be the six most popular items according to the popular

vote. We shall award £1 to each of the two readers who comes closest to forecasting the most popular six in the right order.

In voting, please give marks entirely to your own preference. Do NOT, please, vote to please me. Don't say: "Oh, we'll give a vote to the editorials. It will cheer the old boy up." Anything like that would ruin the vote. Give marks only to the items you really like. And in the competition section, because you know votes will be wide and varied, place the order, not as you would like it to be, but as you think it will be. Closing date will be announced next month.

THE EDITOR

* * * * *

MORE CLIFF HOUSE HISTORY

by W. O. G. Lofts

Recent research on old records brings forth further interesting information on the subject of Cliff House.

In the middle of 1918, Mr. Hamilton wrote a couple of stories entitled THE GIRLS OF CLIFF HOUSE SCHOOL, recorded as being for THE BOYS' FRIEND LIBRARY. They were of course not used, but later were transferred to the new SCHOOL FRIEND. With this new girls' paper then in preparation, Charles Hamilton obviously was instructed to write fresh stories to introduce Bessie Bunter to the school, and so the first four were written by him. The stories that he wrote originally, were however used. In No. 9, "Bessie Bunter's Way" and No. 11, "Out of Bounds." Whilst I am far from expert of the style in this field of writing, there is no doubt in my mind that No. 11 reads like pure Hamilton, even down to the same ending of the title that was a characteristic of his. No. 9 probably may have had to be revised somewhat.

For the record the very first appearance of Bessie Bunter was six weeks before the Schoolfriend commenced in MAGNET No. 582, dated 5th April, 1919, and the artist was C. H. Chapman. The story was very amusing, and I have always felt that Bessie Bunter was an excellent characterisation. Both she and Sammy to my mind had a stronger will, and were more shrewd, than the more famous Billy.

Danny's Diary



NOVEMBER 1922

At long, long last, the Magnet, Gem and Boys' Friend are enlarged and the price has gone up to 2d. Nearly all the other papers have long had this distinction, and I think that these three must be the final ones to get it. Actually, the school stories are no longer. There is just an increase in all the bits and pieces. The Boys' Friend has probably come off the best in some ways. The Magnet and Gem have four extra pages. So has the Friend, but four pages of the Friend are the equivalent of eight of the other two papers. But the Friend has lots more advertisements.

The first Rookwood tale continued with the Wilmot series. The Fistical Four try to get shelter from the rain in a cottage in the woods, but they are repulsed by a very disagreeable man. And Jimmy proves, to his own satisfaction, that Dandy Jim has taken the place of the new games master, Mr. Wilmot.

The last of the series was "Rookwooders to the Rescue" when the chums rescue Mr. Wilmot who is held prisoner in that sinister cottage, and Dandy Jim is arrested. Now, in the third week of the month, the Boys' Friend was enlarged. "Jimmy Silver's Protege" was a new boot-boy, Sandy Smacke. And at the end of the story, Smacke

startled Jimmy by speaking in the voice of Mornington, who was expelled last term. So a new Morny series is on the cards. But the final of the month did not feature Morny. "The Rogue of Rookwood" was Tracy of the Shell, who made a "book" of horses, after he had got the results of the races by telephone.

One of the new attractions in the B. F. is a series of short school stories by P. G. Wodehouse. I don't think these are new stories.

Old Kaiser Bill, now in exile at Doorn, has just got married again. Even better news is that all tram, bus, and underground fares are to be greatly reduced from 1st January. Prices are coming down all over the place.

Some very good films in the local cinemas this month. The new star, Rudolph Valentino, has knocked all the ladies sideways with "The Sheik." It has a catchy theme song, entitled "I'm the Sheik of Arabee." Agnes Ayres is also in this film.

James Barrymore plays Sherlock Holmes in "Moriarty," a picture which was much more in my line than "The Sheik." Ethel Clayton was in "Exit the Vamp," and Henry Edwards and Chrissie White were in a good British film "Tit for Tat."

I don't usually care about stories which are full of descriptions of games, and there have been plenty of these in the Gem and the Magnet. But there is a lot more than mere games in "The Cardew Cup" series which started in the Gem last month, and has run on through to its conclusion this month. Cardew raised the money for the cup by visiting a pawn-shop, and it has been a delicious series. Titles this month have been "Fighting for the Cup," "Rival Footballers" (the Gem is permanently enlarged this week), "Playing the Game," and "The Cup Winners."

The enlarged Gem is a little bit of a hotch-potch, though I like the new coloured cover in red, white and blue. But there are now two adventure stories and a serial as well as the too-short St. Jim's tale, and the rather washed-out "St. Jim's News" appears every fortnight.

Someone has sent a poisoned box of chocolates to the head of the Metropolitan police. Sounds like a real-life Sexton Blake story. And, while my brain is on Sexton Blake, there is a new story about Granite Grant and Mlle. Julie in the S. B. L. It is entitled "Riders of

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Nelson Lee Column

EDWY SEARLES BROOKS

by Jim Cook

'Shun great things' was the advice Horace gave. But how can I shun the great St. Frank's stories Brooks wrote?

Had the Roman poet known in advance of the creator of St. Frank's I am positive he would have re-phrased his quotation.

The strange thing about old Edwy is that he never aimed to be included among the Greats. He must have pondered in his early years about his future and what destiny had in store, but of the many contemporary authors who were trying to earn a living rather than seek literary fame Brooks has outshone them all today.

Does greatness demand an explanation? Perhaps Cicero has the answer to that ... 'He seems to me greatest who rises by his own merit.

Yet we need not delve in classical history to find the reason why Edwy is so popular now. 'Truth will conquer' so runs an old Hindoo saying, and should there be any-one who would deny Brooks his rightful place at the top it must be because they do not wish to associate themselves with another's success, but prefer to be deluded by the pretentiousness in others.

There are many tales of St. Frank's that will live for ever. Come the four corners of the world in arms and nothing will slay the evergreen St. Frank's.

Labour of man and affairs of State may neglect for a time the old College, but not for long. I find myself often thinking of those wonderful juniors and seniors even in moments of stress and am comforted that I can reach them so easily. Like old friends, they are reliable and never desert you.

But Brooks is not without his critics. I can find no fault with this author. He never wrote to be remembered; only for the moment. Posterity pays every man his honour, and Edwy now receives it.

I think it was Montaigne who said ... 'Since we cannot obtain greatness, let us avenge ourselves by abusing it.'

And I think this sums up the attitude of Brooks' critics. Rather

than admit the St. Frank's yarns are the best of all school and adventure stories ever written they prefer to cling to a nostalgic faith in another school story writer.

We all have a blind faith in doctors. But we don't need a blind faith in Brooks. It is impossible not to be thrilled by his school tales. They are fresh today as they were when they first saw the printer. Like old wine they improve with age.

You know how some characters in a book seem to leap out from its pages and become so real that you really look upon them as living persons. Well, many of the St. Frank's characters have this propensity. Over the years, I have seen real Handforths, real Bernard Forrest's and many like Nipper. And who has returned home and not seen an Ezra Quirke?

One thing has always puzzled me about lovers and supporters of the author of the St. Frank's stories. The great majority of them prefer to remain anonymous and just sit back and let others write the articles, attend the club meetings, hit back at Edwy's critics, attend to correspondence and all the hundred and one things connected with the hobby that they leave to others rather than get out of their armchair and help promote the Nelson Lee side of the business.

St. Frank's has many devotees, but a number desire to remain in the background always hoping the other fellow will see to it that an article or letter will appear - as usual - in next month's Collectors' Digest. Well, it's about time these lazybones contributed something that will take away some of the preponderance that is allotted to another school story writer.

I have been asked why I like Edwy Searles Brooks. They really meant to say why did I like the St. Frank's stories. I don't think I have ever been asked a question with such an easy answer as that one. The very fact that I can still read the tales today, over and over and over again, must prove the quality and defy the death. The magic in the characterisation, the facility in the narration, the punchy lines, the grip of thrills, the humour and the pathos sum up the St. Frank's saga.

Where else can one find such an abundance of good reading? Many books I read in my youth always threatened me with sleep, but dear old Edwy made me a Heaven that still lives in me. Twice read,

better remembered, said Samuel Johnson; well, from the number of times I have read a St. Frank's story my memory is well set.

But apart from all else I love the mental images and scenes that Brooks created. Bellton Lane, Bannington high-street, Bellton village and Bannington Moor. Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi, Mr. Binks and old Jeremiah Mudford. The Rev. Goodchild and Dr. Brett. The clock tower in the Triangle, the chapel and Mrs. Hake's tuckshop... "Stands the Church clock at ten to three? And is there honey still for tea?"

I have always wanted a St. Frank's sort of Christmas. With plenty of snow and breakdown trains that leave you stranded at station platforms. And of the castle ablaze with festive lights that welcome you and your rescued friends. Not to forget the Yuletide mystery and the gaiety and the boys and girls. One can only read about those times now. Never, never, never will we see those days again. No doubt, it could be 'arranged' but a false atmosphere would accompany the mock-up and like flowers, the falsehood would die.

There have been many substitutes written in an effort to copy the style of the St. Frank's tales, but they never prosper. Only Edwy Brooks could write a St. Frank's chronicle. The style was his and his alone. And it is this style that I find so indubitably superior to any other of his contemporaries. It is infinitely higher in expression and description. Brooks overpowers others' achievements.

It is understandable that supporters of St. Frank's do not need to be asked if they remember certain series or single stories in the Nelson Lee Library. Brooks' tales are unforgettable. Nor does controversy warrant exploitation. If Edwy's faithful followers haven't made up their minds about the St. Frank's tales by now I fail to see how disputing and debating them through Collectors' Digest is worth the trouble.

Opinions seem to vary with increasing regularity about another school story writer, but this could be petty fault finding. It is remarkable that a monthly controversial episode can be written if that author of school life was so excellent at his job. What's that old proverb about... 'Any silly little soul easily can pick a hole?'

The old story about Edwy not caring what he wrote towards the end of the St. Frank's saga has whiskers on it now. Like yesterday's news, it is out of date. Critics of Brooks always fasten on this as their

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

May I remind Blake fans that the Sexton Blake section of the Library is still available to everyone. Now that the darker evenings are upon us we can turn to our hobby and read our favourite Blake stories. Even the TV cannot always distract our attention. So if anyone wants to borrow from the Library, especially the Christmas numbers, will they please let me know in good time before the rush of Christmas post. I have several duplicate copies of the Gwyn Evans Xmas stories but it will naturally be - first come - first served. Happy reading.

A BLAKEOPHOBE?

by J. Bridgwater

Did William Murray Graydon dislike Sexton Blake? Did he think that other authors made so much of Blake that he needed taking down a peg or two from time to time?

So far I have

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read only four of his stories but these were chosen quite at random. My samples all produce the same impression.

Union Jack No. 227, "The Flood" has Blake being most unimpressive as a detective but Pedro is in great form.

2nd Series S. B. L. No. 122, "The Crook of Chinatown" does not give any better an impression of Blake. The other fellows are much more intelligent but if Tinker had not been there goodness knows what would have happened.

2nd Series S. B. L. No. 139, "The Mystery of the Golden Chalice" whilst being the best of the bunch from Blake's point of view, still leaves one unimpressed and wondering how he managed to get his reputation.

2nd Series No. 148, "The Riddle of Crocodile Creek" puts Blake out of the way for most of the story by having him fall easily into the hands of the master crook and remain in captivity till nearly the end. Tinker puts up a magnificent performance. All four are enjoyable stories but in none of them does Blake even approach being the great detective we know him to be. On this showing we ought to be referring to the Tinker and Pedro Saga in which poor old Blake is a minor character about as important as Mrs. Bardell with detective skill on a level with Inspector Coutts.

THE LATE SEXTON BLAKE

by Derek Smith

When in the Strand Magazine for December 1893, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle pronounced the death sentence upon his most famous creation, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, young City men went to their offices with crape bands tied round their hats and letters of protest poured in upon the author - including one beginning: "You brute!" No such extravagant behaviour marked another sad occasion some thirty years later, but faithful admirers of the second great Sage of Baker Street must have had a nasty shock when they purchased the UNION JACK on 18th June, 1927. There, centre cover, in blue lettering on an orange news sheet was the uncompromising legend: DEATH OF SEXTON BLAKE.

The story inside was "THE GALLOWES MYSTERY" - the third in a series by Gwyn Evans detailing the outrageous exploits of King-Crook Karl of Serbovia and his infamous gang, the Double Four.

The tale began in the condemned cell at Handforth Prison where the luckless occupant, Philip Carew, was awaiting execution for the murder of moneylender and blackmailer Hugo Channing.

Carew was, of course, innocent: he had been framed by the Double Four. Now, for his own nefarious purposes, King Karl was about to arrange the prisoner's release in bizarre and gruesome circumstances. Even as the pinioned man was stumbling along the short grey passage that led to the execution shed, the King-Crook and his minions were providing a substitute for the gallows. "Sprawled in a queer, grotesque attitude on the fatal trapdoor was the body of a man - a fat man, with a monstrously bloated face. And round his neck was twisted a new rope." The body was still warm - he had been strangled on the gallows while the governor and his men had been making the last grim ritual in the condemned cell - and the victim was Hugo Channing, allegedly murdered three months before!

Anything after that was likely to prove an anti-climax. In fact, it was only the opening move in a diabolical chess-game where "check-mate!" meant death. It did not take Sexton Blake long to explain the seemingly inexplicable, and identify the chief agents in the affair as Samson, the strong man-escape artist, and Lou Tarrant, the Danny La Rue of the Double Four. The gang remained at large and Blake, for once in his life completely baffled, was still pursuing routine investigations when he met his Nemesis in the unlikely shape of a tattered blind beggar.

Considerately, Blake "steadied the blind man, whose stick went tap-tapping on the pavement as if to find the friendly railings. Once the ferrule pressed smartly on the detective's shoe. He winced slightly ..."

He climbed into his car and the Grey Panther drove off with Tinker at the wheel, while in Baker Street the "blind" beggar chuckled with fiendish glee. He was Dr. Scarlatti, the famous illusionist and King Karl's chief lieutenant, and he had just murdered Sexton Blake.

The innocent-looking stick was hollow, with a hypodermic needle hidden in the rubber ferrule. Pressure on the handle released a deadly venom which was injected into Blake's blood-stream.

When Tinker drew up at the entrance of Handforth Gaol he found

to his horror that his beloved gov'nor's heart had ceased to beat. "There was not a tremor in that still, silent form. Not an eyelid quivered! Those sightless eyes stared unseeingly into Tinker's own."

The body was placed upon a stretcher and carried into the prison infirmary. "Sexton Blake, the greatest criminologist the world had ever known, whose keen wits and brilliant deductive powers were second only to his chivalry and kindness to all those who were in trouble or distress, had died, as he would have wished, in harness."

But the gods were kind, and the great legendary figures of good and evil can never really die. Scarlatti had used a form of poison which acted directly upon the heart, and though its action was stilled, the vital spark of life was not yet extinguished. In response to Tinker's frantic pleas, the prison doctor took a last desperate chance and put a powerful injection into Blake's chest. Here is the story of the great detective's return from the dead, in Sexton Blake's own unemotional words:

"A slight stimulant, applied directly to the heart muscles, will sometimes cause it to function again. Adrenalin, the most powerful astringent in the world, may be used sometimes with success. It is derived from the suprarenal gland, and, used at once, is a powerful vasomotor stimulant. But it must be used quickly. Fortunately, the doctor had a hypodermic handy. In response to Tinker's urgent plea, he used it. He charged it, he told me afterwards, with the equivalent of fifteen drops of a one to one thousand solution. The operation itself is of extreme simplicity. The heart is difficult to miss, and the needle's length is a guarantee against a too-deep puncture. It is inserted below the fifth rib, close to the breastbone. The doctor took a chance, and - well, here I am!"

There he was, indeed. Much lay ahead, including a revolution in Serbovia and a fantastic invisibility ray in London. King Karl was to lose first his throne, then his liberty, and finally his life. But nothing could eclipse the memory of the terrible moment when Sexton Blake died, nor the triumph of his resurrection. For the legendary heroes only sleep: one day they will all return.

* * * * *
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No. 104 - Magnet No. 401 - "Bunter's Anti-Tuck Campaign"

1915 was not a particularly happy year in the Magnet and it was also a time when Bunter's character was portrayed without an iota of sympathy. By the time Magnet No. 401 was published, the war had already lasted a year, and was obviously going to continue for some time longer. Shortages had not yet begun to bite deep, but there were plenty of ominous portents for those who cared to look into the future. Against this unhappy background, "Bunter's Anti-Tuck Campaign" was a humorous story with a bitter taste.

Bunter had been caught having a private feast of gargantuan size in the Remove box-room. The Famous Five told him that it was unpatriotic to eat more than necessary in wartime, and Bunter felt it was an unjustified interference in his liberty - "He felt like a coal-owner who is stopped from doubling the price of his coal." As a punishment he was paraded about the school with his bottles, tins, and jars strung round his neck and waist. We were told that he was scarlet with rage and shame, and that even Billy Bunter could feel ashamed.

As a result he challenged the Remove to go without lunch and to cut down severely on all future meals. He stood up in the dining-hall and told Mr. Quelch that the Remove had decided to go without bacon for breakfast. The Removites became famished while Bunter continually hectorated and lectured them about patriotism. In a way, the reader could not help sympathising with Bunter to some extent, even though his abstemiousness in eating was obviously not all it seemed.

In the end, the inevitable exposure followed, and Bunter was in trouble, as usual. But the story has an ambivalent moral line: when Hurree Singh declared that the Ministers of State were obviously denying themselves all their little comforts, there was a certain amount of doubt expressed by his listeners, and many of the remarks that Bunter made about the necessity to deny oneself in wartime seemed to represent Charles Hamilton's ironic commentary on the official urgings of the day.

One of the most interesting items in Magnet 401 is the advertisement on the back page for the film "His Little Lordship," which promised among other things a fight between an earl and a

poacher, and the earl's son being kidnapped by gipsies. Magnet readers were urged to ask the local picture-house manager to book the film. The circulation and readership of the Magnet must have been very extensive at that time to make such an advertisement worth-while. One also wonders whether Charles Hamilton ever noticed the advertisement or saw the film. Certainly, in the middle twenties, the Magnet featured more than one missing heir theme that might have been partly inspired by the film scenario - or something even older.

* * * * *

ALIAS NORMAN CONQUEST

by Norman Wright

The first story in the Conquest saga finds our intrepid adventurer just returning from a period abroad. Within a few chapters he has met Joy Everard, who is to be the heroine of the next four dozen adventures. Conquests first abode of any great importance was quite unusual. "Underneath the arches was different - as unique, in its way as its owner. Cunningly built into three spacious old railway arches, the home had every refinement that a modern apartment house can offer - and plenty more." (Conquest Marches On.) Even his telephone number was Bayswater 1066.

The close proximity to a railway line encouraged the wrong 'uns in one story to tie Conquest to the line in true 19th century melodrama style. Fortunately Manderville Livingstone is on hand and able to prevent his master suffering a sticky end. For those not familiar with the stories I must explain that Manderville Livingstone, or Mandy, as he is more often called, is an ex-tramp. He is to Conquest what Hoppy Uniatz is to the Saint. Mandy often drives a motor scooter and has featured in many of the stories, often arriving in the nick of time. Unfortunately he does not feature in so many of the later stories.

With the proceeds of several adventures behind him Conquest decides to invest some of his capital in property. He purchases "Conquest Court," a handsome apartment house that was originally going to be called "Lexington Park Plaza house." Norman and Joy are to use the penthouse of the building, while the rest of the apartments are to be let. We are told that the penthouse is comprised of two wings, one of

Continued on Page 25

"Come along, children, it's bed-time!"

These words were no punishment to us. My brother and I used to race each other up the stairs, unable to get there quickly enough, to hear the latest exploits of the famous fat boy of Greyfriars.

Although the late Charles Hamilton created the characters, and all the stories were written under the pen name of Frank Richards, many of them were in fact written by my father, George Richmond Samways.

He worked at home, a tall lean figure, with dark curly hair often standing on end where he had run his hands through it, and would come and enlist our help when he was stuck for ideas.

My brother had some marvellous plans for putting life into the series, by including cowboys and Indians, or cops and robbers, but my father demurred, saying that these belonged to a more violent world than Greyfriars.

My own more timid suggestions had all been used before, so we weren't of much help to the harassed author. We did, however, save him a certain amount of time and trouble by counting the number of words on each page.

There were limits to what was allowed in the stories. New characters could be introduced so long as they were of a temporary nature, and could later be dispensed with; but the stock characters of Harry Wharton & Co. could not be changed.

The one exception I will never forget, was when the editor, John Nix Pentelow, killed off one of the main characters because the boy's name was similar to another's, and readers were always writing in asking which was which. I shed many tears over this tragedy at the time, for the boy who died was one of my favourites.

Not being tied to any one place by his job, we seldom lived anywhere for more than a year at a time; therefore I was always the new girl at school, and was warned that my father's occupation was to be kept deadly secret, as the "MAGNET" was not considered suitable for young minds.

To my surprise, nearly all the children smuggled in copies of stories which I had heard months before, when they were first written.

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIALNo. 175. THE EARLY ROOKWOOD

Throughout our life time with the Companion Papers - and for many of us this has been a very long time indeed - we have been accustomed to coming upon re-prints. In the last quarter of a century one of the joys of the hobby has been tracing exactly from whence the reprinted stories originated. The serial "Birds of Prey," an early Nelson Lee epic, appeared first as a serial in the Boys' Friend in 1901, re-appeared as a complete story in the Boys' Friend Library about 1907, and then was given yet another run as a serial in the Gem somewhere about 1911. Magnet serials of the year or two prior to the first world war included the Sidney Drew story "Twice Round the Globe," which had been earlier serialised in a comic paper, and "Mysteria" which had its first airing in the Boys' Friend.

In our "The Postman Called" column this month, Mr. W. T. Thurbon recalls the Penny Popular of 1912 to 1918 which reprinted Sexton Blake stories from the Penny Pictorial and the Union Jack, and Jack, Sam and Pete tales which came from the halfpenny and penny Marvels.

The Penny Pop, and later, the Popular, was mainly a reprint paper. The very early St. Jim's tales were reprinted from the blue Gem (with one, oddly, without the Terrible Three, from Pluck), and the Greyfriars tales came from the red Magnet. But strangely enough, the Rookwood stories, which appeared for a year (so that there were about 50 different stories) in the Penny Popular of 1917 - 1918, did not come from the Boys' Friend which was the nursery of Rookwood.

I have commented before on this curious fact, in our Annuals of a few years back, but nothing has so far emerged to clear up the mystery of who wrote these Rookwood stories and from whence they came.

For some inexplicable reason, they were described as the "early adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co." And that, they certainly were not.

I have recently been browsing over these fifty stories, and they are by no means bad tales. I would go further and pass the opinion that some of them were written by Charles Hamilton himself. Of course,

only just over two years had gone by since Rookwood started, and it may well have been thought the time was too short for reprinting the original Rookwood tales. When I first read them, as a child, I really believed that they were what they pretended to be - "the early adventures of Jimmy Silver." It was not till many years later that I found out that I had been given an editorial ride, not for the first time, up the garden path.

It is possible that they were new stories, some written by Hamilton, but, if so, surely the editor, most definitely, would have announced them as NEW. He never did. In rough figures, about the first 25 of them were illustrated by Arthur Clarke - and, as we know, Clarke died in 1911. These illustrations could have been taken from other series of tales in other papers, but so far, though I have long runs of both Pluck and the Marvel, where plenty of Clarke pictures are to be found, I have no links, though it is only fair to add that I have not searched diligently.

I cannot help feeling that these earlier "early Rookwood adventures" may have been a series which Hamilton wrote of another school, and which were used for the 1917 Penny Pop with the names of the school and the characters changed. Here, again, I have to confess that, though I believe I possess almost everything that Hamilton wrote this century, I have not, so far, come across any link between his earlier series and this Rookwood lot.

Again in rough figures, the second 25 of the Penny Pop Rookwood series of this time contain plenty which are obviously sub tales, though they are not bad of their type. Through this period the artist changes, and the pictures come mainly from Shields, though it was not the attractive Shields we knew in the golden age of the Magnet and in the Schoolgirls' Own. However, plenty of these pictures can be found in the much earlier Pluck, illustrating quite different stories. One, as I have mentioned before, was the cover illustration - now very famous indeed - to the very first St. Jim's story ever written - "Jack Blake of St. Jim's." And if Shields pics were transferred in this way, as they were, then clearly the same thing may have happened with the Clarke drawings.

Some of the tales introduce German spies, giving them a war-time flavour, which might indicate that they were newly written. But,

of course, tales of German spies and war with Germany featured in the A. P. papers long before 1914. "The Legions of the Kaiser," telling of a German invasion of England, was actually running in the Boys' Friend when war broke out in August, 1914. And "The School Under Canvas," written some years before 1914, told of a German master who was a spy.

The mystery of the Pop's "early Rookwood" remains. If they were new stories, written especially for the Pop, surely the editor would have said so. If they were an old heap of tales, from whence did they come?

Of passing interest, many of these Penny Pop "early Rookwood" tales, introduced the prefect Beaumont. Beaumont featured in the early Rookwood tales in the Boys' Friend, though he disappeared after a time. I have a feeling that he was expelled. I must check over the early Danny's Diary extracts, for these give us the entire history of Rookwood in the Boys' Friend, right from the beginning.

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which is to be occupied by Conquest, and the other by Joy. There is a central lounge and dining room. The garage has its own private lift, the entrance of which is at the side of the building. From the garage there are three doors. One leads into a laboratory, one leads into Mandy's quarters, and the third leads in to the rooftop garden, which comprises a swimming pool, and which has a first class view of London and in particular Hyde Park. A maiden lady, Miss Susan Bliss is the house-keeper at Conquest Court.

It is in the story "Blonde For Danger" that Conquest obtains his famous car the Pace Special. This car is named after its builder Justin Julian Pace, a racing motorist, who proved to be a crook known as the Old Man. Conquest bought the car for five thousand pounds. It featured in almost every story up until the time that it was destroyed by Reed Lonson, a crook, who used it in an attempt to escape the law. After this Conquest had car after car, but they never had the individuality of the Pace Special.

Conquests constant adventures nearly always brought him into contact with the police in the personage of Bill Williams of Scotland Yard.

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The Postman Called

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

JOHN TOMLINSON (Burton-on-Trent): Some time ago I agreed with Len Wormull regarding his view of the ubiquitous Edward Oswald Handforth, but his latest comments on St. Frank's do not meet with my approval. Two months in succession he has "run-down" E. S. Brooks in order to praise Charles Hamilton, even in the first case having his article in the Nelson Lee section. As a lover of both writers, with a preference for Brooks, I do not consider the old idea of disparaging one to the advantage of the other either very original or very endearing to the partisans of the one slighted, whichever it may be.

It would not do for everyone to think alike: life would be very monotonous; but some writers seem to take the view that their opinions should be held by all sensible people and another point of view is not permissible.

T. HOPKINSON (Hyde): I have just read - or rather ploughed - through the E. S. B. reprint, "Expelled" and "Death of Walter Church." I cannot see why the Nelson Lee enthusiasts rate Brooks so highly. His writing comes nowhere near Hamilton's. I could never read him with the same enjoyment and pleasure as Hamilton which also was the fact in my younger days, when I read a S. O. L., "The St. Frank's Caravanners." In that tale, one of the boys spoke in rhyme on every occasion. I thought even then how "corny" it was.

W. T. THURBON (Cambridge): Further to Mr. Wadham's enquiry about the Penny Popular, all the early stories were reprints. Sexton Blake came from the Union Jack and the Penny Pictorial. Jack, Sam and Pete came from the Marvel. I am not sure when Jack, Sam and Pete dropped out, but it was around No. 222. The Pete story in Popular 222 was a reprint of Marvel 253. The reprinted Pete tales were abridged, very skilfully. Popular 2 was an adaptation of Marvel No. 3, "The Phantom Chief." No. 1 of the Popular contained the Pete tale from No. 1 of the Penny Marvel; named "Volcano Island" in the Penny Pop and "Isle of Fire" in the Marvel. From Penny Pop No. 31 onwards, most of the

J. S. and P. tales were reprinted from the Halfpenny Marvel. In Halfpenny Marvel No. 385, was the famous first story of Jack, Sam and Pete: "The Eagle of Death." The crudities of the halfpenny tales were toned down in the reprints. One or two of the goriest halfpenny tales were not reprinted. I wrote something about these reprints in the 1953 Annual if Mr. Wadham can come across a copy.

(Editorial Comment: The last Jack, Sam and Pete tale in the Penny Pop was in No. 236: "Pete's Motor Bike." It might be added that almost all the stories in the original Penny Popular were abridged, and it was extremely skilful shrinkage, far removed from the hacking which was accorded to some stories as they were reprinted in the SOL and the Gem, years later.)

M. MILSTON (London): As an admirer of Levison, I was very pleased to read the article about him, but I must disagree with the assertion that his reform was a bad thing. The fact is that Levison was never really bad. He was very bitter, and this bitterness was the cause of his actions. Once the bitterness had gone he would automatically be his normal self, which was a decent, sensitive person. When he was at Greyfriars, Wharton saw it, and he was not disappointed when Levison saved him from expulsion. Cardew and Smithy had basic faults; Levison's faults were caused by his environment.

(What was he bitter about? And what was the matter with his environment? - ED.)

DENNIS GIFFORD (London): I trust I won't be accused of monopolising your columns if I trouble you again?

The point at issue is an interview with myself, concerning my comic collection, that was published a few weeks ago in the Young Observer section of The Observer colour magazine supplement.

Many collectors' eyebrows must have shot up when they read Miss Angela Levin's report that "a copy of number one of THE BEANO recently changed hands at £200." I can assure them that my own eyebrows shot up, too!

I was immediately in touch with both the Editor of the Young Observer, and the Editor of the 'Letters' feature of the Observer newspaper itself, but neither could find room in their pages or their consciences to publish a correction.

To set the record straight, therefore, may I crave space in your columns? The fact is that the young lady garbled two quite separate

statements into one. First, I showed her my copy of Number One of the American comic book, FAMOUS FUNNIES. This, I told her, was currently advertised by American dealers at 500 dollars - approximately £200. Later she asked me what 'number one' comics I did not have. I said I had none of the Thomson first issues. "How much were they worth?" she asked. I said this was impossible to estimate. One might pick them up for 5p at an Oxfam shop, or pay a dealer up to 50p. I added that as a specialist collector I would be willing to pay as high as £2 a copy.

Evidently Miss Levin got her comics crossed, and mixed the facts about FAMOUS FUNNIES with the hopes about THE BEANO. So please publish this - and wipe the smirk off the face of Bill Lofts who does have Number One of The Beano!

JOHN BUSH (Herne Bay): I have very much enjoyed reading the series on the old cinemas, but feel I must point out a mistake in the October "C.D." In the "Editor's Chat" is the statement - "Golden Domes opposite to the South London Palace," Elephant & Castle. Actually I knew the "Golden Domes" very well, having lived 50 years quite near to its location, and it was actually situated almost opposite the Camberwell Green Bus Garage, in Camberwell New Road, and is now a Bingo Hall. The South London Palace was at St. George's Road, Elephant & Castle.

(Editorial Comment: We knew the Golden Domes cinema in Denmark Hill, Camberwell. I believe it was mentioned in the series. Referring to the cinema opposite the South London Palace, we stated the belief that it was also named Golden Domes, though we were not certain. A reader wrote that it was actually called Golden Domes, and this was why we did not query the name in our recent editorial. Can any other reader tell us for certain whether or not the cinema opposite the South London Palace was called Golden Domes?)

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Williams, who is promoted throughout the saga, is described as a large stoutish man with a red cherubic face. Mrs. Williams is mentioned at least once, in the story "Conquest in Scotland." She is described as a pleasant featured, middle aged woman. We also learn that Williams has three children, two boys and a girl. The whole happy family living at 26 Rose Avenue, Streatham.

Other characters who appear often in the stories are George

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NEWS OF THE CLUBS

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

A particularly enjoyable meeting was held at Cahill's Tudor Hall, on 30th August. Ron Brockman produced a number of photocopies of an article in the general affairs magazine "Nation" - an article dealing with Hamiltonia. The writer was Mr. Burns, a lecturer in English at the University of N.S. Wales. We hope he will become a member of our club on the invitation of Ron Brockman.

Stan Nicholls received a parcel of hobby books and papers from an anonymous donor. After members had owned up that they had sent the items, it was decided that the parcel should be sent on to Arthur Holland, our absent club member who is with us in spirit.

The Nelson Lee Library reprint "Expelled" was passed round and admired. Final highlight of the evening came from Jim Cook of New Zealand, who sent along photos, etc., so that we could share with him the delights of his recent visit to hobby friends in England.

B. PATE



LONDON

It was appropriate that Ray Hopkins gave a Kirkham reading from a Schoolgirls' Own of 1927 vintage, (later on it was featured in a Schoolgirls' Own Library), at the Beckenham meeting seeing that Mary Cadogan was the hostess, ably assisted by Alex and Teresa. Winifred Morss read the extremely funny "Keep Tabs on Fish" from Magnet 1161, entitled "Rolling in Dollars." Josie Packman exhibited a fine coloured photograph of a bloodhound like Pedro, a copy of Marvel No. 33, dated June 1896, entitled "Sexton Blake's Peril" by Hal Meredith and conducted a fine quiz which Ben Whiter won. The latter's Literary quiz was won by Roger Jenkins and then the hostess gave her item about Mrs. George De Horne Varzey who wrote for the Girls' Own Paper and the Girls' Realm. The final item was from Bob Blythe, who after reading from Newsletter, October 1955, gave his Humorous Sounds Quiz.

Recorded greetings were expressed on the occasion of P. G. Wodehouse's 91st birthday anniversary and a welcome to the local members from Sidcup and Gravesend, Maurice Corkett and J. E. Bacon. Nice to see Ron and Kit Beck from Lewes.

A vote of thanks to the three Cadogans was proposed by the Chairman, Ben Whiter who then said that he hoped to see all at Sam Thurbon's Twickenham home on Sunday, 19th November; 29 Strawberry Hill Road.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

• • •

NORTHERN

Meeting on Saturday, 14th October

Our accustomed library session took place with Mollie Allison back again after her holiday in America. That land, you may recollect, with which this little old country is compared so unfavourably by Fisher T. Fish.

One gathered from Mollie's conversation, however, that she had not called in at 'The Aquarium.' (Any report to the contrary may be regarded as a fishy story!)

This month our illustrious President, P. G. Wodehouse, would be celebrating his 91st birthday and Mollie announced that she had sent a greetings card from our Club.

P.G.'s latest book was now published, said Mollie. It was entitled, 'Pearls, Girls and Monty Bodkin.'

Mollie presented us with a word-game manifestly embracing a wide range of erudition ranging from Yorkshire dialect and Latin through the hobby to hobby authors. Duplicated answers were to be erased.

The benefits of a classical education were apparent when Ron Rhodes won with a total of 28 and Geoffrey Wilde came second with 19. It is considered judicious not to record the rest of our marks!

Next meeting is to be on Saturday, 11th November, and we ask for an early start for a full programme. Jack Allison is to speak on 'Reading Between the Lines' and we are to hear the record, 'Floreast Greyfriars.'

Gentlemen, chaps and sportsmen (and Cliff House girls), please

endeavour most graciously to honour us with your presence on this auspicious occasion.

("Pipe down - shurrup - scrag 'im - !")

Floreat Greyfriars!



REVIEW

GREYFRIARS PRESS HOLIDAY ANNUAL

FOR 1973

(Howard Baker £2.75)

Among the scores of Annuals put out for the Christmas trade there will undoubtedly be a great many much lower-priced than this one. It is certain that there will be none more varied in content or better value for money. Inevitably the first half of the volume is rather untidy in presentation, but this is probably no matter in a Christmas Annual, over which browsing is part of the enjoyment.

Chief item is the 4-story Cigarette Case Christmas series of the Magnet of 1938. Not the Magnet's best Christmas series by a long chalk, it nevertheless has a full quota of festive atmosphere, and is notable as reintroducing that extraordinary character, Soames.

A very good tale, featuring Walker of the Sixth, is found in the reprint of the 1933 Magnet "Taming A Tyrant." Less understandable is the reprinting of "Shadow of the Sack" which was the first story of a series which was never completed. As a lone item, though it is well told, it is mainly noteworthy as being the last of all the Magnets.

"Glyn's Hair-Raising Invention" is a reprint of a 1938 Gem which was itself a reprint of "Glyn's Great Stunt," an amusing little trifle of 1920. Some of the other items do not seem to be so happily chosen, interesting though they are in their own right. "Ructions at Rookwood" is the opening story of a long series which featured Mr. Greely at his best, and the reader is left with his tongue hanging out. "Pitt the Plotter" appeared in the Popular, and was itself a chunk of a story in a series in the early St. Frank's saga. The Cedar Creek tale is the final of a little set of tales which starred Beauclerc and his father. "Levison's Triumph," also from the Popular, is the reprint of a chunk of a story in the "Levison, Expelled" Gem series of 1922.

A great deal of work was obviously put into the editing of this book. It could have been even better if stories which were not parts of series had been chosen to form the supporting programme.

Ken King features in a pleasant South Seas tale, and the Rio Kid stars in an excellent western full of atmosphere.

As in all these volumes, there is a mass of additional reading apart from the main attractions. A delight for the fan who loves to wallow in nostalgia, as most of us do.



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Barrow, who is manager of Conquest Court, Tom Burgess who is the man at the desk, and Fred Freeman the hall porter. I could go on for pages with this biography of the Conquest saga, but why instead don't you go and try reading some of the stories yourself. Bob Blythe has most of them in the London club library.