

STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS DIGEST

VOLUME 30 No. 351

MARCH 1976

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Founded in 1941 by
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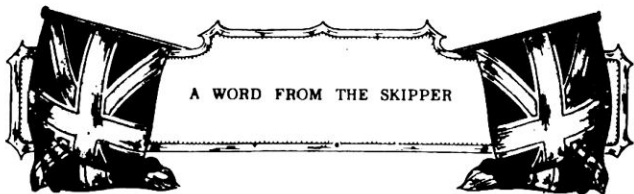
Vol. 30

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Price 20p

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MEMORY TICKLERS

Have you noticed how, on occasion, an item in the news can jog your memory and take your thoughts back to some old, old yarn which you may have read long ago?

Recently the papers reported the mysterious loss, without trace for a time, of a giant oil-tanker. My mind drifted back to one of Pierre Quiroule's fine novels in the Sexton Blake Library in the mid-twenties. The story was entitled "The Mystery of the Lost Battleship", and the cover carried an intriguing picture of a battleship lying at the bottom of a lagoon, somewhere in the South Seas. This story was reprinted in the thirties under a different title, "The Havana Mystery".

and one wonders idly why such a change should have been made, and whether one title was more effective than the other. Whatever the title, it was one of the best of the Rolling Stone's books.

Many of P.Q.'s novels had the peculiarity of devoting the first half to detective work, and then trailing off into an adventure yarn in the second half. For this reason I often enjoyed the first half more than the second. Personally, I think that "The Havana Mystery", with its detection and, later on, its adventure, would be attractive if published for the readership of the seventies.

It is with some pleasure that I recall it was due to my own intervention and persistence that the controllers of the S. B. L. republished almost all the Quiroule stories before, in the late thirties, they managed to persuade W. W. Sayer to write some new ones.

THE GOLDEN GEM

Our various clubs often inspire an item in my editorial, and I am grateful to them for this. In January our Northern Club discussed the high prices being charged for old magazines. It is a topic which has cropped up down the years, and it has always been evident that it's a matter of supply and demand.

Nevertheless, the prices being asked and paid for the old papers now is a matter which we view with some concern, for the collection of the papers is becoming a rich man's hobby.

One reason is that the country is awash with money, despite all the warning rumbles. And when a country is enormously prosperous, all prices rise high because so many have money to burn, and, as a result, times get harder for those on small and fixed incomes.

The only thriving industries today are nostalgia, pornography, and burglary - which doesn't say much for the way we have been governed since the end of the war. Let's hope we don't get swept away in the flood.

At our Northern Club meeting mentioned above, "others felt that the intrinsic value of hobby literature was coming to be recognised." They're telling us! It's a nice bit of sales propaganda, anyhow.

A BIT OF OLD CATFORD

We tend to think of things as they were when we last saw them.

Recently, I saw an announcement that "Songs of Praise" was to be televised from St. Laurence's Church, Catford. Ah, St. Laurence's Church - and Catford, I thought. I knew them so well. I pictured the beautiful, cathedral-like church, on the corner where two main roads joined. I could see the L. L. C. trams - one after the other - tuppence all the way in off-peak times - going off in one direction - to Forest Hill, I think. Route 66, I seem to remember. And in another direction, past the church, the trams had Southend on their destination blinds. (It meant Southend, Catford, I think.) And in another direction the trams went off to Lewisham, surely. And opposite one side were gardens, laid out with flowers in the summer. And opposite the other was Lewisham Hippodrome (why Lewisham, I used to wonder, when this is Catford?) a beautiful, big theatre, all plush red seats, and carpets, and sweeping curtains, and marvellous shows when I went there once or twice. And Kent used to play county cricket at Catford somewhere.

They started off "Songs of Praise" with a shot of St. Laurence's Church, Catford, and my dream ended. I have an impression that it looked like a giant igloo. "This lovely modern church," intoned the announcer. I realised how far I had been thinking back. I wonder what became of the old church. Perhaps it was bombed in the war, or perhaps they just pulled it down for the sake of pulling it down. They do, you know!

YOU'RE THE ONE WHO COUNTS, ANGELA!

Elsewhere in this issue we review a fascinating new book by Mrs. Mary Cadogan and Miss Pat Craig. It's a giant work, and I reckon I shall be quoting from it for a long time to come. A persistent theme of the book is the way women had to fight the unfairness of the world. Speaking of a remark made in 1910 by a certain Rev. John Todd, whoever he was, Mary and Patricia say: "His picturesque indictment is remarkable now chiefly for its innocence; but it shows plainly how responsibility for the nation's moral tone was supposed to devolve on women."

I'm quite sure that the nation's moral tone does depend on women. No nation can be magnificent unless its women are magnificent. The men don't really count for much. The women do. A good home depends

carried on. In "Out Of The Running", the election for the junior captaincy takes place, and Gunner tries to win it by a bit of trickery, but it rebounds on his own head, and Lovell is elected the new captain.

In "The New Captain Gets Going", Lovell throws his weight about as captain, and it does not make him popular. In "Nowhere To Go", Lovell no longer shares a study with the rest of the Fistical Four, so he has no study of his own. Tubby Muffin, knowing that Lovell has received a pound note by post, persuades Lovell to join his study - and that does not please Tubby's study-mates.

Last of the month was "The Rookwood Boat-Race", between the Classical Juniors and the Moderns. Unfortunately for Lovell, he gets the flu and is unable to skipper the Classical boat - so Jimmy, who had been left out of the "eight", takes over and wins. An excellent series which will continue next month.

In the Nelson Lee Library there has started this month an interesting new series in which the St. Frank's fellows become stage actors. It is mainly comedy so far, but there are also plenty of dramatic moments. Mr. Andrew Sylvanus Noggs runs a travelling theatre in a large marquee which is erected in places near certain towns and villages. Mr. Noggs's business is bad, which he puts down to competition from cinemas. But his manager, Roger Barton, is a scoundrel, and he is partly to blame for Mr. Noggs's troubles. In the first story Handforth and Lawrence decide to help Mr. Noggs by staging a boxing match in the play on the stage. Archie also gets the idea that he would like to be a star. Stevens's father wrote a splendid play before he died, and the son has always dreamed that the play would be staged some day. Handforth writes a detective play about Trackett Grim, - and Barton steals Stevens's play. The month's tales are "The Lure of the Footlights", "Stage-Struck Archie", "Handforth on the Trail", and "The Triumph of Trackett Grim".

There is another new issue out of the shilling monthly, the Monster Library. It is entitled "The Bullies of St. Frank's" or "The Mysterious X".

It has been the driest March for over 70 years. Mr. Alan Cobham flew from London to the Cape and back, finally landing at Croydon Airport.

The British post-office is recognized as the very best in the world. It has now introduced a new parcel system, named C. O. D. That means Cash On Delivery. You can order something, and pay for it to the postman.

A weak programme in the Gem this month. In "Friends Divided", Talbot and Marie Rivers quarrel because Marie renews a friendship with Joan Dawlish, the sister of the criminal Jim Dawlish who has featured in goodness knows how many Talbot stories. Marie is kidnapped and Joan Dawlish goes to St. Jim's - as Marie. It's miles beyond belief. When a number of sick juniors go to the Sanatorium for treatment, the fake Marie Rivers doesn't know which medicine to give them, so selects a "white mixture". If medical treatment is run on such lines at St. Jim's, I'm glad I don't go there.

Sequel to this was "The Night Raiders" in which the fake Marie lets the gang in to plunder St. Jim's. And John Rivers is now a detective. All these Talbot tales of recent years are much of a muchness, and this pair is no worse than the others. Maybe a bit better, if you can believe that everybody could really believe that Joan Dawlish, in Marie Rivers's clothes, was Marie Rivers.

"Grundy the Artist" is a title which tells its own sad tale. Somebody - a Mr. Manton - is coming to St. Jim's to photograph the Head's Rembrandt. Grundy, who thinks he can paint, thinks that he may become famous if one of his pictures is photographed. So he substitutes his own picture for the Head's Rembrandt - and Mr. Manton pinches it in mistake for the Rembrandt. Tedious and tiresome stuff.

Finally, yet another Sports Contest, in "Rivals & Chums". And Talbot, who has assisted Mr. Ratcliff, is rewarded by being transferred to the New House. But he changes back in time to win the Sports Contest, for the School House. Oh, those awful, boring Tournaments. How ever many have there been?

At the pictures we have seen Charlie Chaplin in "The Gold Rush" (I like Charlie better in his shorter pictures, though they say this one is a masterpiece); Emil Jannings in a heavy-going version of "Quo Vadis"; House Peters in "Raffles"; Reginald Denny in "I'll Show You the Town"; Tom Mix in "The Lucky Horseshoe", and Rin Tin Tin in "Tracked in the Snow Country". My favourite, though, was Betty Bronson and Ernest

BLAKIANA

conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

As I write these words the scene outside is really wintery. Cold with bleak looking skies and a thin layer of snow on the frozen ground. A description of conditions which go well with the article by Cyril Rowe connected with "The Mammoth Hunters". At the moment we haven't any glaciers and the snow is not very thick but in this topsy-turvy world of ours one never knows what to expect where our weather is concerned. Cecil Hayter's tales of Loseley and Blake's adventures were very good and always amusing. There is a copy of this BFL in the Sexton Blake lending library should anyone wish to borrow it. In fact there are hundreds of Sexton Blake tales available for people without a collection of their own or who do not have all the books they want. The charge for borrowing is still 1p for U.J.'s and 2p for S. B. L.'s and other Libraries. It's only the postage which has gone up.

CUTCLIFFE HYNE, CECIL HAYTER AND SEXTON BLAKE

by Cyril Rowe

In the early years of the Boys' Friend Weekly appeared the serial "The Mammoth Hunters" by Cecil Hayter, introducing Sir Richard Loseley and Sexton Blake in a tremendous adventure across the North Polar wastes. This story was reprinted in No. 88 of the 1st series of the Boys' Friend Library, where I first read it during the Great War. I was able to secure it again a few years ago and thoroughly enjoyed the tale once more.

Just recently I bought a second-hand copy of "My Joyful Life" by C. J. Cutcliffe-Hyne, the author of the Captain Kettle yarns. Looking in the index before buying the book I saw the name Cecil Hayter set down in three places. However, upon reading the volume I discovered that he appeared over much more of Hyne's reminiscences than that. In the early years of the century Hyne and Hayter took an ex-whaling barque "SY Windward" up to Vardoe at the entrance to the White Sea for Alfred Harmsworth who was sending her as a relief vessel to an

expedition marooned in Franz Joseph land. Hyne and Hayter left the vessel there and walked across Lapland, 850 miles to Tomio-Haparanda at the head of the Gulf of Bothnia. No dates are given but this obviously took place very early in the century. A rather piecemeal and interrupted account of their journey is given in this book published in 1935. As the journey was made in all the difficulties of winter I wondered if all the snow scenes in Hayter's tale came from magnified remembrance of this journey. Both gentlemen were great travellers and brought much local detail into the worldwide adventures of their fictional characters from many of their own experiences and I presume that quite a deal of interchange of local colour may have gone on. Hyne says in the book that most of the journey is reported elsewhere and I observe that he wrote a book called "Through Arctic Lapland" which no doubt tells the trip in more considerable detail. This book I have not come across but would very much like to; to see if a more detailed conclusion can be drawn. Possibly another book by Hyne "People and Places" might be another source but I have no idea of the year of publication. Off on another tack far from Sexton Blake, I wonder how much the originator of Captain Handyman drew from Hyne's Captain Kettle.

BLAKE TELLS THE TALE

by S. Gordon Swan

Long-forgotten episodes in crime literature are to be found in issues of THE JESTER for 1905-6. These were printed under the general heading of "The Detective Club", and each story was told by a celebrated crime investigator.

We have encountered Sexton Blake as author in THE UNION JACK and THE SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY. Here we find him narrating some of his own exploits to his fellow-practitioners. In No. 222, dated 3/2/1906, is a story entitled "A Trail of Glittering Gold", in which Blake relates how he and a number of police officers track down a gang of coiners.

In No. 232 of 14/4/1906, "The Scourge of the Bush" takes us to a different venue, Queensland in Australia. On the goldfields a character named Griffin accuses a young Englishman of stealing five hundred pounds in banknotes from his tent. As he has a list of the numbers of the notes and they are found in the Englishman's possession,

surrounding forests. The following extract gives a good idea of what faces any explorers of this region.

"The trees which lined the banks were of an enormous size. Their height was like a terrific wall, and presented a great, vast green frontage on the river which seemed impenetrable.

It was an endless rampart, and mysteries lurked between the recesses. Wild animals, snakes and goodness knows what else lay hidden among those mighty trees and masses of creepers. Everything on this river was so huge - so enormously large. Even the flies themselves were terrifically fat."

From the health point of view it is extremely difficult to imagine anyone - with the exception of the local Indian inhabitants - surviving all the hazards which the Amazon forests hold over a lengthy period.

Nelson Lee and the St. Frank's party had the benefit of Lord Dorrimore's yacht - the "Wanderer" in going up the Amazon and with an airship to cross the swamp in search of the missing Colonel Kerrigan.

Even had E. S. Brooks exaggerated the difficulties which would beset those entering the forests, it is obvious that no help could be given by the outside world to those in trouble.

"A COUPLE OF POSTSCRIPTS"

by C. H. Churchill

In the February 1975 edition of the C.D. I recorded a short history of Boz, Nipper's little Spaniel dog, which he purchased from a member of the crew of Lord Dorrimore's yacht. I finished by saying that I believed his last appearance was in old series No. 548, "The Schoolboy Conspirators". I have since been advised by fellow Leeite, Jim Cook, that Boz turned up again, for the last time, in the Flood series in 1927. Not possessing this series, I was unaware of this fact so we are obliged for this information from our friend in New Zealand.

I found Ernest Holman's article in the January 1976 C.D. on the "Mysteries of St. Frank's" most interesting. Regarding his remarks on the sketches in the Nelson Lee and their relation to the stories as regards correctness, I do on the whole agree with him. I can point out a few discrepancies but not many. I have all the St. Frank's Lees in the old "small" series and I see that in the series of Feb./Mch. 1922, Nos. 349/355, when the Juniors camped out on Willard's Island there were

lighthouse. The chair into which I had dropped was covered in leather well-worn by the passage of many years.

A polite cough from Mr. Leggett recalled me to the purpose of my visit.

"I am grateful to you, Sir, for being so kind as to receive me," I acknowledged. "I will try not to abuse such courtesy. To be brief, I have called to ask you to tell me something of your firm's connexions with Greyfriars School."

Mr. Leggett leaned forward, a wisp of grey hair falling across the gentle wrinkles of his face. "Ah! Greyfriars," he said, his voice little more than a whisper, "so much has already been written and said about Greyfriars that it can do no harm now if I speak of the small part that Leggett and Teggers has played in the history of that particular school."

"Our association with Greyfriars," began Mr. Leggett after he had stirred the fire into a new lease of life, "covers several decades and still continues today. Considering the number of criminals that we have been instrumental in placing in temporary posts at the School that is a remarkable fact. In addition to this a junior partner of this firm, for reasons of personal gain, took a post at Greyfriars in another man's name. I will refer to him later, but for the moment I would like us to examine two cases about which a certain amount of confusion exists. I am thinking of the two Lagdens - Rupert and Stephen. As far as I know they were not related and, although they both indulged in crime, Rupert was a professional and Stephen an amateur.

Stephen Lagden had been a master at Okeham School and there had not only committed a robbery but had succeeded in having the guilt fastened on a colleague, James Loder, who was sentenced to three years hard labour for a crime he did not commit. Loder was able to escape from Blackmoor prison and managed to cross the southern counties from the west until he reached Kent where he hoped to flee to the continent. He encountered Lagden on his way to the School to take up a temporary post of Games Master for which we had recommended him. Lagden turned down an appeal from Loder to confess to his deceit. Turning away from this confrontation, Lagden encountered another - this time a speeding car. Loder exchanged identities and clothes with Lagden and



PUFFING and groaning, Bessie swung the clubs in a hopeless effort to obey Gail's harsh commands. Poor Bessie! The upstart captain was punishing her for no reason at all!

T. E. Laidler illustration in *The Schoolgirl*



THE FACE AT THE WINDOW! gasped Peggy. "I—oh! I—nearer, until it pressed against the glass! I had a vision of two beady green eyes!"

Bessie as illustrated by G. M.



Bessie portrayed by Leonard Shields in a 1935 Magnet

Smack! Hazelene gave a wild yell as Bessie's fat hand smote his face. "Bessie!" shrieked Marjorie Hazelene. "I'll smack him again!" exclaimed Miss Ewens, dancing round the enraged and dazed Hazel. "I'll give him porpoise!" "I'll give him fat little beast!"



WINDOW! "Do you see that?" cried Babe, hoarsely. "Yes! A white shape! Lock!" Suddenly the white shape came to the window pane. And in that moment the green eyes that glowed uncannily in the darkness without.

G. M. Dodshon in The School Friend in 1921



HOW ARE THE MIGHTY FALLEN! Whi-iz! "Yow-wow-wow!" hurriedly aside as Bessie shot past them on the slide. Crash! Bump! "Yarough!" yelled Bessie as she fell heavily upon the thick ice.

G. M. Dodshon picture from a 1921 School Friend

LETTER FROM A LUVLY LAYDEE

Clif Howse Skool, Friardale, Kent.

Dear Mr, Edditter,

(I am fourwoding this via Mary Cadogan as I doant knoe yor adres.)

As yew ar sellebrayting a hundrid yeers of Charles Hamilton, I think it is tym yew payd a proper tribewt to his most phasinayting and dianamic karacter - **ME!** I am abserloutly **PHED UPP** with the way my stepid brother Billy has hogged yor kolums so long! But he orlways was a greedy beest - kwite difrent from his charming, luvly and orltogether delytfull sister!

I am shore that most of yor reeders ar seekretly in luv with me (everywunn likes a girl with a good figger and a pritty face!). To give my menny admyrers a reel and long oaverdew treet I am enklosing some pikchers by vareeus artists which pay tribewt to my beauty. I eggspeckt to be the starr of yor payper in fewtewr!

Yors sinceerlee,

Bessie Bunter

P. S. Sorree this letter is krumpelled! That kat Clara Trevlyn sed it was pifling rott and throo it into the waistpayper barskit! Cheek! P. P. S. If yew doant print this letter, **SUMWUNN'S HEAD WIL GET SMAKED!:** I warn yew!

took the latter's place at the School while Lagden was carted off to the local Cottage Hospital suffering from amnesia and other discomforts. Lagden later confessed and James Loder, having occasioned some uncomfortable moments for his cousin Gerald, a prefect at the School, returned to his proper place in society.

Rupert Lagden had experienced success in both his chosen professions but it was less academic calling that profited him the most. At nightfall the gown and mortar-board were put aside for the black silk mask and dark suit and the Bachelor of Arts became 'Jimmy the One'. This subterfuge stood him in good stead for over a decade during which he must have amassed an immense pile of loot of incalculable value. He was brought to justice, not so much perhaps because of the vigilance of a Scotland Yard detective named Brent, but because of the inquisitiveness of a pupil called, I think, Bunter. Thus ended the careers both scholastic and otherwise of a vicious and evil man who had proved that he would stop at little to further his own vile interests.

In the early months of the second war many were called to serve their country. Mr. Woose, then Art Master at Greyfriars, was appointed adviser on camouflage to the War Office and Dr. Locke asked me to find a successor. This was not easy considering the shortage of manpower and I was considering advising the Greyfriars headmaster that I was unable to assist when a Mr. Lamb walked into this office. I remember him well for he wore his hair rather long and appeared to cultivate into a style of curls more suited to the youth of today than to a mature man of 1939. How genuine was this and the other affectations he indulged in I am unable to say. Perhaps they were part of a disguise for his real character of Slim Jim. But beggars - even academic ones - cannot be choosers and Lamb provided proof that he had been exempted from military service and was too old to be considered a 'Bevin Boy'. I tried to ignore the man's rather 'arty' appearance which reminded me rather of a cartoonist's idea of a concert pianist, and as he was more than willing to take up the appointment and I was anxious to oblige Dr. Locke, I decided that he would have to do.

There were excellent pickings in the Greyfriars vicinity for a man of Lamb's calling and it was just as he was leaving one of these - Popper Court I think it was called - that he was confronted by Mr. Quelch.

Poor Quelch! Faced with exposure, Lamb arranged the Remove masters' abduction and the poor fellow had to face many weeks of incarceration before his release was engineered by a boy of his form called Vernon-Smith. And mention of that name recalls Lucius Teggors, the junior member of this firm whom I mentioned earlier. I must emphasise that Lucius was not a criminal seeking to augment his teaching emoluments by cracking safes! He was a dissolute wastrel, heavily in debt to innumerable turf accountants, but it was a vision of unlimited wealth that made him stray from the strait and narrow. You are doubtless aware of the immense assets of Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith the international financier and that he is parent to an only child - a boy who is a pupil at Greyfriars School. It was the behaviour of this boy that caused the father seriously to consider disowning him and naming another as his heir. The successor was to be Lucius Teggors if the boy did not mend his ways.

The Teggors were distant relatives of the Vernon-Smiths; a distance that the latter had been at pains to observe over the years. Now, suddenly, Lucius was approached by Vernon-Smith Senior who dangled the possibility of an immense inheritance before his eyes. The son had only to fall from grace once more and Lucius would be named heir in his stead. Lucius decided to take up an appointment as temporary Remove master in another's name in order to ensure that the son's disgrace was certain and decisive. Men of sterner fibre than Lucius may have been as easily tempted."

Mr. Leggett looked suddenly tired but he managed a smile as I rose to go and took me by the arm to the door.

"When next you take up the chronicles of Greyfriars School, do remember the firm of Leggett and Teggors. In our small way we made those chronicles more interesting to read. Good night!"

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ON SALE NOW: A Special 20-page Convention Number of **GOLDEN FUN**. This features Chips, Film Fun, Denis McLoughlin, Peggy the Pride of the Force, Tiger Tim, and more - plus a superb cover by David Ashford. Send 38½ pence CASH to Alan & Laurel Clark, 1 Lower Church Street, Cuddington, near Aylesbury, Bucks. (Note to regular readers - this is not our Roy Wilson Number which will now be next issue, No. 5.)

REVIEWYOU'RE A BRICK, ANGELA!Mary Cadogan & Patricia Craig
(Gollancz: £6.50)

This is more than a book. It's an event.

Comprising nearly four hundred pages, it is a giant reference work for the student of girls' fiction. It covers an extremely long period, from early Victorian times (when most women wore the trousers without appearing to do so) to the nineteen-seventies (when women wear the trousers very obviously).

It is well-written, and gives a reader plenty to think about. I imagine that a book of this type is far harder to produce than a similar one about boys' fiction, for the simple reason that girls mature far earlier generally. So we find the writers looking at children's books, followed by papers like the Girls' Friend which, despite their titles, catered more for young women, and lastly the school story of Cliff House and Morcove type, which attracted boys as well as girls.

The opening chapter seems to lack warmth. This is possibly due to the writers, from the highly-advanced civilisation of the nineteen-seventies, dwelling on the squalid aspects of Victorian life, and being indignant at man's inhumanity to women. There is a keen Feminist theme running through the book.

Victorian stories do not show up very well. Our writers tell us, in a footnote, that Oscar Wilde observed: "No man of feeling can read the death of Dickens's 'Little Nell' without laughing." But Oscar Wilde was a cynic, and, possibly, a man who liked to say something in the hope that it would annoy.

Our authors are a bit sweeping about religion. "In spite of the firm hold which religious ideals had taken on popular imagination, there was no sympathy or help for women and girls who had been forced into prostitution ... Double standards of Victorian morality - which cast a girl who had been made pregnant outside society's protection though it happily accepted the male seducer - add to the number for whom there was no alternative method of survival but prostitution."

And: "Those who yearned to 'do good' saw no dichotomy in forcing their pregnant maid-servants without notice into the streets or

workhouse."

It is not surprising, perhaps, to find our authors contemptuous of Mrs. O. F. Walton and her sentimental little tale for children, "A Peep Behind the Scenes". They are surprised that "it has been frequently reprinted, appearing as recently as 1972 in a new paperback edition." They make no attempt to explain why it has sold over 2½ million copies and why its popularity has lasted. (In fact, the new edition which we reviewed in C.D. in 1972 was a stiff-covered book, not a paperback.)

There are fascinating appraisals of the work of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Lewis Carroll, L. M. Alcott and her "Little Women", Susan Coolidge who wrote the "Katy" stories, Mrs. Burnett of "Lord Fauntleroy" fame, L. M. Montgomery who created Anne and Green Gables, and E. H. Porter's "Pollyanna" who is described as the silliest of all the characters.

Of strong interest is the comparison between the Girls' Own Paper and the Boys' Own Paper, and I was intrigued with a pleasant and informative section on Angela Brazil who wrote what was then a new type of girls' school yarn.

A favourite chapter is the one on the Girls' Friend, Girls' Reader, and Girls' Home, but I would question the accuracy of the statement that "it is true to say that these Northcliffe papers are collected today mainly for the appeal of Pollie Green." Those papers aren't collected today - for the simple reason that there are next to none of them available to collect. Unlike the School Friend family, they were read solely by older girls and young women - and the unsentimental ladies never saved them.

Our readers will enjoy the chapters, written with real affection, on Cliff House and Morcove. The writers pick a few holes, naturally, but who can argue with a lady? Frank Richards gets a mention now and then, but it is to the writers' credit that they don't drag in the magic name just for the sake of doing so.

"William" is, surely, a cuckoo in the next. Stories about four naughty small boys could hardly be termed girls' fiction. But it's a good study of Master Brown, who shares his chapter with a young miss named Jane (a stranger to me) by Evadne Price.

Enid Blyton gets a look-in, though one senses that our authors disapprove of her. They observe, following one Blyton quotation: "This is a type of smutty, chauvinistic humour which children enjoy, and incidentally it sums up two objectives of British education: to instil an acute sense of cleanliness and to teach the pupils to take their punishment like a man. The former may be still socially valid but the latter has a jingoistic connotation which has very little relevance at the present time."

That bit would earn approval from the parliamentary gent who claimed that he read the Magnet for years and found nothing but snobbery in it.

The final chapter or two deal with post-war tales for girls, and I am out of my depth. But plenty will enjoy the swim.

A wonderful book of intriguing reading, even if, at times, you cross swords with the authors. It is far from being a giant wallow in nostalgia.

It is quite superbly indexed and acknowledgments are profuse,

I am impressed by the little bits of currency information, given now and then in footnotes or parentheses:- for instance, we are told (incorrectly) that 8d. is 4p, and (near enough) that 8/11 is 45p. Those who buy this book now will hardly need to be reminded of the value of old money in today's coinage. So our authors clearly hope and expect that their book will be still going strong for generations who never knew real money.

I reckon it will. It deserves great success. If it lasts as long as "A Peep Behind the Scenes", it won't have done so badly, will it?

=====

Before Tom Merry was created, Jack Blake was the leader of the St. Jim's juniors in this charming old story of 70 years ago.

MISSING

St. Jim's was in a state of excitement the next morning. The whole school knew now that D'Arcy was missing, and wild speculation was rife as to what had become of him.

During the morning Inspector Skeet

came over from Rylcombe to see the Head, and many curious eyes watched his red face and portly form crossing the quadrangle. The inspector brought little news. The police had searched the wood, aided by a number of villagers, but they found nothing

but D'Arcy's cap. This was picked up in the densest part of the wood. Of the boy himself nothing had been seen. Only one thing was certain, and that was that he was no longer in the wood.

Dr. Holmes's face was dark with anxiety. The inspector's report was a bitter disappointment.

"It is certain that he is not in the wood, sir," declared the portly inspector.

"Have you discovered anything of the gipsy?"

"He has not been seen, sir. If found, he will be arrested on a charge of attempted robbery. Nothing has been seen of him as yet."

"Then does it not look as if he had kidnapped the boy?" asked Mr. Kidd, who was present at the interview.

The inspector gave a fat smile.

"My dear sir, kidnapping is entirely out of date," he exclaimed. "I assure you that nothing of the kind has occurred. If you wish to have my candid opinion, gentlemen, it is that this unfortunate boy has wandered away."

"How could he wander away?" asked the housemaster, a little tartly. "Once out of the wood, he would know his way back to St. James's."

"And he has certainly not returned," said the doctor.

"He may have a reason for that, gentlemen."

"You mean that he may be staying away of his own accord?"

"Yes. Boys have run away from school before now."

"Absurd! D'Arcy was not in the least likely to do anything of the kind. The idea cannot be entertained for a moment. You

agree with me, Dr. Holmes?"

"Certainly. D'Arcy has been prevented by force from returning to the school."

"It seems to me clear," continued the housemaster. "His cap was found in the densest part of the wood. That looks as if the gipsy had taken him there to keep him secure until after dark, when he would be able to take him away unseen. His motive, in the first place, was spite against the boy, but he certainly had another object."

"And that object?" inquired the inspector, with a superior smile.

"Probably to extort money for the release of the boy," said Mr. Kidd instantly. "That, at least, is my idea. D'Arcy's people are very rich, and he had an unusual amount of pocket-money for a schoolboy. Barendro may know something of this, hence his seizing the opportunity which fell his way last night."

"Quite a romance," said Inspector Skeet, with ponderous sarcasm. "But it is my belief that Barendro has cleared out to avoid being arrested for attempted robbery, and that he had nothing whatever to do with Master D'Arcy being missing."

The inspector delivered this opinion with due solemnity, and the doctor was somewhat impressed. But Mr. Kidd, who had a very keen idea that the portly inspector was a humbug, wasn't impressed in the least.

The conference was interrupted just then by a letter being brought to the doctor. It was marked "Urgent", and addressed to "Dr. Holmes, St. James's Collidge, near Rylcombe." It had just been delivered by the local postman.

The doctor looked at the letter in amazement. The envelope was coarse and dirty, and the writing a mere scrawl. The postmark was the local one of Rylcombe.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," said the doctor.

He opened the letter. A look of blank amazement came over his face.

"Dear me! This refers to the missing boy, D'Arcy."

The doctor passed the letter to Skeet, and he and Mr. Kidd read it together. It was a villainous scrawl.

"Sir, - Your boy D'Arcy is in my hands. He is safe so far and will not be hurt if you agree to my terms. Are you willing to pay fifty pounds for him? If you are not, you will never see him again."

There was no signature.

"That is confirmation of your theory, Mr. Kidd," said the doctor quietly. "There is no doubt now that D'Arcy has been kidnapped with the object of extorting money."

Inspector Skeet looked crestfallen.

"We have no proof that this letter was written by the gipsy Barengro," he said.

"There cannot be much doubt upon that point," replied Mr. Kidd. "D'Arcy is evidently in that ruffian's hands. You will not comply with the impudent demand, sir?"

"Certainly not," said the doctor.

"The matter is in Mr. Skeet's hands, and you will retain that letter, inspector. Whether the rascal is Barengro or not, D'Arcy is undoubtedly in the hands of a kidnapper, who must be discovered quickly."

"We shall leave no stone unturned, sir," declared the inspector, pocketing the letter, and rising to his feet. "I expect to

have news for you very soon."

And Mr. Skeet took his leave.

"I haven't must faith in Mr. Skeet," said the housemaster, when the door closed behind the inspector. "He was sure there was no kidnapping, and now he has no idea where to look for the rascal. I do not believe they will find D'Arcy."

The doctor looked worried.

"I would rather pay the money than have the boy harmed," he exclaimed. "But the wretch does not say in his letter how the money is to be paid, nor have we any guarantee that he will release D'Arcy on receiving it."

"That is the difficulty. We shall hear from him again, of course. This letter is simply to prepare you for paying the ransom. It looks as if he feels certain that the police will never be able to unearth him."

"I shall give Mr. Skeet a little longer before I communicate with the boy's parents," said the doctor. "The school had better be informed, Mr. Kidd. I understand that his friends are anxious about him."

The housemaster left the doctor's study, and the announcement was made in the School House that news had been received of D'Arcy, that he was well, but would not yet return to St. Jim's.

But the masters did not deem it wise to allow the story of the kidnapping to be known. Already all sorts of rumours were afloat, but that could not be helped.

Mr. Kidd went to Kildare's study. Kildare listened to what the housemaster had to tell him of the letter.

"Undoubtedly it was from Barengro," he said.

"So I believe. No, Kildare, Inspector Skeet means well, but I have little faith in

him. If we want to find D'Arcy, we must do it ourselves. Are you willing to help me in this?"

"Willing and quite ready, sir."

"Good! The gipsy evidently has the boy hidden in some place in the neighbourhood. That letter was posted this morning in Rylcombe, by the postmark. We both know this district well, and we ought to be able to find where the scoundrel is lurking. Don't you think so?"

"We can try, sir."

The afternoon's post brought a second letter to Dr. Holmes. It was like the first in appearance, but the contents were more to the point.

"Are you going to pay the fifty? If you are, chalk a white cross on the dead oak in Rylcombe Wood. Then I will rite again."

Head and housemaster consulted over the letter, which was then sent to Inspector Skeet. The fat inspector came up to St. Jim's in high good humour.

"I was waiting for something like this," he declared. "Now we will have him, sir. He'll have to come to see whether the mark is made on the tree, and then we'll nab him."

"He will be on his guard, I suppose, for a trap."

"Oh, we'll have him, never fear!"

"If he escapes you, may he not in revenge do the poor boy some injury?" said the doctor, with many misgivings.

"He wouldn't dare," said Mr. Skeet confidently. "Besides, he won't escape."

And off went the inspector to lay his trap. Mr. Kidd consulted with Kildare.

"What has struck you about that letter, Kildare?"

"That the dead oak is very near the ruins of the old castle, sir," replied the captain of St. Jim's instantly.

"Yes, and that struck me, Kildare. That is a very likely place for the ruffian to keep his prisoner in."

"I don't know the ruins very well, sir, but I believe there are many recesses where a prisoner might be kept."

"Exactly; and I think that you and I, Kildare, could not spend an hour better than in searching the ruined castle. I know the ruins very well." Mr. Kidd coloured slightly. There was an unpleasant episode in his life connected with the ruined castle, but of that Kildare knew nothing. "We may as well go at once."

Meanwhile, an important council of war was being held in Study No. 6.

(ANOTHER INSTALMENT OF
THIS 70-YEAR OLD STORY
NEXT MONTH)

- * * * * *
- * COMIC SWOPPING NOTELETS!
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- * Send 18p (stamps) for range of samples
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- * * * * *

IN NOVEMBER COLLECTORS' DIGEST WILL BE
30 YEARS OLD

 BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

 No. 24. GOOD-BYE TO MARIE DRESSLER

Our opening feature this term came from Warner's: Margaret Lindsay in "From Headquarters". This was followed by another from Warner's: "Fashions of 1934" starring William Powell and Bette Davis. This sounds like a musical, but the stars suggest that it wasn't. I can't remember anything about it.

Next from M. G. M. came Marie Dressler and Lionel Barrymore in "Christopher Bean". This was the film version of a famous play of the period: "The Late Christopher Bean", the story, so far as I recall, of a famous artist who died and left all his paintings to his housekeeper. I fancy that Marie Dressler was slightly miscast in this one. It was her last film. She died before it was released in this country. I remember that I felt very reluctant to play it, finding something distasteful in screening the film of a star who was dead. One smiles at such sentiment today, when many of the best films on TV star artists who have long gone. I dallied with the idea of cancelling our booking of "Christopher Bean", but I didn't, probably not wishing to be a bit of a nuisance to a firm like M. G. M.

Then, from Warner Bros., that superb player, Paul Muni, in "The World Changes". It is just a name to me now, but it was a big film in its day. Next, from Warner's, Kay Francis in "The House on 56th Street".

Then one of my own favourite films of the thirties. This was Lee Tracy in "Turn Back the Clock" from M. G. M. It

was a fascinating story, a fantasy, of a man who went back to live his life over again, while still retaining the memories of his previous life through the same period of time. It ended with the great Wall Street crash of the early thirties, which was where his previous existence had ended with his either meeting with an accident or trying to commit suicide. It was with this film in mind that I gave the title to one of the episodes in the "History of the Gem".

Next, from M. G. M., Herbert Marshall and Elizabeth Allan in "The Solitaire Man" which, I fancy, was a Raffles-type story.

Then a double-feature programme, both films from Universal: Paul Lukas and the lovely Elissa Landi in "By Candlelight" plus Robert Young in "Saturday's Millions", probably a sporting story.

Then, from M. G. M., one that sounds delicious: Joan Crawford, Clark Gable, and Francot Tone in "Dancing Lady". Then another from M. G. M.: Jean Harlow and Lee Tracy in "Blond Bombshell".

In the next one, from Warner's, James Cagney was back in "Lady Killer". After this one came another double-feature programme, both films again from Universal: Edmund Lowe in "Bombay Mail" and Sue Carol and Jack Mulhall in "Secret Sinners".

Next came what was, I believe, our first Jeanette Macdonald picture from M. G. M.: Ramon Novarro and Jeanette Macdonald in "The Cat and the Fiddle" in

Technicolor. It sounds great.

Then, from M. G. M., Frank Cellier in "Colonel Blood". This was a British film, and M. G. M. probably released it as part of their Renters' Quota. After that, from Warner's, Adolphe Menjou and Genevieve Tobin in "Easy to Love".

Now from M. G. M. another technicolour extravaganza: the adorable Marion Davies and Bing Crosby in "Going Hollywood". Then, from M. G. M., Jimmy Durante in "Meet the Baron". Schnozzle was always popular with our audiences.

Next another double-feature programme, both from Universal yet again: Fay Wray in "Madame Spy" plus Edward Everett Horton and Edna May Oliver in "The Poor Rich". This was followed by, from Universal, John Boles and Gloria Stuart in "Beloved". John Boles was a very popular singing star in his day.

Next, from Warner's, Paul Muni in "Hi, Nellie". Sounds like a comedy, and a bit out of the ordinary for Paul Muni. But he was always superb. After this, from M. G. M., came Laurel & Hardy in their latest full-length film, "Fraternally Yours". I always thought that the 2-reelers were their metier, but their features were always welcomed in the Small Cinema. I note, with some amusement, that among the

educational items which we played with "Fraternally Yours", was one entitled "The Coming of the Dial", concerning the dial on telephones. It surprises me to realise that we had dial telephones as long ago as that.

Next another double-feature programme: from M. G. M., Robert Montgomery and Madge Evans in "Fugitive Lovers", plus, from Wardour Films, Bebe Daniels and Clifford Mollinson in "A Southern Maid" in technicolor. Then, from Warner's, Joan Blondell in "I've Got Your Number".

Last of the term was another double-feature programme, both films this time from Wardour Films. They were Stanley Lupino and Thelma Todd in "You Made Me Love You", plus Buster Crabbe in "Tarzan the Fearless".

Thelma Todd, a beautiful, willowey creature, played in many good features, and in an enormous number of 2-reel Hal Roach shorts, paired for a long time with Zasu Pitts and later on with Patsy Kelly. Soon she was to die in mysterious circumstances, getting herself mixed up with gangsters and being murdered in a gang feud, so it was said. I believe that her death was never satisfactorily explained, and it is one of the unsolved mysteries of Hollywood.

* * * * *

FOR SALE: Used Armada Books: Bunter's Holiday Cruise, Bunter & The Phantom of the Towers, Bessie Bunter Joins the Circus, Bunter the Racketeer: 12p each. S. O. L. (E. S. Brooks' stories) Island of Terror, Terror of the Tagossa, Kidnapped Schoolboy (nice copies) 60p each. S. O. L. "The School Squadron" by Eric Roche: 40p. P. & P. extra on all items.

Contact ERIC FAYNE (no reply if items required already sold).

The Postman Called

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

H. P. CLARK (Nuneaton): It was with deep regret that I read of the death of Harry Dowler.

It was in 1968, just after I became a subscriber to Collectors' Digest, that I made contact with Mr. Dowler. I was very anxious to obtain a copy of Frank Richards memorial number, and put an advertisement in CD in the hope that I might be lucky.

Judge my great surprise and delight when, a few days later, a copy of the memorial number arrived, accompanied by a very nice letter from Mr. Dowler. He would not accept payment for it, commenting that it would be a sad world if one could not do a good turn to a fellow enthusiast.

Later Mr. Dowler sold me a large bundle of CDs at a very modest price, and I received several delightful letters from him.

I shall always remember Harry Dowler for his kindness and for giving me one of the happiest surprises of my life.

My congratulations on yet another splendid CD Annual - in my opinion one of the best in recent years.

J. W. DOUPE (Harwich): I have subscribed to your magazine for an odd year or two and during that time have read so many eulogies that one wonders if anyone has ever ventured a word of criticism. Can it be that such a letter goes straight into the waste paper basket? In spite of the danger of such a fate and as a Hamiltonian, Blakian and Nelson Lee OUTSIDER, I feel constrained to venture on such a course.

My Collectors' Digest arrives with the morning post and is opened at breakfast. The Editorial is disposed of with the cereal, Danny's Diary, Blakiana, and the Nelson Lee Column pass with a shake from the pepper pot, and I am left with The Postmas Called and the News from the Clubs to digest with the bacon and the toast and the marmalade. The final cup of tea is devoted to the Advertisements and the compilation is then put away on the shelf as of no further interest.

PERHAPS it contains what the majority of its readers want - or "heretic" - is it that they take the same easy course as I?

The encomiums awarded the Annual suggest that a wider field of

approach would be more appropriate and a perusal of back numbers from the shelves of Mr. Norman Shaw's entrancing emporium confirms my belief that in this day and age - CORSETS should be ABANDONED.

Reading between the lines of the small excerpt from Derek Adley's letter, I am not alone, and confidentially several little birds confirm that view.

H. TRUSCOTT (Huddersfield): In answer to W. Thurbon's query concerning the Greyfriars Soccer-Rugger match, although I have read the Magnets concerned in the past I cannot recall their numbers. The story was reprinted at least twice, in a S. O. L. and in the 1925 Holiday Annual, where I first encountered it. In the latter volume it was called "The Rival Editors". Hurree Singh meets an old friend, junior captain at Southgate School, and arranges a match for a half-holiday. Only when the Southgate team turn up is it discovered that they play Rugger, although Wharton has had to put up with sniggers from Temple, who knows this little fact. In this story Hamilton made one of his rare slips of memory. He describes the Greyfriars side as having scored five goals by half-time; in the second half they scored "goal after goal", but at the end of the match still had only six goals!

W. THURBON (Cambridge): "Are we told too much". I think the answer is that when we were boys we never worried about the authors; I was always convinced that Frank Richards, Martin Clifford, etc., were all different people. It must have been well into the 1920's before the idea of pen names dawned on me. But, speaking as an archivist, I think it is important that everything possible about boys' papers; writers, artists, publishers, finance, pseudonyms, etc., should be recorded for the future. Those of us in the sixties and seventies are fast disappearing, and future social historians are going to find all that is now recorded of great value. If all childrens' and boys papers and magazines, including "comics" were lost, a 21st century student of 19th and 20th century childhood would get a very distorted idea of the subject. We are far too near Charles Hamilton to make a proper judgement of him. But in a hundred years time someone may well wish to write a definitive life of him, and it is the material we collect and leave behind that will form the basis of this.

I was very interested in Roger Jenkins remark that Charles Hamilton was a great admirer of Dickens, but held only contempt for Scott's characters. I wish he would elaborate on this. I don't recall anything that suggested this, but I am not an expert Hamiltonian. But I do recall a story, possibly c. 1918 to 1920, in which Grundy tried to form a secret society, based on Scott's "Anne of Geierstein", and one of Grundy's Co. was then reading all Scott's books. Since "Anne" is not one of Scott's best known novels C.H. must have been well read in Scott, unless the story was by a substitute. Do you or Roger recall the tale. I read most of Scott when I was in my early 'teens, and I recall that it was this "Gem" that put me on to "Anne of Geierstein".

GEOFFREY WILDE (Leeds): Perhaps you will allow me to correct the rather misleading implication conveyed by one phrase from the Northern Club report in your February issue: "Teed, said Geoffrey, was perhaps not the greatest of the Sexton Blake writers ..." That manages to sound decidedly patronising, not to say dismissive. Such was not, I think, our reporter's intention, and it was certainly not mine. What I meant to say in my talk (and hoped I had said) was that if, in the nature of things, there can be no final agreement that Teed was the greatest of all the Blake writers, he was unquestionably in the first three or four. And with that, I'm sure, few Blake scholars would disagree.

R. E. ANDREWS (Laverstock): I was most interested to read the extract from Mr. Holland's letter in the February magazine. I also was presented with my first Magnet whilst suffering from measles (or some such similar malady) at the age of 10 years. The Magnet was No. 1649 from the Water Lily series.

TOM PORTER (Warley): If the Digest foundered I think your readers would feel like Magnet readers at the end of May 1940 when, like me, they went to their newsagent's shop for No. 1684 and were told that the paper had finished. A light would go out in all our lives.

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NEWS OF THE CLUBS

LONDON

The twenty-eighth Annual General Meeting took place on Sunday, 15th February, at the East Dulwich home of Josie Packman. It was her second consecutive meeting and she was given a hearty vote of thanks for accommodating the club on these two occasions.

Roger Jenkins was elected as chairman for the Charles Hamilton Centenary year and the retiring other officers were re-elected. Copies of Mary Cadogan's book, "You're a Brick, Angela!" were displayed by her and details were forthcoming of the t.v. and radio features in connection with the book. Both her co-author, Pat Craig, and Mary, are to be congratulated on such a good book on the girls' papers and books. Roger Jenkins won Graham Bruton's test of knowledge, Ray Hopkins read chapters from a Cedar Creek story and Brian Doyle gave his treatise on the appearances of Bunter on t.v. entitled, A Retrospective Survey. All very good features and with Bob Blythe reading extracts from a March 1959 newsletter and the centenary details discussed, a large attendance thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

Next meeting at Mrs. Sarah Baddiel's residence at 43 Kendall Road, Gladstone Park, London, NW 10. Phone 452 7243. The date is Sunday, 7th March, kindly inform if intending to be present.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

MIDLAND

Climatic conditions reduced the number answering call-over at the January meeting to six. A copy of the Charles Hamilton Companion, Volume 2, another splendid publication from the Museum Press stable, was on view to receive high praise.

The Anniversary Number was Nelson Lee, Old Series, 'The Great Air Mystery', dated 27. 1. 1917, 59 years old on the day of the meeting. For the Collectors' Item - a mint copy of Sexton Blake Library, Mayflower-Dell Series, Number 1, 'Murder at Large'. Both items from the Tom Porter collection.

The New Year Party held on 5 January at the home of Gerald Price was re-lived - a memorable evening graced by the presence of Mr. & Mrs. Hamilton-Wright among the guests and devotees to the hobby.

CAMBRIDGE

The Cambridge Club met at 5 All Saints Passage, on 8 February, 1976, Bill Lofts presiding. Condolences were expressed with Harold Forecast, recovering from an operation.

A number of interesting matters were discussed, among these it was felt that it would be useful if the "Digest" and "Annual" could carry articles on some of the older papers, since those who read papers like Chums, The Captain, Marvels, and several comics of the 1914 period were becoming a minority, and their memories would be worthy of record - it was realised that the editor could only meet this point if the "veterans" would send him contributions.

The Secretary and the President reported that Danny Posner had met the son of the late S. E. Austin, a prolific "substitute" author, and hoped to tape memories of his father from S. E. Austin's son.

Vic Hearn opened a discussion on "interesting murder cases"; items covered included Victorian "bloods" like Sweeny Todd and Maria Marten; Christie, about whom Vic raised a number of interesting points, and Bill Lofts mentioned that his sister had been a neighbour of Christie; Crippen, Jack Overhill recalling as a boy of seven, just beginning to read well, the graffiti that had appeared on Cambridge walls at the time. He pointed out the fact that this case was the first use of ship to shore wireless telegraphy to arrest a criminal. Bill Thurbon ranged over the field of historical murders from William Rufus (1100) to Sir Thomas Overbury in the reign of James 1st. Time was too short to cover fictional murders, and Sherlock Holmes, Sexton Blake, and others were left to another time. Next meeting, 4 March, host Edward Witten.

NORTHERN

Saturday, 14 February, 1976. Chairman Geoffrey Wilde opened the Meeting by remarking that it was St. Valentine's Day, and something of a unique occasion in that he couldn't find in his collection any Magnet or Gem bearing that date and obviously there couldn't have been many meetings on this day! He felt that on this occasion we might consider the continuing support and influence of the ladies among us - which sentiments heralded a round of applause!! We were pleased to receive our Frank Richards plaques - one more item with which to grace our dining rooms or studies! A highlight of the evening was Jack Allison's presentation of 'A Quiz for Magnet Fanatics!' It was one of those quizzes where we aficionados should have known all the answers. Sad to say, many of us did not! But top came Geoffrey Wilde, followed by Bill Williamson and then Ron Rhodes. It occurred to us that we might again announce our meeting-place in Leeds. It is the Swarthmore Educational Centre, Woodhouse Square, Leeds. Cars may be parked immediately outside. Meetings are always on the second Saturday of the month and begin at 6.30 p.m. All will be most welcome!

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1. Return rail fare to London from your local station.
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