

STORY PAPER COLLECTORS DIGEST

VOLUME 30 NUMBER 353

MAY 1976

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A WORD FROM THE SKIPPER

THE ALHAMBRA

Since the war we have become so accustomed to seeing lovely old buildings being pulled down and monstrosities being erected in their place that we tend to regard it as a disease of the second-half of the century. A post-war virus carefully cultivated in order that certain people could build up stunning bank balances.

All the same, one did see, very occasionally before the war, instances of destruction of similar type. Danny in his Diary recorded

in May 1926 that a Royal Variety Performance was held at the London Alhambra. And some time during the late thirties, the Alhambra was pulled down, and the Leicester Square Odeon was built on its site.

The Alhambra was a beautiful theatre, reminiscent of an opera house in Madrid, with the auditorium comprising many tiers and with an unusually large number of boxes. It seated just under two thousand people, and it was a luxury theatre in every sense of the word. A theatre which was an asset to any capital city. Yet they yanked it down.

In the years that I knew it, the Alhambra was a variety theatre, with twice-nightly performances, like the Coliseum across the road and just round the corner of Trafalgar Square. Both the Alhambra and the Coliseum were under the direction of Sir Oswald Stoll. The variety bills were generous and lavish, with rather longer programmes than those offered in suburban variety houses. The best stalls at the Alhambra were 5/- (as against 3/- at the Holborn Empire which also offered superb variety shows but was away from the West End). Stage bands were a frequent attraction at the Alhambra, with stunning scenic effects. Jack Hylton and Jack Payne were frequent visitors with their great bands and even now I can recall the scenic effects when Hylton played "California, Here I Come" with his band straddling a giant engine which was dashing along at speed, and "Summer Rain" with the band in a glorious garden among masses of flowers with the rain, apparently, hurtling down.

It was at the Alhambra that I met the American singer, Sophie Tucker, in her dressing-room, and she gave me an autographed copy of her autobiography (still a prized item among my old treasures). Sophie, of course, was very popular in England. In the early days of the Trocadero she appeared there on stage, and, in a speech at the close of her act, she referred to "this beautiful, beautiful theatre". It was, too, but not so beautiful as the wonderful Alhambra. But the beauty of the Alhambra did not save it from the destroyers. When did beauty ever save anything?

The Alhambra had its main entrance on the Charing Cross Road. The Odeon, which replaced it, has its main entrance on Leicester Square.

Variety at its best, famous for many years at the Alhambra, did not stay quite till the end. I fancy that its last production was the

operetta "Lilac Time".

SO LONG AT THE FAIR

I feel it appropriate to use that title to this paragraph for the simple reason that I find myself rather in the position of the young lady in the film of that title. I have, in fact, lost track of three items which I know I ought to have somewhere. I am wondering whether some readers may be able to become Sexton Blakes pro tem and aid me to find my lost treasures.

First there is a short story entitled "The Magic Bat". The leading character in the tale was a junior schoolboy named Crocker, nicknamed "Crockery" by his friends at school. The theme of the tale concerns a cricker-bat which seems to have magic qualities. I had that story for many years, and I always used to read it to my young cricketers at the outset of our school Cricket Week in late June. For a long time I have been unable to find the book which contains the tale. I felt certain that it was in an anthology of short school stories by Talbot Baines Reed. But I have searched through all my volumes of Reed short stories, and "The Magic Bat" is not there.

If you have any volume of Reed short stories, I wonder whether you would look through it and see whether it happens to contain "The Magic Bat". Or let me know if you have come across that story in a volume by any other author.

My second lost item. You know the tale. A mother and daughter arrived at a Paris hotel in the year 1900. The daughter settled her mother comfortably in Room No. 6 in the hotel, and then went off to the fair. When she returned to the hotel later in the afternoon, the mother had vanished and the hotel room had vanished. The hotel manager declared that he had never seen either lady before. The mother was never seen again.

That short story was made into a film, not a patch on the short story, telling of a girl and her brother, and the brother disappeared, though he turned up again at the end of the film. The film was entitled "So Long at the Fair", but that was not, perhaps, the title of the story. I cannot trace the volume which contained the story and I cannot remember the title, or the author of the tale, which is claimed to be a true story.

Can anybody help me?

Finally, I have for years sought a piece of several verses, of which the first line is "Tom Merry, oh, Tom Merry, how I love your cheerful face." It appeared some time in the Gem, probably in a feature entitled "Our Reader's Page" or, maybe, in the Editor's Chat. As I have every copy of the Gem, I obviously have the verses somewhere, but, search how I may, I cannot find them. I fancy the period would have been prior to 1918, but I am uncertain. If ever you come across them, when Gem-browsing, will you let me know? Please. When the verses eventually turn up, we must find a spot for them in a C. D. Annual, after which they will never be lost again.

THE EDITOR

* * * * *

DANNY'S DIARY

MAY 1926

My worst fears have come true. Rookwood has finished in the Boys' Friend. I had the first of the new issues, and it seems a different paper altogether except that the colour of the paper is the same and its the same size. Now the 4-column lay-out has been changed to 3-columns and that adds to the bleakness. There is a school story called "Rippingham" (author not named); a short story of Harold Hood, Detective, author not named; "Dred, the Outlaw", a western serial by Russell Mallinson who is unknown to me; a short story of "Will Pleasant", anonymous; "Roly and Squibs", a serial by James Gordon; and "Roving-A-Roving", a serial by Francis Warwick. I shan't waste my money on this paper any more.

There has been a General Strike lasting nine days. This is the only general stoppage of work in the history of Great Britain. The miners went on strike, and the other unions supported them. But it was really all quite good-tempered, and rather fun, in a way. In most places, skeleton services of trains, trams, and buses ran, being operated by volunteers or by those who did not approve of striking, but it was only in a few cases that protection was needed. In Gravesend the

trams were off the roads because the tram-workers belonged to unions, but all the Maidstone & District buses, which are in competition to the trams, kept running because their workers don't belong to unions. Unfair to the trams!

Printers were on strike, and I wonder whether it is going to mean we shall lose a week of any of my papers.

Twice this month the North Pole was crossed by aircraft. The first flight was made on 9th May by two Americans, Byrd and Bennett, and 3 days later Amundsen crossed the Pole in an airship.

It has been a wonderfully good month in the Gem, with one of the best series for a long time. There are four stories in the series, and they are "Cousin Ethel's Chum", "Barred", "Figgins's Sacrifice", and "The Shadow of Shame". Gussy has lost a ten-pound note, and, at first, Cardew is suspected of stealing it. But then Figgins goes shopping with Cousin Ethel who is staying at St. Jim's for a short holiday, and he is staggered when she pays for the goods with the stolen tenner which Figgins recognises from the number on the note. For a while, Figgins allows himself to be suspected of the theft, for nobody knows that Ethel had changed the note for Trimble. But at last Cardew takes a hand, and the clouds roll by. A tip-top school story, and a clever plot.

There has been no Gem in the last week of May - in fact, none of the weekly papers have appeared this week - owing to the strike of earlier in the month.

The Nelson Lee Library, which has started again at No. 1, is enlarged and much improved with larger print and larger-sized sheets. In addition to the St. Frank's stories, there are also short detective tales about Nelson Lee and Nipper, and so far they are quite good.

Fenton, the captain of St. Frank's, has started the idea of a sports carnival and, in addition, Nipper, who is often called Dick Hamilton, has the idea of five junior Test Matches between Young Britain and Young Australia. Nipper's plan is to gather all the Australians from thirty miles round St. Frank's, and make them into a cricket team. It is no wonder that they are "Sports Mad at St. Frank's", which is the title of the opening tale of the new series. The other titles this month are "Handforth's Bad Day", "The Folly of St. Frank's" in which Mr. Crowell is determined to check the sports mania, and "The Slaves of

St. Frank's". It's a very lively series with a lot of sport, especially cricket.

A Royal Variety Performance was held at the London Alhambra on 27th May. The artists appearing were: The 12 John Tiller Girls; Dick Henderson; Robb Wilton; Lilian Burgiss; Jack Hylton and His Band; Con Kenna and Partner; Carr & Parr; Bransby Williams; The Houston Sisters; Billy Bennett; Rich Hayes. The musical director was George Saker. It must have been a wonderful show. I wish I had been there. The King and Queen enjoyed it all immensely, and so did the artists.

There has been a marvellous detective novel in the Sexton Blake Library entitled "The Ethiopian's Secret". The Ethiopian is Mlle. Julie's black servant Pom-Pom, who is dumb. The story goes back in time and tells in one chapter how he came to be dumb.

Two good tales, also, in the Schoolboys' Own Library. They are "The River House Rivals" by E. S. Brooks, and "The Boy Who Was Soft", the latter telling how Putty Grace came on the scene at Rookwood.

At the pictures we have seen Alice Joyce in "The Little French Girl"; Lillian and Dorothy Gish in "Hearts of the World"; Leslie Fenton in "Havoc"; Gloria Swanson in "Madame Sans Gene"; and Jack Holt in "The Thundering Herd".

Not a good month in the Magnet, though the opening story was pleasant. This was "Harry Wharton's Feud", a sequel to the story of the previous week in which Wharton, unjustly accused of ragging the French master, decided to throw in his lot with the ragers. However, he discovered, accidentally, that Mossoo is in money difficulties, and, with the aid of Mauly, sent an anonymous donation to help the master in his trouble.

"The New Boys' Secret" was a silly affair in which a new boy, named W. Punter, was thin and tall, and came to Greyfriars to search for a hidden treasure. Next came two tales "The Mystery of Popper's Island" and "For Another's Sake", in which a man robs Walker's aunt of all her money, and then hides on the island with the loot. Bunter opens a letter which Walker received from the man, and Harry Wharton & Co. help Wharton to capture the villain. Not too bad in its way, but nothing much.

I am buying the Popular every week, and it is all old tales, and

none the worse for that. They are now running, from the Gem and Magnet respectively, the stories where Bunter goes to St. Jim's as Wally, and Wally goes to Greyfriars as Billy.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: This may well have been the only occasion when there was no Greyfriars story in the monthly issues of the S. O. L. No. 27 was "The River House Rivals", described as "a stirring story of Hal Brewster & Co. of River House School", by E. S. Brooks. I can't find it described anywhere as a "new" story, but it is usually accepted as being one of the yarns specially written for the S. O. L. Our Lee experts can confirm or deny this. No. 28 "The Boy Who Was Soft" comprised 5 tales from the early 1919 Boys' Friend, relating the arrival of Putty Grace at Rookwood. I find quite fascinating Danny's list of the performers at the 1926 Royal Variety Performance. I have no memory at all of some of them, but Bransby Williams was in the sunset of his illustrious career as a character actor and monologist, while the Houston Sisters were on the threshold of fame. Dick Henderson was a fat little man who sang and danced with amazing lightness; a few years later he did "Tip-toe Through the Tulips". Billy Bennett was "almost a gentleman" and Robb Wilton was famous in comedy sketches including "The Fireman". I seem to recall Con Kenna having an acrobatic act with a stage aeroplane, but others may have better memories than mine. I have no recollection at all of Rich Hayes, Lillian Burgess, or Carr & Parr.)

* * * * *

BLAKIANA

conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

I have prevailed upon two of my contributors to tell us how they first found and read of our favourite detective Sexton Blake. I do hope you will find their delightful reminiscences pleasing. John has completed his article with memories of his early visits to the cinema and this part has been published separately.

MY MEMORIES OF THE CINEMA

by John Bridgewater

Across the road from our shop (mentioned in the Blakiana section) was the local "Flea Pit". At that cinema I saw that grand first version of "Frankenstein" with Colin Clive and my top favourite Boris Karloff, also my No. 2 from my "ops parade" Bela Lugosi in "Dracula". Another well loved actor Gene Gerrard in an unremembered by most film called "Out of the Blue" with the young Jessie Matthews. Possibly her first film. Another early film I saw there was "Bill the Conqueror"

with Henry Kendall, Sam Livesey (father of Roger who recently died) and Heather Angel. She it was who played with Sybil Thorndyke in *Hindle Wakes*, another well remembered film I saw sitting on one of those uncomfortable 6p seats in one of the ten front rows. One memory triggers another. The last silent film I saw just flashed into my mind, George K. Arthur and Karl Dane, title forgotten. (According to my film records this was a film called "China Bound" an M.G.M. silent which was issued at the same time as Garbo's last silent film "The Kiss", with Lew Ayres - J.P.)

What a lot of thoroughly enjoyable films we had in those days. As a teenager I well remember how smitten I was with Ann Dvorak when I saw her with James Cagney in "The Crowd Roars". Fay Wray was another great favourite, especially in *King Kong*. I have been a life long addict of Horror/Fantastic/Detective films ever since I saw that first version of Edgar Wallace's "The Terror" an early talkie, with the organ eerily played in the vault, which gave me schoolboy nightmares. Must have been 1929 if my calculations are correct. The best night's TV compares very unfavourably with the weekly visit to the cinema. Not that I belittle the TV but it is a sobering thought that progress means the killing off of so much that was good because the new is not better, only different.

However, do not let us be sad, we can at least watch *Ironside* and read of *Sexton Blake*.

HOW I FOUND SEXTON BLAKE

by John A. C. Bridgwater

What a Golden Age was that between the wars for books and a profusion of excellent story papers at 2d, each. Bound books could be bought for a shilling or so, magazines from 7d, and Annuals! Well just think what 5/- bought in those days. I think, relatively speaking, that I did as well on my weekly pocket money (all coppers) as I do today. I still remember those glorious Sunday afternoons when Dad had a newsagent shop and we used to retire to the "Front room" over the shop with armsful of this week's papers, from *Titbits* to *Answers* and *Passing Show* and *Humourist* for adults, with a sprinkling of *Pegs Paper*, *Womans Weekly*, etc. for the ladies. For me there were the *U.J.*, *Gem*, *Magnet*, *Nelson Lee*, *Boys' Magazine*, *Toby*, and when I was older "Ralph

Strangers Science Review". What a wonderful stock to pick and choose anything I liked provided my hands were clean and the pages were carefully turned so that all could be returned to the counter unsullied for sale on Monday morning. When I wished to venture into hardbacked books there was the 2d, a week per volume lending library (free to me) at the back of the shop. It was all well worth the disadvantages, Cramped tiny rooms one on top of another with mountains of stairs to clumb, rushed meals and papers to deliver at crack of dawn. Such was my introduction to the delights of Sexton Blake and all our other favourites.

HOW I FOUND SEXTON BLAKE

by W. H. Vernon

In 1929 my father took the family to the Queen Victoria Market in Melbourne. We generally went there on a Saturday morning about 10 a.m. In those days things were tough. I still remember sitting in the car and watching men and women sorting amongst the market garbage for an edible orange or a butt of a cigarette. When I look back now it is horrid to even think of it, but it was all new to me at the time and I was quite curious. Poor beggars, I didn't know how lucky I was. Very different today I assure you. My father gave me money to buy books or comics at my favourite bookstall and there were long trestles and tables stacked a foot high with all the various papers, you name them, this man had them. Having only a certain amount of money I'd go by the covers. How many copies I would pick up and put down, there would be thousands not hundreds from which to choose. I generally finished up with the goriest covers. One I have before me now, U. J. No. 1321, called "The Broken Melody". I remember thinking some silly ass must have spilt red ink on the cover, not realising of course till later it was supposed to be blood on the music sheet. This was a bumper No. 32 pages, with supplement and containing a new serial called "Red Aces" by Edgar Wallace, at least I thought it was a new one but it was just the beginning of the full story which was to appear in number 1 of a new paper "The Thriller". The other serial was "The Isle of Strife" by Stacey Blake. A big appeal to me of the Union Jack are the covers, both pink and coloured. My world was quite complete to sit in the back seat of the car on the drive home and read. My head was

stuck into the Union Jack and I was happy. Such was my introduction to Sexton Blake,

DEATH OF MRS, GWYN EVANS

by Bill Lofts

Recently I heard from the daughter of Gwyn Evans - a Mrs, Patricia Gwyn Welch now living in the U. S. A. that her mother had died in 1974. So another link has been broken from the past, and with probably the most colourful and best loved Sexton Blake writer of them all. Readers will recall that I had to find Mrs, Gwyn Evans some years ago in connection with some T. V. rights when they were filming the Sexton Blake series. I found her a most interesting person, and who was able to fill in quite a few gaps pertaining to Gwyn - even though they had parted in the thirties and she had remarried after his sudden death in 1938 at the age of only 39.

Unfortunately Mrs, Welch knows very little about her father - as she saw very little of him after the age of six - but is thirsting to know details of his life and work, as her two children are also interested in their famous grandfather. I have of course been able to rectify this with a potted biography, and able to supply a few old stories. This is the least one can do as a tribute to the writer of such brilliant Blake stories, that gave such pleasure to many many readers.

FIVE IN FEAR

by S. Gordon Swan

"Five in Fear" is the title of a G. H. Teed novel published in hardcovers in the nineteen-thirties and believed to have been derived from a Sexton Blake story. This is referred to in Blakiana of the Collectors' Digest for March 1975 as "Story unidentified so far".

My copy was not published by Wright and Brown, who printed so many converted Blake stories, but by Stanley Smith Ltd., Albion House, 59 New Oxford Street, W.C.1, and dated 1936. It is dedicated to "My sisters Margaret Alberta and Ethel Louise".

The tale is definitely the same as No. 536 of the SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY (Second Series), in which it was called "The Island of the Guilty". The names are identical, except for Sexton Blake and Tinker, who become Grant Rushton and Tony Farways.

The odd thing about this story is not so much that it was

published as a novel, as that G. H. Teed wrote two stories with the same name. The first one appeared in 1926, in No. 41 of the SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY (Second Series). According to the Sexton Blake Catalogue, No. 536, was a reprint of No. 41 - a natural assumption - but this is not the case. It is true the two stories have the same basic theme, that of a number of fugitives from justice hiding on an island, but they are entirely different yarns with different characters.

Incidentally, on page 180 of "Five in Fear", one finds the name of Tinker instead of Tony.

* * * * *

Nelson Lee Column

SORRY TO TROUBLE YOU;

by William Lister

There used to be a saying "chips with everything". Today it could be "drugs for everything". One can have drugs for anything from a headache to "a far-out trip", as they say. Not that all drugs are bad. There is something to be said for those drugs prescribed by a doctor and used accordingly. Rather I am thinking of the Jekyll and Hyde variety. You know, one minute you're with it and the next you're not! Reminds me of the time that the drug racket upset the smooth-running of St. Frank's - not that St. Frank's ever ran smoothly. Edwy Searles Brooks saw to that. He had to keep stirring things up with his able pen, if only to keep his "customers" (as he called us) running to the shop every week with our hard-come-by two pence. And stir things up he did, when he created some rotter to dose the venerable head of St. Frank's with a few grains of "you know what", or perhaps like me you don't know what, as I don't see a name given to the drug.

Now whether we know what, or we don't know what, the boys of St. Frank's knew what. When Dr. Malcolm Stafford, a level-headed headmaster seems to go berzerk on occasions only to resume his own character a little later, something seemed wrong. And when the same Dr. Malcolm Stafford took to handing out thousands of lines, dozens of cuts of the cane, one or two floggings and an expulsion or two, the St. Frank's boys not only thought it seemed wrong, but decided it was

wrong and hence the seed was sown for a school rebellion, of which, more later,

St. Frank's boys can put up with a lot of things - they are a long-suffering crowd - but when your own headmaster takes a king-size chopper and chops the goal-posts on your playing-fields down, it is more than flesh and blood can stand. Even if it is only fictional flesh and blood. If anything can put the cat among the pigeons, in the eyes of the public schoolboy it is to chop his goal-posts down. In fact you might not believe it actually happened, but if you obtain a copy of the "Schoolboys' Own Library" No. 354 and dated 3, 11, 38, you can actually see this distardly act taking place,

It was enough to cause a rebellion, or at least spark it off, and it did. Now I'm not in favour of rebellions, but I suppose one has to have them now and again. But why pick one so near Christmas? I mean, if we can't have a bit of peace and quiet and goodwill towards men (even drug-crazed headmasters) at Christmas when can we have it? And the trouble was this rebellion brewed up in a November "Schoolboys' Own Library" and burst into its fury in the December Christmas Number of the same dated 1, 12, 38, and called "The Christmas Rebels". Now, just look at that cover picture! Bags of the old snow-stuff, Snowballs whizzing through the air, ladders propped against the school wall being pushed over (with schoolboys still clinging to them) and other chaps running up with huge planks on their shoulders. Take it from me, things look rough; at Christmas time, too.

My readers will be wondering why I didn't submit this article for one of the C. D. Christmas numbers. I hadn't the heart to do so; What with all the trouble in the World around this Christmas; I couldn't bring myself to burden our C. D. readers with more. As it was I knew they would be able to make out to some sort of a happy Christmas what with their club parties, back Christmas numbers of their favourite papers, the Christmas "C. D." and the 1975 C. D. Annual and no doubt they did. So I thought about this time of the year would be just right for unloading this trouble on you. Then you can forget about it by next Christmas as I don't think E. S. Brooks unloaded any more rebellions on us at the festive season (shame on you, Edwy). Mind you, give him his due, it had crossed his mind that Christmas was hardly the time to plunge

St. Frank's into rebellion; he did put these words into the mouth of Armstrong - (just as the juniors are getting worked up to vote) "What's the good of starting warfare now? In a few days we shall all be going home for Christmas holidays - early next week in fact. So what's the good of starting a rebellion?" Now I would have thought that good sense, however I suppose the St. Frank's boys know best, after all, it was their goal posts that were chopped down, not mine.

As time passes Nelson Lee accidentally and unknowingly takes a hefty dose of this drug, and at this point I hand my pen over to Edwy Searles Brooks for a description of its effect:

"The clock seemed to be ticking louder than ever, the swing of the pendulum irritated Nelson Lee beyond measure. Acting on impulse he seized the clock and smashed it to the ground. At the sound of the crash Nelson Lee broke into a harsh, gloating cackle of laughter. He continued pacing. Something was wrong. He saw his reflection in the mirror, and it shocked him. He saw a strange, distorted face with glaring eyes and twisted lips. The face then became more horribly distorted than ever. Then Nelson Lee began to like it - he approved of it. Ugly and horrible though it was, he was overjoyed to see it. Something seemed to snap in his head . . . There he stood with twisted distorted features, his teeth bared, his shoulders hunched up like a deformed creature, and in his eyes shone - not a light of madness, but something revolting and terrifying."

"Can I have my pen back now, Mr. Brooks?"

Strong stuff, this drug; Shades of Edgar Allen Poe!

Well, time and space falls me to tell of the development of the so-called "Brotherhood of the Free" which seems to be something akin to Communism where the free are not so free as they would like everyone to believe, Schoolboys' Own, No. 360, and of the sacking of Nelson Lee and Dr. Malcolm Stafford from St. Frank's in disgrace and of their return in triumph. Schoolboys' Own Library No. 363.

Over and above all the excitement and horror and torture and suspense - and in the midst of the rumpus . . . there is, of course, a touch of the right kind of weather. Starting in late November with swirling pea-soup fogs and a shadowy figure slipping in and out of the mists, to frost and heavy falls of December snow, and as the story

tails off into February 1939 a roaring gale followed by floods.

You don't believe you can get all this in a series of four S. O. L.? Then you don't know our Edwy Searles Brooks!

* * * * *

DO YOU REMEMBER?

by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 133 - GEMS 737-9 - DARRELL SERIES

It is difficult not to believe that in 1922 Charles Hamilton regarded the Gem as far more important than the Magnet. Nearly half the Greyfriars stories were by substitute writers in this year, whereas practically every St. Jim's story was the genuine article, and a succession of brilliantly varied series in the Gem must have left the readers amazed at the author's versatility. Not only were there many famous light-hearted tales at this time, but dramatic themes as well were prominently featured. The Darrell series, though it had a few humorous touches, was definitely a serious tale.

A Greyfriars series that revolved around the senior school was usually of a superior nature, but this did not always apply at St. Jim's, possibly because there was no senior like Coker who could be the source of amusement. The St. Jim's seniors were all serious-minded, and this was perhaps something of a loss on occasions, though not in this short series, in which Darrell was one of those who had entered for the Founder's Latin prize of £50, a handsome sum indeed in those days. He was initially certain of winning and indeed he had promised the money to a friend in distress. In fact he did not win the prize, but he managed to raise the money and he sent it by registered post in the form of banknotes. When it became known that £50 in banknotes had been taken from the Head's study, he was the obvious suspect.

Although a few clues were provided, the identity of the guilty party was not really obvious, and the readers could have exercised their own detective powers themselves had they so wished. What slightly marred the story was the large part played by Kit Wildrake, the junior from British Columbia, who had arrived at St. Jim's in 1921 and who intruded too often in the stories for some time. Wildrake was here cast in the role of detective (the part formerly allotted to Kerr) and,

whilst it would have been perfectly natural for him to shine at tracking footprints or riding horses, it did not seem quite in character for him to sit brooding over likely suspects. It is true that the guilty party was lassoed at the end, but this seemed somewhat unnecessary, a gratuitous exhibition of his cowboy skill. The use of Wildrake in this series is an example of Martin Clifford's obsessive liking for new characters at this time.

It took the Gem a long time to recover from war-time restrictions. There were only eight or nine chapters each week and a total of twenty pages including covers. As the St. Jim's story was in double columns and the rest in triple columns with small print, it made the school story appear to be longer than it really was. Half-page illustrations were re-introduced during this series, but the memorable art features at this time were the weekly illustrations of famous St. Jim's characters on the back page of the Gem. These were executed with a careful attempt at individual characterisation and were a marked improvement on the quality of most of the inside illustrations. R. J. Macdonald had many merits as an artist but his drawing of juniors in the background was probably his weakest point.

* * * * *

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 207. THE ISLAND IN THE RIVER

The island - any island - in the river - any river - certainly served Charles Hamilton well during his long writing career. That island turned up as a spot for picnics, as a dumping ground for the loot of various burglars, as the hiding place for lawbreakers or those suspected of law-breaking, and as a stronghold in barrings-out.

How many stories were set partly on the island is beyond count on my part, but there must have been scores of them. The most famous of those islands was the one on the Sark, for ever linked with the unforgettable Sir Hilton Popper.

Oddly enough, Sir Hilton Popper and his island were created in the Gem for St. Jim's. That happened early in 1910 in a tale entitled "Tom Merry's Master-Stroke". Tom Merry & Co. found themselves at

daggers drawn with Sir Hilton because they trespassed on the island in the Ryll, a spot which he claimed as his personal property.

It is impossible to decide how it came about that Sir Hilton was transferred to the vicinity of Greyfriars, and his island to the sparkling waters of the Sark. It is an indication, of course, that the writers did not take their work nearly as seriously as their readers were destined to do several decades later.

Hamilton was a man born with the gift of writing, but his methods were a bit slapdash as we have seen time and time again when considering his work. He might even have forgotten that he had used the theme before. In using the name Sir Hilton Popper, he may even not have realised that it was not new to readers of the Gem - his propensity for using a name over and over again was quite astounding, and we have only to count up how many times a Lagden turned up at various schools to see to what absurd lengths this was carried. And, in all probability, writers and editors alike seem to have assumed that a generation of readers lasted for not more than two years.

I have not the time to check through scores of Magnets to find out just when Sir Hilton first appeared in that paper, but one of the earliest, if not the earliest, must have been in "The Only Way", of the autumn of 1911, which we ran as a serial some years ago.

We find Sir Hilton and his island featured in a very good tale "Schoolboys Never Shall be Slaves" in the Summer Double Number of August 1915, which, in topical strain, featured German spies who captured Sir Hilton on his own island. A few months later came another tale, starring the baronet, his island, and some more Germans, in another good thriller "The Midnight Marauders",

Fifty years ago, as we see in the extracts from Danny's Diary this month, there came another island couple, complete this time with Sir Hilton, laying down the law about his property, and a scoundrel who had robbed Walker's aunt. The late Bill Gander had the impression that these two were genuine tales, though it is hard to see how he came to mistake them. There are many indications of their "sub" origin, and early on in one of the tales we get that gritty piece of Third-form grammar "The reason was because --". Even if there was not plenty of other evidence that this is not a genuine pair, it would be hard to imagine

Hamilton ever making such a grammatical error,

Curiously enough, ten years later in 1936 we find a genuine couple, "Billy Bunter's Burglar" and its sequel, with a similar plot to that sub pair of 1926, though there the similarity ends. In 1936 we had a most amusing couple of tales, written with all the Hamilton competence,

Rookwood had its island, though not its Sir Hilton Popper. In 1924, too early in the year for it to be really credible, Rookwood juniors put on a rebellion on that island against the tyranny of one, Mr. Carker, who had replaced the dismissed Mr. Dalton,

The same theme was used again on Popper's island in 1934 in the Magnet, with the Remove in rebellion on behalf, of all people, Billy Bunter, who had been unjustly expelled for something Fishy had done,

Those islands, green and serene, amid the sparkle of their respective rivers, formed wonderful backgrounds for the entertainment of those of us who were young in those far-off days before old England lost its way.

* * * * *

Our Serial "Classic" from 70 Years Ago,

MISSING

Once out of the shadows of the wood the night was not so dark. Stars were gleaming in the sky, and a dim light lay upon the massive ruins of the old castle. Grim and gaunt looked the shattered walls, the gaping casements the confused masses of tumbled masonry.

Amid the extensive ruins there were hiding places for a dozen men, and the chums were wary as they advanced. They kept the cricket-stumps ready for use. They had seen the gipsy hurry towards the ruins, and it confirmed their suspicion that his lurking place was there. But as they came on, they heard no sound, and saw no sign of the ruffian.

They stopped in the old flagged hall,

now roofless and open to all the winds. They stared about them uneasily.

"He must be here somewhere," muttered Blake. "We saw him come, didn't we? He may have gone right on, but I believe he's got a hiding-place here somewhere."

"Let's search," said Herries,

They searched through the ruins. Nothing rewarded them. There was no trace of D'Arcy, and neither sight nor sound of the gipsy. They stopped at last at the yawning cavity which gave admittance to the vaults, and hesitated.

"Come on!" said Blake resolutely. "We've got to go through with it. The brute is most likely to sneak into there, if

he's hiding here at all."

He lighted his lantern, and led the way, the light in his left hand, the cricket-stump gripped in his right. Herries and Digby followed close at his heels.

They passed down the stone steps, crumbling with age, and offering none too secure a foothold, and a cold, damp breath from below smote them and made them shiver. They moved quietly, but the slightest sound seemed strangely, eerily loud in the dead silence.

Black and gloomy were the deserted vaults - black and gloomy and damp, with a chill air as of the tomb. The hearts of the three lads were beating hard. They knew there might be danger ahead, but the gloom and eeriness of their surroundings had more effect upon their nerves than the thought of danger.

The dark arches of the vaults seemed to extend indefinitely in endless succession. The lightest footfall rang in weird echoes. Blake halted suddenly. His nostrils were dilated, his eyes were gleaming.

"You notice it?" he muttered.

They were sniffing. A distinct scent had come to them suddenly - a whiff of tobacco-smoke, of a cheap, strong tobacco. It was proof positive that someone had lately been in the vault. The chums looked at each other in silence.

Someone had been in the vault, and the scent of the pipe he had smoked still hung in the heavy atmosphere. He had certainly not left the vault again, and so he must still be there - probably near at hand.

They realised that the sounds they made and the light they had carried must betray their presence. Their hands tightened

on their weapons. Nothing could be seen in the surrounding gloom. After a few moments of natural hesitation they went on.

A faint sound came from the darkness, like the scuttling of a rat.

Blake sprang in the direction of it, and caught a momentary glimpse of a shadow darting away. There was the clink of a footfall, and silence.

"He's here," muttered Blake.

"We'll make him tell us where D'Arcy is. Come on. We're not afraid of the brute."

They hurried on, with teeth set hard. Crash! A stone, whizzing from the darkness, crashed on the lantern in Blake's hand, and dashed it from his grip to the ground. The light was instantly extinguished. Blackness wrapped the boys round like a cloak.

Blake gave a startled cry; he could not help it. In the sudden darkness, something brushed past him, and he clutched at it wildly. A stunning blow sent him reeling, but with indomitable pluck he leaped forward and made a clutch, and seized upon an invisible form, and was seized in return. There was a fierce struggle in the darkness.

Blake exerted himself to throw his adversary, and by a wrestling trick he succeeded, and the two went down together, Blake on top.

"Got him!" panted Blake. "Help, you chaps - quick! I've got him!"

He gripped his prisoner by the throat, and kept him pinned down.

A low, indistinguishable gurgle came from the helpless one. He struggled fiercely, but Blake had him fast.

"Herries! Dig! Strike a light! I've got him!" yelled Blake. "Quick or

he'll throw me off. Get a light and bash the brute. Lie still, you beast, or I'll crack your head on the floor."

"Gr-r-rh!" came from the captive,

"Keep still! Quick, you chaps!"

A light flared out. Digby had struck a match. The flare showed Blake on top of his prisoner, pinning him down, but the prisoner, unfortunately, was Herries, whom he had seized by mistake in the darkness. Blake stared at his victim in utter amazement.

"Herries!" he gasped. He released his unhappy prisoner as if he had all at once become red-hot. "Herries! My giddy Aunt Matilda!"

"You silly ass!" howled Herries. "What do you mean by grabbing me by the throat and pitching me over?"

"Well, that's cool! You grabbed me, too."

"I took you for the gipsy."

"I took you for him, too," growled Blake. "You don't think I did it for fun, do you?"

"You've nearly throttled me."

"Never mind," said Blake. "It might have been worse."

"I don't see it," said Herries crossly.

"Well, it's lucky Dig struck a match before he started on you with a cricket-stump," Blake remarked. "Don't growl. It's all in the day's work. The trouble is that while we've been wasting time the gipsy has got away. Of course, it was the gipsy."

"Of course. Is the lantern smashed?"

"To smithereens!" said Blake,

examining the lantern in the light of another match struck by Digby. "Can't light it again. What asses we were not to bring another, in

case of accidents. We'll bring an extra one next time."

"Then we shall have to give it up for the night?"

"I'm afraid so. But wait a bit. Let's shout, and if D'Arcy is hidden anywhere about here, he may hear us and yell back, even if he can't get out."

They shouted till the vaults rang and rang again. Echoes rolled back like thunder from the subterranean depths. At intervals they stopped to listen for a reply, but no reply came.

Either D'Arcy was not within hearing, or he was unable to reply. Blake's spirits were considerably damped.

After ascertaining that the outcast gipsy haunted the ruins, he had become confirmed in his belief that the missing junior was kept there somewhere. Now he could not help doubting again.

Without a light it was impossible to continue the search. The chums gave it up, and in a rather gloomy mood made their way back to the upper earth.

"I fancy you were off the track, after all, Blake," Herries remarked, as they set out for the school. "If D'Arcy was there, he ought to have heard us yelling; then he would have yelled back. But if he isn't there, where the dickens can he be?"

"I believe he's there," replied Blake. "He might be gagged, you know. Barengro is a brute. We're not going to give in yet. To-morrow's a half, and we'll come again and have a jolly good hunt."

The school clock was booming out midnight when they arrived at St. Jim's. Five minutes later they were in bed in the

dormitory; and it seemed to all three of them that they had only just closed their eyes when the rising-bell began to ring the

next morning.
(MORE OF THIS OLD, OLD
STORY NEXT MONTH)

* * * * *

COMICS 101

(Some Impressions by Mary Cadogan)

From the cocktail party on the evening of Friday, 19th March, until this British Comics Convention ended on the afternoon of Sunday, 21st, the atmosphere at London's Mount Royal Hotel was a happy blend of nostalgia, friendship and exciting new interests. Dazzling is hardly too strong a word to describe the amount of creativity assembled there. Fans had the joy of meeting the artists, editors and writers of their favourite comics, past and present, and I was most impressed by their vitality and dedication. High-spots for me were meeting modest Terry Wakefield (whose 'Film Fun' Laurel and Hardy strips were an integral part of childhood for so many of us), and Frank Hampson whose Dan Dare was an equally potent symbol for young people - and many adults - in the 1950's. Vigorous and articulate in his 80's was Walter Bell, whose pictures delighted so many of us in the 1920's and 30's (remember Casey Court?); and Fred Robinson, of The Gremlins fame, was one of the most amusing and spontaneous speakers I have heard. As well as those who draw our comics we met newspaper comic strip artists - like Steve Dowling, originator of Garth, who was also at one time responsible for the Daily Mirror's 'Belinda'.

Younger artists were well represented: Leo Baxendale, creator of The Bash Street Kids, speaks as vigorously as he draws, and vividly described the challenges involved in meeting deadlines under incredible pressures, and yet remaining creative. One of the most impressive items in the agenda was a talk by artist Terry Bave and his wife Sheila, on creating characters for today's comics. Sheila thinks up the stories for Terry's pictures, and they keep in vital touch with the views of child readers by visiting schools, and inviting correspondence. I must mention Denis Gifford's history of comics, aptly illustrated by slides of his unique collection. Bob Monkhouse, even more amusing in person than on T.V., chaired (and took part in) a session of 'Quick on the Draw',

and another celebrity from the entertainment world, Cardew Robinson, brought to the convention a link with Charles Hamilton. (His radio character, Cardew the Cad, was of course inspired - tenuously - by Ralph Reckness Cardew.)

One's mind boggles at the work put in by Denis Gifford, the organizer of Comics 101: he deserves our congratulations, and thanks.

BILL LOFTS adds:

Old comic artists in attendance included Walter Bell (Casey's Court) and Wal Robertson (Marmaduke and his Ma) and Terry Wakefield (Laurel & Hardy). The exhibition was mainly of art-work both past and present strips, whilst the talks by distinguished speakers were excellent. Highlight of the event was the dinner on Saturday, and presentation of awards by Bob Monkhouse as a sparkling host - who certainly knows his comic history. Main Ally Sloper award went to Terry Wakefield, who continued his father's excellent work in Film Fun in the Laurel & Hardy strips. His Dad G.W. (Billy) Wakefield of course was also the main illustrator of the Rookwood stories in Boys' Friend.

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BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

No. 26. THE THIN MAN WITH 20,000,000 SWEETHEARTS

Our first feature of the new term came from Warner Bros. : Ian Hunter in "Something Always Happens". Next, from M. G. M., came what I think must have been a dramatised documentary. It was "Mala, the Magnificent", and I see that we described it as "The great epic of the Frozen North". The cast was, I feel sure, unknown, though later on we played another film starring Mala.

Then came the second of M. G. M's Tarzan films: Johnny Weissmuller and Maureen O'Sullivan in "Tarzan and His Mate". Then a magnificent Musical which received high praise from the

critics in its day: Dick Powell and Ginger Rogers in "20,000,000 Sweethearts". Radio was in its heyday, and this one, unless my memory is playing tricks, was about a couple of stars of an American radio show. Some week later I took a party of boys down to Gravesend in Kent to see Kent and Surrey playing cricket on the famous Bat & Ball ground in that town. After the cricket, we paused before the Plaza Cinema where "20,000,000 Sweethearts" was the attraction. The boys confided to me that they would love to see it again, so in we went. I enjoyed it even more this time when I hadn't the

distraction of screening it as I watched it. It was a Warner film.

Next, from M. G. M., Clark Gable, William Powell, and Myrna Loy in "Manhattan Melodrama", which I recall as a tense drama. Then, also from M. G. M., came William Powell and Myrna Loy in "The Thin Man". This was the first of the "Thin Man" films, and tip-top it was. Here, the "Thin Man" was, I seem to recollect, the criminal. Many more "Thin Man" films followed, but in these the sparse gent of the title was the detective.

Then from M. G. M., Charlie Ruggles and Una Merkel in "Murder on the Runaway Train". This was not nearly so exciting as the title promised. Next a double-feature programme: Warren William in "The Dragon Murder Case", from Warner's (I am not certain, but I fancy this was a Perry Mason story) plus, from Gaumont-British, Ralph Lynn and Tom Walls in "A Cuckoo in the Nest". After that, Margaret Sullavan in "Little Man, What Now?" from Universal.

Now a superb Musical: James Cagney in "Footlight Parade" from Warner's. This was packed with great songs, such as they used to write in those days - "By a Waterfall", "Shanghai Lil", and so on, and the breathtaking musical numbers were produced by Busby Berkeley, at whom modern critics like to sneer from their silly pedestals. Berkeley died quite recently at a ripe old age.

Now from Universal, Russ Columbo in another musical, "Wake Up and Dream".

Then Jimmy Durante was back in "Student Tour" from M. G. M., followed by Conrad Veidt in "The Wandering Jew" from Gaumont-British. The latter sounds a bit sombre for our audiences. Next, also from Gaumont-British, Victor McLaglen in "Dick Turpin" which sounds more up our street.

Then a double-feature programme, both films from Universal: Chester Morris in "Embarrassing Moments" plus the superb character actor Edward Arnold in "The Million Dollar Ransom". Next another double-feature programme: Joan Blondell in "Kansas City Princess" from Warner's, plus a documentary deservedly famous in its day, "Man of Aran" from Gaumont-British. Followed by another double-feature programme, both films this time from Universal: John Stuart in "Blind Justice" plus Buck Jones in "Rocky Rhodes".

Then, from Universal, Sonnie Hale and Robertson Hare in the film version of the famous British play "Are You a Mason", followed the next week by Jack Hulbert in "Jack Ahoy!" from Gaumont. Next, from M. G. M., Robert Montgomery in "Hide-Out" followed by, from Gaumont-British, Tom Walls and Ralph Lynn in "Turkey Time".

From Warner now came one which sounds as though its advance trailer would have produced loud cheers in the Small Cinema: James Cagney in "Here Comes the Navy", and then, to wind up the term, William Powell in "The Key", from Warner Bros.

(ANOTHER ARTICLE IN THIS SERIES SOON)

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The Postman Called

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

JOHN TOMLINSON (Burton-on-Trent): I was as delighted, when I opened the January issue of C. D. to see another old early story of St. Jim's being serialised, as if I'd been given a £5 note (well, almost!). I cannot subscribe to the opinion of those who are certain St. Jim's would not have lasted such a length of time if Tom Merry had not been created and Jack Blake had remained the principal character. We cannot dogmatise either way, but these early St. Jim's stories must have been a contrast to the either slapstick or deadly serious model yarns current at the time, and one can see something very special about them - something indefinable - even then that proclaimed genius in the field.

JIM COOK (New Zealand): I would like to tell you of an 'out of the past' contact I have just made. During 1928-9 when I was an organising officer for the St. Frank's League, three other friends formed what we called The Big 4 to promote the objects of the 'League'. Well, we eventually disbanded and got involved with life generally. But a few months ago I 'found' one of the '4' in Scarborough and just last week 'found' another in Southport. The latter was found for me by an advertiser in the C. D. Annual. I am sure you can appreciate my feelings on making contact with my old friends. My third friend, a Jewish chap, who lived close to me in London at the time, has yet to be "found". The remarkable thing about finding these fellows after so much has happened since the late 1920's is that they are still with us. I am sure our hobby and its books we grew up with has sustained us for these many years and kept us young.

R. J. LEWIS (Wirral): In the article, 'The End of the Silver Trail', the writer asks:- Surely some readers must have written in to the Editor and asked "What about some Rookwood?" But if any reader actually wrote in that way, the Editor never referred to it.

Well if the readers did not write to the Boys' Friend they certainly wrote to the Magnet. In Magnet No. 1,001 (The Hand of an Enemy) dated 23 April, 1927, the Editor has this to say:-

'Once again a Magnet reader has written to ask what has happened to Jimmy Silver & Co., who once upon a time figured so

successfully in the "Boys' Friend", and goes on to tell the writer than Uncle James and his merry men appear regularly in the "Popular" on sale every Tuesday.'

Mrs. D. DOYLE (Brighton): I loved Val Fox, and well remember him. He was illustrated with a parrot on his shoulder. I think, also, he was a detective, and did a good turn each week for someone. All such happy days.

H. HEATH (Bexhill): I am all in favour of Danny's survey of Rookwood with his comments on each story being gathered together and published in booklet form. What a wonderful idea!

(Many thanks to the large number of readers who have written on similar lines concerning Danny's Rookwood. - ED.)

Rev. P. J. H. HOBSON (Reigate): May I ask two questions which may well have been answered in earlier copies of our magazine, but this must certainly have been a long time ago, and may be of interest to other readers.

The last 'Magnet' was No. 1683, published on 18th May, 1940, and there was, of course, no mention in that issue which I have before me, that the magazine was ceasing publication. We were promised the following week, a story entitled "The Battle of the Beaks". This story must have been written; has it ever been published? Surely the stories for at least the two following weeks must have been written also.

The second question deals with the post-war Bunter Books. I feel sure that I read in one of these books that "Bunter Court" or rather "Bunter Villa" was situated in Reigate, Surrey. If my memory is correct, does any reader know in which book this appeared?

Many thanks for the excellent magazine. Thirty years is indeed a great achievement. Long may it continue!

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: The Magnet ended, indeed, with unprecedented suddenness for a quality paper of its type. After the war we were given a number of titles, including "Battle of the Beaks", which, it was said, carried on a series which ostensibly began with "The Shadow of the Sack" (the last Magnet). In C. D. in 1969, I expressed the view that, though Chas. Hamilton undoubtedly intended to write stories under those titles, they were probably never actually written. Nothing, in the years since, has occurred to cause me to change my views.

In the Golden Age of the Magnet, Bunter's home was given as Reigate, in plenty of stories. For some unexplained reason, it was changed to Redgate in the latter-day Magnet. I cannot recall now whether Reigate came back in a post-war Bunter book, but I have a feeling that it did.)

Mrs. U. HAMILTON WRIGHT (Sutton Coldfield): I wonder if you could include this in your THE POSTMAN CALLED feature in the Digest? Because so many Old Boys Book Club Members read The Charles Hamilton Companion Series I should like to have the opportunity to correct some of the many mistakes contained in the article, MISS HOOD REMEMBERS In Volume 2 of the series. The list of his addresses is incomplete and incorrect - this will be unscrambled in a forthcoming article of mine - and it, should be noted, my parents, his sister and brother-in-law NEVER lived with him, but he lived with them at their home and their houses always had to be large enough to accommodate him at the drop of a hat together with his typewriter and sometimes his dog. My parents bought and paid for their own homes, the contrary statement is untrue.

Secondly, my parents did not part from each other at all, let alone for 'several years'. Miss Hood has confused a musician's absence from home on professional business with parting. He was no more parted from his wife than a sales representative would have been! Charles Hamilton did not have to provide for my mother or me. My parents' financial arrangements were completely independent of my uncle.

On Page 192 of the article the alleged incident of Percy Harrison and the baby in the pram is a figment of Miss Hood's imagination, which appears to be more creative than my uncle ever suspected.

The statement that my uncle subsidised my parents' daily living and paid my school fees is cruelly untrue. I even have the documentation to prove its falsity! I cannot understand why Miss Hood should make so many hurtful false assertions about people who are dead and cannot defend themselves and who showered both her and her family with largesse of every sort, in the shape of property, possessions, and medical care.

Finally, everybody knows what a gambler my uncle was. If Miss Hood had read his stories and his letters to my mother, even she

could not have missed this point. I have the documentation to prove it and treat the subject very thoroughly in my biography.

Again the correspondence between my uncle and my mother and father proves the lie of the assertion that neither of my parents were interested in Charles Hamilton's work. This is also fully treated in the biography, with quotations.

While not relishing the task of having to shoot an old lady down out of her ivory tower in cloud-cuckoo land, nevertheless such cruel untruths cannot go uncorrected. Out of respect for my uncle's memory I do implore you to publish these corrections.

* * * * *

News of the Clubs

MIDLAND

A fine crop of letters from country members arrived to be perused and enjoyed by all present at the April meeting. Slender, important links in the hobby scene, and remarkably heartwarming. The thorny problem of 'club subs' and the escalating cost of the mailing list was discussed.

Digging deep into the bran tub, Tom Porter (fresh from the delights of book hunting in Cornwall!) brought to everyone's delighted gaze an anniversary number: Nelson Lee, old series 147, dated 30 March, 1918 - 58 years old to the day of the meeting - 'The Clue of the Fancy Vest' by E. S. Brooks. The collectors item was No. 1 of 'The Schoolboys' Library' published by Gerald G. Swann. 'The Pirates Cove Affair' by Reginald Browne; not a cinema organist, but another disguise for the great ESR.

The club programme concluded with Geoff Lardner describing a recent visit to Excelsior House, a reading by Ivan Webster (Magnet 1391 'The High Hand' featuring the one and only Horace Coker) and a swift dash to lights out with Greyfriars Bingo. Meetings, usually last Tuesday of the month, 7.30 p.m., Dr. Johnson House, Birmingham.

LONDON

A welcome return to the Kingsbury residence of Bob and Louise Blythe for the April gathering where, as was expected, the writings of Edwy Searles Brookes were on display. On entering there was a display of old boys' books and papers and later on members were asked to name these in a simple competition. The winner was David Baddiell and in second place was Don Webster, up on a visit from Bideford. Then Don conducted one of his famous quizzes with the result being a win for Bob Milne.

Bob Blythe conducted his Lotto Game. The Full House was won by Ray Hopkins and the Pyramid by Winifred Morss. Prizes were donated by Bob Blythe and Bob Acraman. The first ones were Oxford hardbacks and the second single issues of Magnet Facsimiles, the winners having first choice.

Norman Wright obliged with two extremely funny readings from Nelson Lee Old Series, number 352-54, "The Coming of Archie Glenthorne". Most appropriate for this home of Nelson Lee lore.

Discussions took place re future functions and all too soon it was time for hearty votes of thanks to the hosts, Bob and Louise. Next meeting at 29 Strawberry Hill Road, Twickenham, Middlesex. Telephone 892 5314. Hosts Sam and Mrs. Thurbon.

CAMBRIDGE

The Club met at 5 All Saints Passage, on 11 April. Vic Hearn was in the chair.

Bill Thurbon gave a talk on pre-1914 "Invasion stories", ranging from Chesney's "Battle of Dorking" written in 1871 to the stories which had appeared in the various boys' papers from the late 1890's onward, including the "John Tregellis", "Britain Invaded" and "Kaiser and King" series. He pointed out, as Herbert Leckenby had done in an early "Annual" article, that Turner in "Boys will be Boys" first edition, had not apparently realised that the first Tregellis series had not only appeared as serials in the blue Gem and the Marvel, but originally in the "Boys' Friend" in 1906, as well as in the B. F. L. Lord Northcliffe had commissioned William le Queux, a well-known journalist and novelist, to write a war story "The Invasion of 1910" in the Daily Mail, and Tregellis's

tales were based on this. He also referred to the war tales in "The Captain" and "Chums". He commented that from all these stories both for adults and boys there had emerged one classic tale "The Riddle of the Sands", published in 1903 and in print ever since.

Jack Doupe gave a talk on the naval stories of Surgeon J. T. Jeans. Jeans began his career as a naval surgeon in 1894 and died in 1929, as an Admiral and former Director of Naval Medical Services. He had served in many ships and stations including the Atlantic and China squadrons, against gun runners in the Persian Gulf, and with the Naval Brigade in South Africa. Jeans had written six excellent naval stories for boys based on his experiences, dealing with the China station, the Atlantic Fleet, and gun runners in the Persian Gulf. He showed copies of four of these. Members admired the fine bindings of these, and the excellent pictorial covers. It was felt how much more satisfactory it was to handle such fine volumes than many of the plain covered modern books, which depend on their jackets for illustration.

Next meeting 9 May, at 99 Shelford Road.

NORTHERN

Saturday, 10th April, 1976

This was our Annual Meeting and began with the election - or rather the re-election - of officers, for the 'old team' were willing to serve again.

For information to our fellow-hobbyists we record Chairman - Geoffrey Wilde, Vice-Chairman - Harry Barlow, Librarian - Mollie Allison, Secretary - Geoffrey Good.

We discussed various items for our programme during the coming year which include an edited Hubert Gregg programme, a recording of the TV programme 'You're a Brick, Angela!', varied talks and quizzes contributed by members and an epidiascope session by Harry Barlow.

A feature of our evening was the playing of a recording of one of the Greyfriars television programmes made by Darrell Swift in August 1960. Darrell prefaced his recording with a talk about the actors. Gerald Champion, he said, played the part of Bunter throughout the series to the end. We look forward to hearing more of the programmes in the future.

Meetings continue at the Swarthmore Educational Centre, Leeds, on the second Saturday of the month at 6.30 p.m. New members will be welcomed.

One new member puts it that he only wishes that he had known about the Club many years ago. There couldn't be a better advertisement than that, could there?

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REVIEWS

THE GREYFRIARS SECRET SOCIETY

Frank Richards
(Howard Baker: £3.90)

This volume contains the first 8 stories of the 11-story Prout - Headmaster series of the autumn of 1934. Owing to an accident, Greyfriars is robbed of the presence of its Headmaster and its Head Prefect. In consequence, Mr. Prout becomes Acting Headmaster, and so poor is his judgment of boys that he appoints Loder as his Head Prefect.

This thoroughly entertaining series is notable for a gorgeous character study of Prout, who, blown-up with the sense of his own importance, changes from a pompous old bore to an overbearing tyrant. A novel feature of the series is the way that free gifts, then being given away to readers of the Magnet each week, were linked up and featured in several of the stories.

If these gifts were not just slightly too juvenile for the Magnet readership, they certainly were for Greyfriars boys, and it is an interesting question whether having the boys use the gifts in the stories did not introduce a mild note of unreality and lower the tone. Readers can only decide this point for themselves, and they will get a kick out of doing so.

It is a series which has been well-loved by Greyfriars fans down the years - and deservedly so.

THE DICTATOR OF GREYFRIARS

Frank Richards
(Howard Baker: £3.90)

This volume contains the final three stories about Prout - Headmaster, spilled over from the previous volume, and, oddly enough, the

actual title, "The Dictator of Greyfriars", was that of one of the tales in the other book. Excitement and suspense continue to run high until Dr. Locke returns unexpectedly, and Prout's tantrums are brought to an end. At the time in 1934 when I first read it, I had the impression that the actual ending was a slight anticlimax, a bit tame and abrupt after a long welter of delightful reading. The close of the series ran very close to Christmas. On the other hand, plenty of readers regard it as a powerful ending, worthy of a superb series. Once again, you will get a kick out of deciding for yourself.

The volume also contains the 4-story series about the Sinister Doctor Sin, a holiday quartette of mid-summer 1937. It stars Wun Lung, and makes a welcome change, with plenty of oriental thrills. Though it is miles behind the famous China Series in attractiveness (how could it be anything else?), and it is mainly set in Europe, lacking most of the mysticism of the Far East, it is nevertheless a good holiday interlude, and packed with thrills. Most readers will be in their element, and wish it had been longer.

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WANTED: N. L. L's (o/s) up to No. 92. U. J's; S. B. L's; early Champions. Items for sale.

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WANTED: Bullseye 41, 89; Surprise No. 3; Film Fun 571, "The Boys' Magazine" with complete story "Werewolf/Blackstone Hall", Magnet 1400, 1403; Buy/Exchange (state wants).

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REQUIRED URGENTLY: Collectors' Digest Annuals 1955 and prior. Also 1959 and 1961 - 1964. Will pay up to £1.50. Offers to:

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SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARIES wanted: 12; 20; 28; 76; 94; 132; 174; 198; 206; 220; 272. Monster Library. Magnet 556.

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