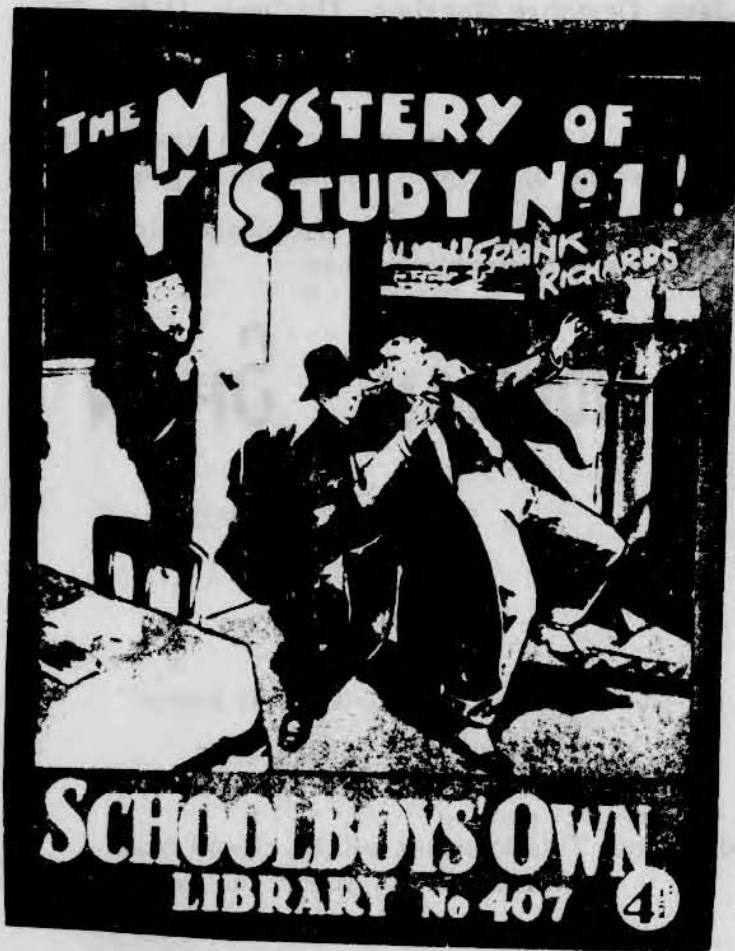


STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS DIGEST

Vol. 30 N^o 355

July 1976



20p

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STORY PAPER

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THE MELODY LINGERS ON

Mr. Walter Fleming, a C.D. stalwart probably from its beginning, writes me: "I am very interested in 'Biography of a Small Cinema', and, in particular, in the mention of Dick Powell in '20,000,000 Sweethearts'. Always an admirer of Powell, this film was one of my favourites. I believe that it was in it that he sang 'The Man on the Flying Trapeze', and the other song in it which runs through my mind was 'Thanks a Million'. This film, together with 'Footlight Parade' I thought were two of the best musicals I ever had the pleasure

of seeing."

Mr. Fleming is right about the catchy and famous "Trapeze" song, though I had forgotten it. The most noteworthy song in the film, I fancy, was "I'll String Along With You". The singer, with the typical selfishness of the young male lover, assures his lady-love that he will "string along with her" until someone better comes along. And we loved it.

That young man of the thirties may have been selfish, but he compared quite well with the recent gentleman in song who assured his lady-love that, on her behalf, he would "beg, steal, or borrow". It is typical of the seventies that it never occurred to him that he should work for her.

LONG AGO STORY

When I was small my sister frequently read to me, and one tale I have fondly remembered is "The Kanter Girls". She kept the book for many years, and then, in a moment of weakness, she lent it to a friend. And, as so often happens to people who are generous (or foolish) enough to lend precious books, she never got it back.

For many years I have sought that book, being hampered in my quest by not knowing the name of the writer, or the publisher, or even, for certain, a rough date of publication, though I assumed it to have been published probably during the first decade of the century. I was not certain, either, of the actual spelling of "Kanter", though I always thought of it as "Canter". One day, I asked my sister: "How was Kanter spelt? With a 'C' or with a 'K'?" Doubtfully she said: "I think with a 'K'!"

I mentioned last month how that great friend of frustrated book-seekers and weary editors, Mr. Ray Hopkins, went to a great deal of trouble to track the origin of "The Enchanted Bat" for me.

Tempted, I imposed yet again upon the hard-working and loyal Mr. Ray Hopkins. Without much hope, I mentioned "The Kanter Girls" to him (it may be Kanter or Canter, I told him helpfully), and wondered whether he could possibly trace the writer.

To my intense surprise and admiration, Mr. Hopkins turned up trumps yet again. He found for me that "The Kanter Girls" (my sister

was right - it was Kanter with a 'K') was written by Mary Lydia Bolles Branch in 1896. Mrs. (or Miss) Branch was "evidently a one-novel author", Mr. Hopkins tells me, for her only other registered book was "Tyrant Tom: & other stories", published in 1878, almost 20 years earlier.

So, thanks to my very good friend, Mr. Hopkins, I now know the author's name, and the date of publication, which will help me, though the quest will still be difficult. I have heard that there are certain quality second-hand booksellers who specialise in seeking rare books, but I don't know of any. If you happen to know of any bookseller who does this, I shall be grateful if you will kindly supply me with his name and address.

DAME SYBIL

I cannot recall that I ever saw Dame Sybil Thorndike, who died recently at the age of 93, on the stage. But I have happy memories of her for quite another reason.

Older readers may recall that I provided the piano accompaniment for the Billy Bunter shows which used to be a feature in the West End theatre at Christmas time. One year - I think it was the year when the show was at the Queen's Theatre - Sybil Thorndike was starring in the evening attraction. Most days, I would be leaving the theatre after the Bunter matinee just as Dame Sybil was arriving to prepare for the evening show. Always she stopped for a short chat, usually in the corridor near the stage door, and she had many pleasant things to say about the Greyfriars stories in the Magnet. She had seen our stage show and enjoyed it.

She said to me on one occasion: "A pity they left out Arthur Augustus!" I told her that Gussy went to a different school. "I know," replied Dame Sybil simply. "What does that matter?"

TAILPIECE

The years pass like a page of the Nelson Lee Library being flicked over by a keen reader. It only seems like yesterday that Mr. and Mrs. Bob Blythe brought their little son to a Surbiton meeting.

Now Mr. and Mrs. Blythe's son, Robby, is still jolly, and he is,

in addition, a lucky young man, for, on 17th July, he is marrying Miss Cheryl Jeeves. We wish a long, long and very happy married life to the splendid young couple.

THE EDITOR

* * * * *

DANNY'S DIARY

JULY 1926

I'm sure that the Magnet is better now than it has ever been. I hope it will keep on this way.

First story of the month "The Punishment of Ponsonby" was a sequel to the final tale of last month. Ponsonby dodges a challenge from the Greyfriars fellows, and is sent the white feather. But Fate catches up with him at last, and he gets what he deserves. A fine tale.

And now a great summer series is going strong, with Harry Wharton & Co. - and Bunter - on the way to be the guests of Hurree Singh in India. And to mark the occasion the Magnet is giving away cut-out figures of cricketers. The first one is of the famous Yorkshire cricketer G. C. Macaulay. First story in the new holiday series is "The Japer of Greyfriars". The "japer" is Wibley, who, annoyed at being left out of the cricket team to play Redclyffe, shuts Hurree Singh up in a box-room, and makes himself up to take the Nabob's place in the team. However, the bogus Wibley gets kidnapped by Nally Das, a Hindu who thinks Wib is the Nabob.

In the next tale, "The Nabob's Double", Wibley discovers that his captors intend to cart him off to India in the belief that he is the Nabob. However, in a thrilling tale, beautifully told, Wibley escapes. Next came "The Peril of the Night", in which an attempt is made to steal the real Hurree Singh from Greyfriars, and this time it is Bunter who comes in useful. So it is decided that, on the grounds of his safety - there are political plots against his life - he shall return to Bhanipur, and it is arranged that his friends shall go with him. And Bunter is rewarded by a place in the party. Last tale of the month is "Outward Bound", and the boys find that there will be many dangers on the voyage.

Starting off with the first story of the India series, the Magnet has been illustrated, inside and out, by the artist Leonard Shields. He is magnificent, and I hope he keeps on with it. He is my favourite of all the artists. One of the giveaway cut-out figures of cricketers is A. W. Carr of Notts, England's skipper.

The two new Schoolboys' Own Libraries are "A Mill Lad at Greyfriars", about Mark Linley's arrival and early adventures at Greyfriars, and "A Schoolboy's Temptation" which told of the arrival of 'Erbert, who proved to be the rightful heir to the money which Mornington thought was his.

The weather has been shocking during July - chilly, and wet - and not too good for the Test Matches with Australia. But there have been enormous crowds at the games.

There are now half a million telephones in London alone, and Doug suggested that it would be a good idea if we had a telephone. But Dad was livid. He said that he wasn't going to have a telephone for Doug to ring up all his girl friends at a penny a call. But Doug pointed out that it works out a bit less than that when you have a private 'phone.

At the pictures we have seen Jack Holt, Noah Beery, and Billie Dove in the Zane Grey story "The Light of Western Stars"; Richard Dix in "The Shock Punch"; Jackie Coogan in "Old Clothes"; Sally O'Neill, Ford Sterling, and Charlie Murray in "Mike"; and Jack Buchanan and Juliette Compton in "Bulldog Drummond's Third Round".

The Nelson Lee Library has continued with its cricket series, the opening tale of the month being "St. Frank's Saves the Ashes" in which Handforth turns up trumps and wins the game. Next came "The Yellow Hand at St. Frank's" in which Handy says he has seen strange, Chinese figures flitting through the night, and nobody believes him for a time. Then the last story of the cricket series, "St. Frank's at Lord's!" in which Handy is due to play in the schoolboy test match - but, owing to his own fault, he is on crutches.

Then came the start of the Summer Holiday series. Young Ching has been kidnapped, and in "All Aboard for China", the St. Frank's party sets off, aboard Lord Dorrimore's magnificent yacht "The Wanderer", to rescue him. Last tale of the month, continuing the story about the trip to China, was "In The Dragon's Clutch". The

boys are captured by Dr. Foo Chow, the mysterious Chinese millionaire, and Handforth, like the warrior he is, fights side by side with the grim Zulu warrior, Umlosi. These tales are exciting for boys, and there is plenty of fun in them, too.

At the end of the month there was another issue of the Monster Library - No. 9, "The Boy from the 'Bush'".

A roundabout has been constructed at Piccadilly Circus in London, and so far it seems a great success in controlling the flow of the traffic. The idea may be taken up in other cities and on main roads and cross-roads.

The Magnet may never have been better, and I think the Gem has never been worse than it is now. Doug says I am not fair to these people who write the stories in place of the real Martin Clifford, and I ought to "live and let live". I can't see it. A little while ago there were quite a few actors imitating Charlie Chaplin in films, and also in the music halls, but they were pretty awful and only showed up how good the real Charlie is. Why don't they think up characters of their own, and not imitate Charlie? Though I don't think Charlie Chaplin is quite so good as he used to be in his two-reel comedies.

The Gem started off with two holiday stories "Chums Under Canvas" and "Honours Even". Dr. Holmes has arranged, in rather an unlikely move, that St. Jim's should go into camp, with other public schools including Rookwood, at a site on the Sussex coast. Then "Grundy's Feud" in which Grundy decides to become junior captain of St. Jim's. Then "The St. Jim's Hotel-Keepers" in which we learn that Lord Eastwood is improbably the owner of a number of hotels. The staff at one of these hotels goes on strike, and the St. Jim's juniors take over. Then, not very original, "Fighting for the Ashes" in which St. Jim's plays a team of Australian schoolboys. A pretty feeble month.

Like the Magnet, the Popular is giving away stand-up figures of famous cricketers, and they are great. To mark the occasion, the Popular this month has adopted a coloured cover, in red, white, and blue. It is very attractive. And there is a new serial, "The Test Match Kid" by Patsy Hendren, the famous cricketer. The Dirk Power series from the Gem is now representing St. Jim's, and the Rookwood stories are the ones about Jimmy Silver & Co. on tramp with a horse

named Trotsky.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: S.O.L. No. 31, "A Mill-Lad at Greyfriars" comprised four stories from the $\frac{1}{2}$ d Magnet. The first of the four appeared originally in the Magnet at Christmas 1908, and was uncut. The remaining three formed a series in the late autumn of 1909, the last two being heavily pruned in the S.O.L. Carberry, who was the villain first time round, was changed to Loder in the S.O.L. reprint. Seems a pity! S.O.L. No. 32, "A Schoolboy's Temptation" comprised 5 Rookwood stories from the Boys' Friend of 1917, and little or no pruning was necessary.

Though the editor of the Popular cracked up "The Test Match Kid" as the work of Patsy Hendren - "we kid'n't know he could write stories, did we? Now we know better!", it is pretty certain that whoever wrote it, it was not Patsy Hendren, the cricketer. The Dirk Power series came from the Gem of the autumn of 1920, when the real Martin Clifford returned to the Gem after a long absence. The Rookwood "Trotsky" hiking series came from the Boys' Friend of the summer of 1922.)

* * * * *

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

At this time of the year I usually get around to asking Sexton Blake fans if they have thought about writing an article for the C.D. Annual. The material is required by the Editor at the latest by September so there is none too much time left, so get out your pens and paper or typewriters and set to work. I have ordered a copy of the Arthur Barker book of some early Sexton Blake stories for the Lending Library if anyone is interested. It contains three stories which are really quite interesting, especially the two very early tales. They are equal to any of the "Rivals of Sherlock Holmes" stories which appeared on TV and in recent paperbacks. The book itself makes a welcome addition to our Blake Saga.

THE LIGHTER SIDE OF SEXTON BLAKE

by Don Harkness

Sexton Blake, the famous Baker Street detective, enjoyed many triumphs in his long and triumphant career of waging war against crime. Some of these were grim affairs, a fight to the finish, in which no mercy was asked for or given. Others involved grudging admiration by

Blake for his adversary and vice versa. One such mutual respect for each other which comes to mind, into which sportsmanship entered, existed between Blake and Zenith the Albino. Finally there was the occasional humorously ironic triumph in which author Gwyn Evans excelled.

For a fine example of this type of yarn you could not do better than to beg or borrow a copy of Union Jack No. 1345 dated 27 July, 1929, and read "The Great Pyramid Swindle". Gwyn Evans knew the locality he was writing about having spent some years in Egypt as a reporter.

In my opinion this was a most enjoyable story and dealt with political unrest, romance, historical facts and an exciting idea which to some may seem improbable but was not entirely impossible. The irrepressible Evans had the happy knack of getting off-beat ideas and making the most far-fetched seem plausible. At the same time he was not at a loss for words when describing an Egyptian night most poetically, picturing the sky as "a turquoise velvet mantle, studded with the sequins of the stars" beneath which "loomed the black eternal triangle of the Great Pyramid of Cheops, that mighty monument that has filled the world with awe since the dawn of time".

A very neat quip comes soon after, when Philip Maynard, star reporter of the "Egyptian News" on meeting Marjorie Pike and asked who he is, replies, "I am Ali Baba, I came to see the Sphinx by moonlight and find - praise Allah! - a minx by Spoonlight". It should be explained that Maynard, covering the mid-Lent carnival at the Mena House Hotel, was dressed in an abayia as an Arab prince, hence the reference to himself as Ali Baba. The girl herself was described as "a little wisp of a thing, poised light as thistle-down on a broken pillar of stone, gazing up at the inscrutable age worn features of the Sphinx. She looked like some nymph of Diana, a sprite woven of moonlight and desert dew."

From this picturesque description Gwyn Evans later turned to something more factual, telling us that the Great Pyramid was originally 481 ft. high, 756 ft. square and covered an area of over 13 acres. It was estimated to have taken 33 years to build involving 5 million slaves.

Finally from the author's fertile imagination came the fantastic idea which set his stories apart from all others. It was a millionaire's plan to build a bigger and better pyramid close by the original. It was

to be built of concrete and steel and faced with dazzling glazed blue tiles. The interior was to house a confectionery factory, administrative offices, a movie theatre and a ballroom, complete with express elevators, while in the apex was to be a large observatory.

The story has two plots, one interwoven with the other but to reveal more would only spoil it for intending readers, so you are urged, if you have no copy of your own, to borrow a copy from the Blakiana Archives in Archdale Road, East Dulwich.

A MESSAGE FROM CANADA

by S. Gordon Swan

The following extract from a Canadian newspaper may prove of interest to Sexton Blake fans. My late father sent it to me from Vancouver as far back as 1937 -- which now appears a remote period in history -- and as it deals in part with an author who wrote a few Sexton Blake stories I quote it in full:

THE VANCOUVER SUN

Thursday, 4th March, 1937

In Lighter Vein

A gentleman named Maurice Dix who authors mystery novels and who is one of the string of writers that produces the Sexton Blake detective tales has been telling Vancouver audiences that addiction to Mystery and Detective stories is nothing to be ashamed of because so many noted persons are similarly disposed.

We do not believe that Mr. Dix's apology for the tastes of such addicts is necessary. We do not believe that one needs to justify his taste in fiction by pointing to the literary menus of kings, dictators and statesmen. As a matter of fact we are inclined to think that the intellectual who turns or pretends to turn up his nose at such thrilling fare is either a snob or a liar. For we know of nothing that so relaxes the mind of the staid plodder as a brisk bout, for instance, with Sexton Blake, the pert Tinker and the ubiquitous Pedro. Nor are we sure that such lighter fiction does not serve a higher moral purpose than some of the more serious output.

Many odd things happen in "best sellers", many perversions of justice, humanity and morals. But in the good old detective stories there is only one inevitable ending -- the good and wholesome people

win out and live happily ever after while the scoundrels get it unmistakably in the neck. Wholesome adventure reading is an essential to the man whose life is cast in drab and quiet places. Just as the office man needs a gymnasium workout occasionally to stretch unaccustomed muscles, so does he need a little vicarious blood and thunder to maintain the elasticity of his mind. Ashamed of reading detective stories? Indeed not, we're proud of it.

Some of the sentiments expressed above are even more applicable today. The writer of the article, if alive now, would be horrified at the "odd things that happen" in current best-sellers, the "many perversions of justice, humanity and morals" which are to be found in the paperbacks on sale at modern bookshops.

Even detective fiction has been tainted with the permissiveness that has been foisted on the world in the last decade. It is high time the wholesome adventures of Sexton Blake and Nelson Lee were revived to provide a long-felt want.

REVIEW

SEXTON BLAKE'S EARLY CASES

(Arthur Barker Ltd.
£3.75)

This is a pleasant little collection of three early Sexton Blake yarns. The longest one, "Witness For The Defence", by E. J. Gannon, comes from the 1d Union Jack of 1911. The story is straightforward, with no unexpected twists, but it is eminently readable, telling how Blake, in an endeavour to prevent the execution of an innocent man, gets embroiled in a South American revolution. It is an intriguing coincidence that Blake is roped in, early in the story, to take part in an identity parade, and makes the observation: "I have been forced to the conclusion recently that the method employed in identification parades is one that may well be open to improvement."

Tinker, who features in this story, calls Blake "Sir", and one wonders whether the familiar "Guv'nor" was cut out editorially or not.

Tinker does not appear at all in the other two much shorter tales, which are taken from the year 1895, about 16 years earlier. Perhaps they were before Tinker's time. "The Clue of the Dead Eyes" tells of

Blake at the mercy of the monstrous Dr. Bulasco, and is written by A. Grahame. "A Clue from the Deep" is the story of a murder at sea, and Blake first learns of it by means of a message in a bottle. I, personally, enjoyed this the most of the three. It was written by E. Treeton.

Novelty, and a sense of atmosphere, are probably the main attraction of this collection, and the original illustrations from those old Union Jacks are a big asset to the flavour of the book.

* * * * *

NELSON LEE COLUMN

BROOKSIANA ?

asks Ernest Holman

A Meeting of the Triangle Discussion Group was held recently in the St. Frank's Lecture Room on the subject of the Nelson Lee Column. It was a lively gathering and this Report, whilst retaining the essence of points raised, omits a considerable number of cat-calls, boos, sitting-on-heads, etc. The President, William Napoleon Browne, called upon Brothers present to make their views as brief as possible, in order to give everyone an opportunity of a few well-chosen words.

Reggie Pitt thought that the Column should broaden its scope, to take in all aspects of the work of Mr. Edwy Searles Brooks - not just items about the School. A sort of 'Brooksiana', he suggested; adding, however, that although imitation was the surest form of flattery, it would not be right to 'play' on the title of another section of the Magazine. Nipper put forward 'Between Ourselves with E.S.B.' and went on to point out that whilst such a change could bring in E.S.B. as Victor Gunn, Berkeley Gray and Robert W. Comrade, it would cause a clash with the Sexton Blake pages. Perhaps this side of Brooks' work should be left out of any new Column - although, he remarked, there was no reason why an author shouldn't appear in other pages as well.

Fullwood wondered if more pages could be allotted. Whilst this was not necessarily a good thing, remembering that quality was always preferable to quantity, he did feel that if an article justified it, the Column could be extended. Bob Christine was of opinion that interest

in Brooks was somewhat limited but maybe a wider canvas might induce more readers to take up pen. Nick Trotwood then raised the question of criticism. He considered that the Column as it existed was weak - that, at times, it appeared to be a little too much like a self-admiration Society. The Chairman then asked the speaker if he meant criticism for its own sake.

"No," replied Nick. "I mean constructive comment; views of stories, without bias being over-weighted. I would, also, make a proviso - that comparisons with other writers be excluded. Too often we hear of a person liking a certain writer - and decrying all others. This is ridiculous - a person's taste is his own affair, but that person is quite unjustified in condemning the likes of others. I like the idea of an E.S.B. Column - but it should be Brooks, the whole Brooks and nothing but the Brooks'."

The Chairman remarked that whilst he was not sure that comparison with other writers should be barred, he did feel that this kind of thing wanted keeping within bounds. Bernard Forrest was vehemently against this; let's stir it up, was his view - the more friction the better! Nipper rose to remind the Group that Forrest himself had, at one time, stirred up a normal feud into real warfare. "I'm against comparisons," he told them; "but, if they must be made, then let the decencies of debate be observed." (At this point, Forrest was heard to say something about "no holds barred" - his listeners obviously agreed with him in the use of this expression, for he was unable to take any further part in the discussion!)

Handforth, who had been fuming under the restraint of Church and McClure, now burst forth with the view that E.S.B. was by far the greatest boys' story writer ever. ("Well said, Trackett Grim," from Willy Handforth.) Handy said he did not feel that anyone with any sense could dispute his statement. As for criticism, he was against it - there wasn't any occasion to find any. Buster Boots promptly informed Handy that he was offside; banning criticism would only lead people to take the view that E. S. Brooks was not a writer whose works could stand up to it. "Nothing," he said loudly "could be farther from the truth. Brooks was an excellent writer, whose yarns are more than capable of holding their own."

Just as the Meeting threatened to become more than a little heated (on Handforth's part, at any rate!) Lionel Corcoran steered the discussion back to Reggie Pitt's original idea. The owner of the Blue Crusaders was of opinion that a wider scope would permit the inclusion of his team, as well as bringing in those members of the School who had arrived more recently. (Kirby Keeble Parkington was seen to raise both fists above him and to nod his gingery mop in agreement.)

Miscellaneous views followed: Commissariat features (Fatty Little); Sartorial articles (Archie Glenthorpe); Sports Fixtures and Results (Vivian Travers); Handforth offered to take over the Column entirely and was ready to do battle with 'anyone against'.

Nipper rose again to remark that it was really a question of whether or not to preserve the 'status quo'. Should the Column remain as it is? A productive seed was fine, he conjectured - but one didn't want to grow a 'rogue' plant, if it could be avoided. Nipper decided that views expressed by people like Forrest might burst the banks of reason. ("I have to include you in this expression, Handy, old son!") In reply to an interjection from the back of the room, Nipper admitted that, of course, he didn't want to stifle free speech. The point was, human nature alone sometimes caused people to become 'freer' with words than was desirable. It might well be a case of 'leaving well alone'.

The Chairman then informed the gathering that it was time to apply the closure. He thanked everybody who had spoken for their views - if, in some cases, he could not congratulate them on their behaviour! What was required, he told the Meeting, was for some means to be found of conveying the various points made to the readers.

"Let us, Brother Discussionists," he concluded, "move elsewhere to have a discussion about this discussion. ("Give over, Browne!") To, for example, the School Shop - ("That's better!") - at my own personal and unrestricted expense!" ("Hear, hear!")

Which proved to be the one item of the Meeting that did not produce a single dissentient voice!

- - -

RESULT OF CROSSWORD COMPETITION

Last month, in introducing the St. Frank's Crossword, we spoke of the St. Frank's Golden Jubilee. It should, of course, have been

Diamond Jubilee. There are so many Jubilees about that we get mixed up. The St. Frank's Diamond Jubilee is next year.

The first two correct solutions to the Crossword were received from, respectively, Mr. Reuben Godsave of Leytonstone and Mr. Jack Cook of Newcastle-on-Tyne, to each of whom a prize of £2.50 has been posted.

* * * * *

DO YOU REMEMBER?

by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 135 - Magnet No. 1651 - "Condemned Without Evidence"

There were only seven single stories in the Magnet in 1939, and six of them occurred in the Autumn Term. Magnet 1651 marked the first day of term, with the usual scenes at Lantham Junction and Vernon-Smith deciding to get off at Redclyffe for an afternoon of billiards and banker. He later told Mr. Quelch that he had been unable to get on one train at London because of the crowds, and so he went out to get some tea and missed the next train as well. The aroma of tobacco was explained by the unpleasant necessity of having to travel in a smoking compartment. One thing led to another, and eventually he was expelled on suspicion of having 'shipped' Quelch's study.

No one could quarrel with the plot construction, which was as neat and trim as ever. What was less satisfactory was the presentation of the characters. That Mr. Quelch should want the Bounder expelled on suspicion was not unnatural, but that the Head should agree without demur was highly uncharacteristic, if the 1932 Rebel series is brought into comparison (especially as it was referred to in this story). Again, the Bounder accused Wharton of being responsible without any real reason at all, which was again very unsatisfactory. It may well be that this type of plot needed more than a single story to develop convincingly.

The most serious defect was the style of writing, which showed traces of weariness at times. In the Golden Age of the Magnet, Charles Hamilton's imagery was both novel and striking - "Mr. Quelch, seeing a Greyfriars fellow, felt like the war-horse snuffing the battle from afar. It was like the smell of the barracks to an old soldier." (Magnet 1150) In place of this, we find in Magnet 1651 a banal mixed metaphor of the type used in grammar books as an example to avoid - "Prout had let the

cat out of the bag and there was stormy weather ahead for the Bounder." In view of all this, it is perhaps no wonder that the circulation of the Magnet was dropping.

The Greyfriars Herald at this time was printed on the inside covers, back and front, and it is interesting to see that Herlock Sholmes had turned into Sheerluck Homes, though the story reads like a genuine Hamiltonian one. At the end of the Magnet story the next week's issue is said to be entitled "The Bounder's Dupe" whilst the editorial page lists it as "Grunter of Greyhurst". This all goes to prove the danger of compiling lists of titles from advertisements in advance. Possibly the most noteworthy point about No. 1651 is the part played by Mr. Woosey, the art master: he was undoubtedly featured here so that his departure from Greyfriars a few weeks later would leave the way open for a new art master, Mr. Lamb. Someone should have told C. H. Chapman about the change in staff, for Mr. Lamb was drawn as identical in appearance to his predecessor!

* * * * *

HAMILTON BYWAYS

by Derek Adley

Frank Richards affection for 'dear old Margate' has always been apparent from his correspondence and reference in his stories but without being too critical "times have changed" and unfortunately not for the better.

Last year I spent two periods of the summer - lasting about eight days in each - in exploring this part of Kent. My family and I were on holiday but I was able to enjoy a second quest and that was to revel in the countryside so familiar to the great School story writer.

Both of the two largest towns either side of Frank Richards home, Margate and Ramsgate, were, if you strayed from the beaches, far removed from the picture conjured up from reading the old Magnet. In fact commercialisation has taken over at an unhappy level with also a fair element of rather violent intervention by certain undesirables.

However those areas in between - Cliftonville, Broadstairs and Kingsgate - are still able to retain to some extent a little of the magic, and it was in these places that I was able to enjoy the pleasures of the beaches and countryside.

I loved the Charles Dickens country in Broadstairs with its Bleak House and Dickins House, and even that gift shop known as the Old Curiosity Shop though being a gigantic commercial establishment for the selling of sea shells and other mementos still afforded my daughter, an Art Student, a considerable amount of pleasure.

If one was looking for Frank Richards country however it was possible at every turn of the lanes to put the finger on something. I must hasten to add that a lot of this was pure coincidence for apart from being everyday names a lot of those I saw had been invented by Richards far earlier than on his arrival in Kent, - the area in Cliftonville with the Highcliffe Hall Hotel and the nearby hostelry Captain Digby and in Broadstairs, Laurel Villas - there must be hundreds of them in this country.

To me the saddest sight was Friends House, identified previously in the C.D. by others as the origin of the Portercliffe Hall series in the Magnet.

It is an obvious landmark to the lovers of Frank Richards as having bearing on other series too, I believe, for its very being is a writer's delight.

Though Margate has some affiliation to the Quakers due to its connections with Benjamin Beale, Friends House owes none of its origin to that order.

Friends House is in the close proximity to Kingsgate in an area that I suppose is Cliftonville though generally known as Northdown.

This is a large mansion within what was once the Friends Farm Estate and owned years ago by Captain Friend. After the Captain died it was purchased by the Thanet Council who renamed it Northdown Park House and used the ground floor as a restaurant or cafe.

Over the last few years the house itself has steadily become derelict and the grounds becoming remote from the idea of those at Portercliffe Hall, in fact no real use has been made of the mansion since the council purchased the property.

Local residents concern for the future of this one-time stately pile has been raised and voiced at council meetings. My guess is that it will eventually be pulled down to provide space for a continuation of a nearby housing estate, thus my sadness.

There is still a retention of the name of Friend among the locals despite the change to Northdown Park. It is still referred to as Friends House, though sometimes as Friends Park, and the adjacent bus stop is still listed as Friends Corner.

It would seem that what was once reality in Frank Richards world, the old world of quaintness, of the jolly seaside, the tea shoppe and the Squire in his mansion is now a fantasy that is being phased out fast. But anyone with a couple of weeks to spare and with a background knowledge of the tales of Frank Richards can still amble about the district where the chums of the Remove once trod.

There is still an abundance of nostalgic places and names to see, and with a little imagination - you don't need a magic carpet - you're holiday becomes twice as good.

* * * * *

Our "CLASSIC" SERIAL, written 70 years ago.

MISSING!

It was a fine, spring afternoon. Last night the ruins had looked grim and eerie, but now their aspect was very different. The sun glimmered on the shattered walls and the broken arches of the windows. Blake strode up the hill-path and entered the ruined castle. In more than one spot he had caught sight of a man in cover, watching. The gipsy was being looked for, and if he came openly to the ruins he could not escape.

But Blake did not believe for a moment that he would do anything of the kind. He thought it would take someone far keener than Inspector Skeet to catch Barengro. With his usual modesty, he fancied himself equal to the task.

He was certain that the gipsy had a lurking-place somewhere beneath the ruins, and that he would come to take the packet from the steps without showing himself in

the open air at all. Probably he had a secret way of entering and leaving the vaults, too.

Blake stopped at the yawning opening where the crumbling steps led downwards. The uppermost steps were visible, but the lower ones were lost in shadow. He stopped and placed the packet on the top step.

His work was done, but he did not leave the ruins. He gave a quick look around him. The thought came into his mind that even at that moment he was watched. Several massive fragments of the old building overlooked the spot. Some of the walls were ten feet thick, and crevices opened in them here and there.

Were the eyes of the gipsy on him at that moment, then? Blake scanned the old, grey walls keenly. There was no

sign of life.

Slowly he walked away, as if to leave the ruins and go down the path. He passed behind a massive fragment of an old wall, and stopped. It completely concealed him from the view of anyone near the opening of the vaults. It was partly grown over by rusty-looking creepers, which afforded him cover, and enabled him to peep out without showing himself. He knelt there, watching.

The gipsy was not likely to leave the packet long untaken. If he were indeed on the watch he would be satisfied that the boy had gone. Blake was a dozen yards from the spot where the packet lay. He watched and listened.

There was a slight sound in the dead silence of the ruins. Blake drew a quick, throbbing breath. A head came out of the opening to the vaults, and turned round, scanning the ruins, and he recognized the swarthy, unshaven face of Barenegro, the gipsy.

The head disappeared the next moment. Blake darted forward to the opening. The stone stair was dark and deserted. With the caution of a cat stalking a mouse, Blake stepped into the stairway. There was a glimmer of light in the black vaults. Barenegro was not moving about there in the dark. Blake stole silently down, and caught the glimmer of a lighted lantern.

The lantern was placed on the ground. Barenegro was kneeling beside it, opening the packet he had taken from the steps. He gave a grunt of satisfaction as his eye caught the glimmer of gold.

Blake watched him. He knew now for certain that the gipsy had a hiding-

place somewhere there. But where? When it was found, D'Arcy would be found. But where was it? That could only be ascertained by watching the gipsy. Blake thought for a moment of calling in the men, who were watching only fifty yards away. But he dismissed the thought.

Long before they could arrive on the spot, Barenegro would be able to scuttle into his den and evade all pursuit. While the gipsy counted the gold, Blake descended the last steps and stole into the gloom of the vault. He waited in the darkness. With common luck he would be able to follow the man unseen, and discover his secret.

The gipsy finished his counting; the clink of the coins ceased. Barenegro rose to his feet. He stuffed the money into his pockets. He picked up the lantern. Blake saw the grin of evil exultation on his face. Barenegro was in high good humour. He moved away along the vaults, the lantern flashing before him. Blake followed cautiously. A whiff of tobacco came to him. The ruffian had lighted his pipe at the lantern. Suddenly the progress of the light halted. Blake stopped, too, his heart thumping.

"Who's there?"

The gipsy's voice was guttural and harsh. Blake stood quite still. Barenegro commenced to retrace his steps hastily, flashing the lantern to and fro.

The boy was compelled to move. He retreated on tiptoe, but the gipsy was coming on swiftly, and he uttered a savage exclamation as the light gleamed on the boy's white face.

"You again! You!" he hissed. Blake turned and ran. Muttering

savage imprecations, the gipsy dashed after Blake. The junior made a direct line for the stairs. He stumbled. There was a grunt of triumph behind him, and the gipsy, springing forward, gripped the boy as he rose.

Blake gasped with mingled fear and horror as he felt the gipsy's fingers fasten on him, and struck out with both fists. Barendro staggered backwards with a howl of pain and fury.

Blake made a desperate effort to tear himself loose, but Barendro, startled and hurt as he was, clung to him savagely. The lantern crashed to the ground and went out. The vault was plunged into darkness. But the tenacious grip of the gipsy never relaxed, and he closed upon Blake.

"Help! Help!" yelled Blake.

He had a vague hope that the watching men without might hear. But if they heard there was no time for them to come to his aid. He was down on the stone floor, with the gipsy's weight on him. The hard, strong hands were at his throat.

"Help! Help!"

It was his last cry. The savage clutch choked him into silence. He was dragged to his feet, half-senseless, and hurried away into the darkness. He struggled once, but a fierce rain of blows fell on him.

"You whelp! You meddling whelp!"

It was the gipsy's voice muttering in the darkness. "So you must interfere, you whelp!"

Blake was dragged rapidly along in the darkness, whither he could not guess. But suddenly the gipsy stopped. There was a creaking sound, as of a door long unused opening stiffly. Blake was flung head-long forward, and the creak sounded again behind him.

He fell blindly in the darkness. His hands touched something that lay on the ground; something that was warm; something that moved. He gave an involuntary cry. The unseen object moved again. The darkness was intense; he could see nothing. He rose painfully to his feet.

"What is it?" he cried, in a shaking voice. "Is anybody here?"

A thin weak voice replied from the gloom.

"Bai jove, Blake, old fellah, is that weally you?"

It was the voice of Arthur Augustus. Blake had found the swell of St. Jim's. But he had found him in a way that he had not expected; a way that was far from agreeable to him. He knew now why he had been hurled there, and what the creak behind him had meant. He was shut in with the missing boy. He had found D'Arcy - only to share his imprisonment in this grim and gloomy recess under the old castle.

(MORE OF THIS OLD, OLD TALE NEXT MONTH)

* * * * *

I will exchange old comics and boys' papers for Australian Garth comics. I will pay £4 for Tom Fuss Comic drawn by Marten Toonder and £4 for Classics Illustrated Comic of Dracula.

GIACARDI, 12 PATHFIELD ROAD, LONDON, S.W.16

BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

No. 28. THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

Our opening film for the new term came from A. B. F. D., and was a lively one entitled "Devils on Wheels" starring Frankie Darrow and Jack Mulhall. Next, from M. G. M., came Paul Lukas in "The Casino Murder Case". Then, from Warner Bros., Leslie Howard and Kay Francis in "British Agent".

After that, a double-feature programme, both films from Universal: Diana Wynyard and Frank Lawton in "Over the River" plus Ralph Graves in "Ticket to a Crime". Next, from Warner Bros., Irene Dunne, with Donald Woods in "Sweet Adeline".

Now another double-feature programme, comprising, from Universal, Mary Astor with Baby Jane (whoever she was!) in "Straight from the Heart", plus, from A. B. F. D., William Haines in "Young and Beautiful".

Next, the very worst film we ever played, without any possible exception. It came from A. B. F. D., and we got landed with it from that firm's system of "block booking" to which I referred last month. The film was Rose Hobart in "Atlantic City Romance". It was a poor story, poorly acted, and shockingly photographed. I complained to A. B. F. D. about the dark quality of the print, which made the screen seem poorly lit. They were apologetic, and said that it was a print made from another positive and not from a negative, and this was due to some shortcoming in their parent company in America. It seemed a weird excuse to me.

Now, back to M. G. M., with Robert Taylor and Virginia Bruce in "Times-Square Lady", followed by, from A. B. F. D., Ben Lyon in "Crimson Romance". Next, from Warner's, Barbara Stanwyck and Gene Raymond in "The Woman in Red". I forget this one entirely, but I wonder whether it was a film of Anthony Gilbert's thriller novel of that name - a fine story. If so, it was made again years later, under the title of "My Name is Julia Ross".

Now a real rouser from Warner Bros.: James Cagney, Pat O'Brien, and Margaret Lindsay in "Devil Dogs of the Air". Then, from M. G. M., Leo Carillo in "The Winning Ticket", followed by, also from M. G. M., Robert Young in "Vagabond Lady". After that, from M. G. M., Clark Gable and Constance Bennett in "After Office Hours". And, the following week, from Warner's, Jean Muir in "The White Cockatoo".

Next a double-feature programme, both films from Universal: Alan Mowbray in "Night Life of the Gods", plus Lyle Talbot in "It Happened in New York".

And now Paramount re-issued that glorious epic "The Sign of the Cross", and we played it. It was the type of unforgettable stuff which Cecil B. de Mille always did so well. Charles Laughton and Claudette Colbert overacted superbly as Nero and Poppeia, respectively, Frederic March was wonderful as the young Roman soldier who became a christian under the influence of Elissa Landi who was beautiful as the slave girl christian.

Many years later, after the war, Paramount re-issued "Sign of the Cross" yet again (though we did not play it again at the Small Cinema) and in the post-war re-issue somebody had the stupid idea of giving it a prologue with modern American soldiers flying in a troop-carrier plane over Rome, with the soldiers talking among themselves about ancient Rome, and as they talked the picture faded into the de Mille masterpiece. Such a prologue (and probably a similar epilogue as well) was absurdly incongruous and marred the picture. Though we did not book it in its post-war re-issue, I went to see it at the Regent Cinema at King's Cross in London, and enjoyed it as much as ever.

Next, from Warner's, William Gargan in "A Night at the Ritz", followed by a double-feature programme, both films from Universal: Claude Rains in "The Invisible Man" (the first of the films based on Wells' popular character and very

successful) plus Jane Carr in "Annie, Leave the Room".

Next came Rudy Vallee and Ann Dvorak in "Sweet Music", from Warner Bros., followed by, from M. G. M., Wallace Beery, Robert Young, and Maureen O'Sullivan in "West Point of the Air". Our final film for the term was Jean Harlow and William Powell in "Reckless", also from M. G. M.

Most programmes included a Hal Roach Comedy, and it is interesting to note that Duggie Wakefield was starred in a number of them. I forget whether or not he was good in films, but he was Gracie Fields' brother-in-law, and some years later he toured British music halls with very great success, and I recall that it was one of his revues which packed Kingston Empire every night during the last week of that lovely theatre's existence. They gutted it later to make a super-market, but the exterior still looks very much as it did in the theatre's heyday, even to the giant words EMPIRE at the side, and the date it was built - 1910.

(ANOTHER ARTICLE IN THIS SERIES SOON)

* * * * *

WANTED: "Chatterbox" 1870, 1873, 1875, 1974, 1882, 1883, Vol. 66, Vol. 67. "Boys' School Story Omnibus" by "Hylton Cleaver" and "R. A. H. Goodyear", "Sparrow in Search of Fame", "Black Pearls of The Pacific" by "Gunby Hadath". "Fly of The Fells", "The Goose that Loved a Doctor" by "Arthur Waterhouse". "Spy/Counter Spy" by "Don Betteridge". Also books by Harold Avery, Alfred Judd, R. A. H. Goodyear, Hylton Cleaver, Richard Bird.

E. CONNOLLEY, 25 PAYNES PITCH, CHURCHDOWN, GLOUCESTER.

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WANTED: BULLSEYES. Also MAGNETS between Nos. 1 and 984 inclusive.

H. L. MARRIOTT

27 GREENVIEW DRIVE, LINKS, NORTHAMPTON, NN2 7LA.

The Postman Called

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

BILL LOFTS (London): As a regular visitor to the British Museum the last thirty years, I'm extremely puzzled by some of Len Wormull's remarks in his article MUSEUM MUSINGS (June C.D.). The U.J. is certainly in the Catalogue, and I have had out dozens of various volumes through the years. The large Boys Friend/Realm/Herald papers, have always been at Colindale Museum, simply because they are of newspaper size. The S. B. L. is at Bloomsbury, though it may now have been moved to Woolwich, certainly not Colindale that does not keep library size books. It is also not unique to visit the vaults, as apart from myself, only the other week Denis Gifford was able to visit the shelves, when I was looking for him in vain in the Reading Room! Both the authors of 'Your' a Brick Angela, and E. Kadish are wide of the mark in the writers to use male pseudonym's in girl fiction. A perusal of especially The Girls Friend would reveal many male names. 'Chester Wynn' in the S. F. and S. G. group was Isabel and John Wheway. I am almost certain that 'Clive Bancroft' was also Peter Fleming, and A. Carney Allen the real male name of the person who wrote girls fiction under that name.

GEORGE BEAL (London): I was interested in your comments on the recent Social Reformers stamps, and I thought you might be interested to read my recent editorial in THE PHILATELIC MAGAZINE (May) of which I am the Editor.

Although, as you say, the Post Office people did not feel inclined to honour Charles Hamilton, I think that it should be pointed out that the Committee concerned in fact approve all stamp designs about two years in advance of their issue: many people are unaware of this and so submit ideas too late for consideration.

Incidentally, I was told by a Post Office official that one virtue of the new stamp issue was that it "made a pretty pattern when seen as a complete sheet!" I honestly cannot see any virtue whatsoever in that.

It is my opinion that West Germany produce the best stamp designs and it would be interesting to know whether their great boys'

author, Karl May, will ever be depicted on their stamps.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: Concerning the Social Reformers stamps, Mr. Beal observed "We have tried to find something good to say about them, but failed on every count. We don't like the design, the execution, the colours or the typography.")

J. R. LEWIS (Neston): I have long known that the Editorial Staff of the Magnet resorted to a great deal of subterfuge, in their efforts to hide the fact that Frank Richards and Martin Clifford were one and the same person.

However I never thought they resorted to downright lying to keep up the pretence. I was horrified to read recently in the article 'Come into my Office, Boys and Girls' (Magnet No. 1544, 'The Greyfriars Crusoes', dated 18 September, 1937) the Editorial reply to a letter from a Stanley Bruce of Oxford:-

"No. Frank Richards and Martin Clifford are not one and the same man".

Surely they could have given good Master Bruce a prize for having spotted the 'Great Myth' and told him to keep it dark, or just suppressed his letter, but to resort to such a falsehood fair takes the breath away.

R. J. HODGE (Bristol): I have rarely paid much attention to the 'afters' in 'Gem' or 'Magnet', my interest being in the 'main course'.

However, idly skimming the pages containing a serial called "All On His Own" by one 'Duncan Storm', I was struck by the extraordinary language, both descriptive and dialogue, used to convey the goings-on at (I quote) - "The great School of St. Beowulfs", an establishment that seemed to me a unholy amalgam of bedlam, narkover and an ill-run reformatory, this together with racial attitudes which would bring our present Race Relations Board down like a ton of bricks not only on St. Beowulfs but also Fleetway House!'

The contrast between this epic and 'Martin Clifford's' superb style is such that they do not seem to belong between the same covers.

I know nothing of 'Duncan Storm' - so forward, the experts! Incidentally, the style of the illustrations to this serial bear a striking resemblance to those in the Nelson Lee 'Ezra Quirke' series of 1925.

* * * * *

"WANTED TO PURCHASE" - Boys' Friend 4d Library, Aldine Buffalo Bill 4d Novels, Scouts Annual 1930, Union Jack 2d, Nos. 1056, 1061, 1070, 1085, 1094, 1097, 1260, 1262, 1149, 1150, 1157, 1159, 1303, 1308, 1313, 1314.

Condition and prices to:

ROBERT STORY

34 ABERDEEN CRESCENT, BRAMALEA, ONTARIO, CANADA, L6T 2P9

SALE: Girls' Own Annuals, Vol. 28 (1906), 30, 32, 33, 36, £5 each. "Our Darlings Annual" (c. 1890), loose binding, £5. Every Boy's Hobby Annual, 1927, £2. Captain Vol. 25, £3. Conan Doyle's "Rodney Stone", £1.50. H. Baker reprints, Magnets, Vols. 1, 5, 8. Nelson Lee, Vol. 1, £3.75 each. Magnets, Gems, Bunters.
WANTED: Greyfriars Holiday Annuals, Monsters, Chums Annuals, Vols. 1 to 25. Captain Vols. 1913-1922. Scout Annuals, 1910-1930.

JAMES GALL

49 ANDERSON AVENUE, ABERDEEN, SCOTLAND

WANTED: "Cheer Boys Cheer", Nos. 1-6. "Nick Carter Weekly 1d", Nos. 2, 5, 6, 7. "Nugget Library", 268, "Whispering Mummy". "Firefly" (pre-comic 1914), Nos. 1-3. Your price or would pay well for loan. Quickly please! I'm 75!!

CHRIS WHITE, 7 ASH TERRACE, ASHMORE GREEN, NEWBURY.

WANTED: Copy of Frank Richards LP "Floreat Greyfriars", in good condition. State price required; would also consider exchange of "Populars", "Gems": state numbers required.

FLAT 1, 28 CROXTETH GROVE, LIVERPOOL, L8 ORX.

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

H. W. VERNON, 5 GILLMAN ST., CHELTENHAM, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA 3192

FOR SALE: About 150 copies of the monthly Collectors' Digest between 1952 and 1975. Mostly odd copies, but a few years are complete. £1 for 8 copies, plus postage on same. Also the Souvenir Issue of Magnet No. 1, published by Fleetway: 50p plus postage.

MRS. M. TROVELL, 16 BOURNE RD., COLCHESTER, ESSEX.

NEWS OF THE CLUBS

CAMBRIDGE

The Club wound up the season by a visit, at the kind invitation of Neville and Mrs. Wood, to their lovely home at "Wheelwrights", Sweffling. This was a particularly happy occasion of a reunion with Neville who had been precluded from attending recent Club meetings through being unwell; the occasion being marred only by the absence of Jack Overhill, who was unable to come owing to the serious illness of his daughter. The meeting sent a message of sympathy to Jack and his daughter, with best wishes for her speedy recovery.

Lunch and tea were provided by our generous hosts, and enjoyed in the garden in glorious sunshine. Members speedily made friends with the two lordly Siamese cats who exercise their sway over the Wood household.

The club listened to a recording of an interview with Frank Richards; to a tape sent by Mervyn Branks of New Zealand entitled "When tuppence bought a world", covering boys papers from the 1870's to 1919; and to a recording of the Sherlock Holmes play "The Speckled Band". Members browsed in Neville's fine library with its large collection of detective fiction ranging from the 1920's, his Sherlock Holmes items; and his almost complete set of bound volumes of the Strand Magazine, and among "Captains", "Chums", "B. O. P's", "Boys' Journals", "Union Jacks" and "Thrillers". Bill Lofts was specially interested in the Edgar Wallace tales and Bill Thurbon in seeing a large collection of the works of Talbot Munday. Others enjoyed playing selections from Neville's large collection of records; which specially interested Edward Witten, who enlivened the homeward journey of Vic Hearn's party recalling the melodies we had heard. This day was a feast of nostalgia.

The meeting closed with a hearty vote of thanks to Neville and Mrs. Wood and their daughter for their charming hospitality. Everyone agreeing that this had been a most enjoyable and fitting end to the 1975-6 season. There will be no meetings of the Club in July and August.

NORTHERN

Saturday, 12th June, 1976

In spite of a number of holiday absences we enjoyed a convivial and stimulating evening.

Jack Allison presented a talk and quiz on Dick Penfold - the Greyfriars Rhymester. The supporting articles in the Magnet, said Jack, were not written by Frank Richards, but were obviously the work of someone who knew Greyfriars.

Jack read to us from 'A Weekly Budget of Fact and Fun', purporting to be written by Dick Penfold. The section contained a poem, 'Potty Poetry', which was made up of odd pieces from classical and semi-classical poetry.

But where did all the pieces come from? That, of course, was the basis of the quiz! Geoffrey Wilde came first, Bill Williamson second, and tying in third place were Harold Truscott and Myra Allison.

After refreshments Geoffrey Wilde read to us from the Gem 'Old Bus' series, prefacing his readings with remarks on D'Arcy. Of the many characters that Frank Richards created, said Geoffrey, the ones that stand out most are Bunter and D'Arcy. Both are anti-heroes, though Gussy doesn't suffer from Bunter's obvious defects of character. But both have their own inimitable way of speech and both are at their funniest when they are on their dignity.

Geoffrey's readings began with Gussy's quoting poetry as the St. Jim's friends row up the river. The more his friends ridicule him the more Gussy asserts his noble dignity and the saga leads up to Gussy's head being held in chancery to his own personal chagrine and the amusement of the girls on the tow-path!

Eventually Gussy announces his retirement from the party - but the right sort of soft sawder induces him to change his mind! By the time they arrive at Letchley Gussy realises that his leg has been pulled - but by then the noble anger has abated and it is a reconciled - and merry - party which continues the river trip!

One wonders what Frank Richards would have said so long ago could he have known that his stories would continue to give so much joy

for so many years into the future!

Perhaps in the Elysian shades he gives a quiet smile!

* * *

LONDON

High summer at the Greyfriars, Wokingham, residence of Eric and Betty Lawrence, where a splendid tea was partaken in the spacious garden. Official business was transacted before the tea interval apart from a reading from a newsletter of June 1959 describing the Surbiton garden party gathering held there. Happy memories. Eric Fayne conducted his 'Down You Go' competition, seven rounds being played. Two more chapters of Leslie Rowley's Battle of the Beaks story were read out by Ray Hopkins leaving a cliff-hanger over until the next meeting.

Eric Lawrence then had the members busy again with his Grid Quiz. Twelve rounds were played and it was Josie Packman an easy winner, by providing five correct answers.

Two possible library exhibitions re the Frank Richards centennial will be at Ealing and Lewes. From the latter place it was pleasing to see Ron and Kit Beck, and with Madam helping to dispense cups of tea and the consuming of the various sandwiches that Auntie Renie helped to cut, it was certainly a very jolly meeting for a very fine attendance. Suitable thanks were accorded to Eric, Betty and Auntie Renie.

Next meeting at 71 Olive Road, Cricklewood, London, NW2, phone 452 8148. The hosts Bill and Marjorie Norris.

UNCLE BENJAMIN

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WANTED: Bullseye 41, 89; Surprise 3, Film Fun 571; Boys' Magazine 580; Magnet 1400, 1403. Buy/Exchanges.

SUTTON, 41 SWALECLIFFE AVE., MANCHESTER 23.

* * * * *

WANTED: One Red Magnet Cover - back and front, approx. 1912 or near. State price.

JOHN ROBYNS, TREWELLARD, 14 SPRINGFIELD CLOSE

PHILLACK HAYLE, CORNWALL, TR27 5AH.

CAPTAIN CHRISTMAS

by S. Gordon Swan

The many periodicals published in the early years of the twentieth century provided their readers with a number of characters who are well remembered today; some have even survived into this chaotic era. One about whom little has been written in recent years is Captain John Christmas, sometimes known as Captain X -- an appellation he detested.

He made his first appearance in PENNY PICTORIAL No. 574, dated 28th May, 1910, in a story entitled "The Salvage of the Pelts", under the main heading of "The Exploits of Captain X". In the previous issue the editor affords this information on the editorial page:

"Probably the breeziest character who has ever appeared in fiction is a brand-new little hero who will make his bow to the public in these pages next week. His name is Christmas -- Captain Christmas -- but in an evil moment some joker dubbed him 'Captain Xmas' for short; and in a still more evil moment this nickname was further shortened to 'Captain X'. I say, advisedly, that the moments were evil, because the man who first, in Captain Christmas's presence, ventured to make so free with his name found himself forthwith in such a whirlwind of fury that he never used the nickname again -- at least, not when the peppery little sea-captain was within earshot.

"The stories of the exploits of Captain X are by Mr. Stacey Blake -- already a favourite with readers of the PENNY PICTORIAL -- and I suppose I am giving away no secret when I tell you that Captain X is a character drawn from real life -- a man with whom Mr. Blake was fortunate enough to become very friendly during a voyage he made last year"

Aside from the editor's comments, one cannot help suspecting that the conception of Captain Christmas owed something to Captain Kettle, the creation of C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne. Indeed, there must have been communication between the two authors, as Stacey Blake would surely obtain permission to write "Captain Kettle, Junior", for the BIG BUDGET.

The stories in the main dealt with dubious commissions which Christmas undertook for the sake of providing support for his mother in

Grimsby, and how he generally succeeded in turning the tables on his shady owners; with gun-running expeditions to South American republics where revolutions were the order of the day. Captain Christmas's ventures were not always successful; he was usually the victor in a fight, but on one occasion he was defeated because a woman hit him on the head with a spanner.

The stories continued uninterruptedly until No. 593, but in No. 594 Stacey Blake commenced a new series about a girl called Susie Sunshine, and Captain Christmas's adventures were temporarily suspended. But he made his return in No. 629, of 17th June, 1911 -- a special Coronation Double No. -- and was heard of again at intervals throughout the following years. It is worthy of note that, during this period, the redoubtable Captain Kettle himself made an appearance in issue No. 696 of 28th September, 1912.

When the Great War broke out Captain Christmas received a new lease of life. He was in his element grappling with the enemy on the high seas and on land, ramming German destroyers and even kidnapping the Crown Prince who was visiting the United States incognito as a "peace" envoy. Incidentally, it may be mentioned here that the tough skipper's exploits were also recorded in the LONDON MAGAZINE.

In the nineteen-twenties he was revived again in the PENNY PICTORIAL and then, in 1927, seventeen years after he first made his bow, he appeared in the Union Jack in conjunction with Sexton Blake. This was in U. J. No. 1247, "The Case of the Oil Pirates". (When this yarn was reprinted in DETECTIVE WEEKLY No. 327, of 27th May, 1939, somebody who could not let well alone altered his name to Captain Flack.)

There were two more stories of Captain Christmas in the U. J., these being No. 1273, "Rogues Afloat", and No. 1274, "The Case of the Kaffir King". I have always thought the last of these tales was the swan-song of the famous skipper, but recently, having obtained a copy of THRILLER No. 10, dated 13th April, 1929, I find that Captain Christmas appeared in that story, so that there may have been yet other tales of him to follow.

It is doubtful if stories of this character would be acceptable in today's world. The captain's remarks about "dagoes" and "yellow half-

Africans" and his references to the half-caste populations of some South American republics as "inferior races" would immediately condemn him as a racist in this hypersensitive era. Nevertheless, his adventures made good reading in their time -- and still do, for that matter.

* * * * *

NELSON LEE WORKING MODELS

by R. J. Godsave

It is an unfortunate habit of mine to browse through a periodical backwards. That is to say I commence at the last page and progress towards the first. On this occasion it was a monthly periodical called the "Essex Countryside" a glossy paper type which I regard as a luxury to which I treat myself.

At the top of page 8 towards the end of my browsing were pictures of three working models of early Penny-in-the-Slot machines. The "Miser's Dream" and "A Seaside Flirtation" were stated to be two of the Nelson Lee working models taken from the Palace Pier, Brighton, and now housed in the Haybarn Museum of coin operated bygonas at Battlesbridge, Essex.

Having only in the past read of a living Nelson Lee who was the defendant in a Police Court case I immediately turned to page 7 to find out what it was all about. The following is an extract from the article -

"There are now some 50 items including the twelve famous Nelson Lee working models from Brighton's Palace Pier. These took Mr. Lee of Blackpool, 20 years to build, each being an individual hand-made masterpiece. Large clock-work motors allow 30 operations for each winding."

The rarity of the forename of Nelson combined with the surname of Lee makes one wonder if Mr. Lee's parents were influenced by Maxwell Scott's Nelson Lee which would be more in line from the date point of view than the publication of the Nelson Lee Library in 1915.

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COMING SOON; THE PEARL JUBILEE - the 30th
Birthday - of COLLECTORS' DIGEST