

STORY PAPER

COLLECTORS

DECEMBER
1977

DIGEST

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22p

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THOSE CHRISTMAS NUMBERS

Our Kilmarnock reader, Mr. J. Wark, who has had the misfortune to lose his sight and to whom I referred some time ago in my Chat, often sends me a tape and I greatly enjoy hearing from him. Mr. Wark is very appreciative of those readers who, as a result of my comments, have been sending him tapes concerning hobby interests.

In his latest tape which I received recently, Mr. Wark recalls the deep joy with which he acquired those Christmas Double Numbers of long ago. He has the happiest memories of all of a Magnet Christmas story "The House on the Heath", and considers this the best of all the Yuletide tales written by Charles Hamilton. Mr. Wark comments:

"I always felt that the artist who drew the cover to that Christmas Number was one different from Chapman, for it was an unfamiliar picture of Billy Bunter."

Mr. Wark is quite correct. Chapman drew the interior pictures of the 1916 Christmas Double Number, but the coloured cover was the work of Hayward, an artist who illustrated Rookwood between 1916 and 1918. Hayward was responsible for a few other Magnet covers, in that period.

One cannot help wondering why the regular Double Numbers ended with Christmas 1917. One understood it in 1918, when the paper shortage was acute, but, with the end of the war, the papers were soon increased in size, and there is no obvious reason why those popular Doubles disappeared for ever. Possibly it was thought that a boy would find his tuppence for the normal issues, but might shy at fourpence for a Christmas Double. Yet the 4d Sexton Blake Library sent out four issues (and, for a while, five) every month, and, of course, the S. O. L. and the B. F. L. each issued a number of different issues every month. The most likely reason, methings, was that the publishers did not wish Double Numbers of the weeklies to provide competition which might hit the monthlies.

My own favourite Christmas Numbers were "The Mystery of the Painted Room" and "Nobody's Study" (both Double Numbers, though only the Painted Room tale had a coloured cover) and, the Cavandale Abbey series in the Magnet, though by that time the Christmas Double was far back in the wake of Time.

One of my most precious possessions is a Christmas Double Number of the Favourite Comic, dated 1916. The weekly papers occasionally disappointed at Christmas time, but I fancy that the comics never did.

ANOTHER PEARL

Mr. John Geal has revived a memory for me. He writes: "Once again another year draws to a close, and its a bit of a shock to realise that I attended (I think the Third) meeting of the Old Boys' Book Club at your house in Surbiton Road, THIRTY YEARS AGO this coming February."

Yes, it was the club's Third meeting. But it was in May! I had long forgotten. It was at a Modern School Annexe in Surbiton Road, which is very near the River Thames in Kingston-on-Thames.

I forget who was there. We were all very young - well, we must have been, 30 years ago - and we were new to one another. I forget what we did, and what we talked about. I have an idea that those were pre-chairman days, and that the host used to arrange the programme, though I may be wrong. I forget what time we started, and whether we had tea, or really anything about it. I forget how many people were there. We had very large rooms in Surbiton Road, so I'm sure we were not cramped for space.

A large house with a very big garden. So far as I know, it is still standing. I wonder whether our club spirit occasionally finds expression among the people who live there today.

Were you one of the enthusiastic youngsters who met in Surbiton Road for the third meeting of the parent club? If so, please drop me a line and let me know, even if, like me, you can't remember anything that we did on that far-off occasion. I might be able to knock up your comments into a little feature for an early C.D.

The Digest, of course, was over a year old at that time. Without the Digest, it is almost certain that there would never have been any of our clubs, or, probably, many other things which are part of the hobby and taken for granted now.

Mr. Geal remarked: "So it must have been about this time of year in 1947 that the first meeting took place."

Actually the first club meeting was held at the home of Len and Josie Packman at East Dulwich on 29th February, 1948. So our club movement is approaching its Pearl Jubilee. Can I hear, somewhere, a brass band playing "Congratulations"?

OUR MONSTER SERIES

Last month we came to the end of Mr. Alf Hanson's delightful series in which, with a charming bit of genius, he imagined what the covers of the old Monster Library might have looked like had the publication continued for a year or more longer than it did. All our readers, and St. Frank's fans in particular, will have enjoyed Mr.

Hanson's outstanding art work and, especially, the bitter-sweet fascination in joining our brilliant artist in musing over what might have been. Our hearty thanks and congratulations to Mr. Hanson. A picture of St. Frank's, drawn by Mr. Hanson, forms the cover of the new St. Frank's Handbook, just published, and reviewed elsewhere in this issue.

A MERRY CHRISTMAS

I wish all my readers, the world over, a very, very joyful Christmas. My grateful thanks for the thousands of letters and encouraging messages I have received during the past twelve month. I am a bad correspondent - not from design of lack of feeling, but because, if I wrote to everybody who kindly writes to me, the Digest could never possibly fall regularly through your letterboxes. I send out a great many letters every month, but not nearly so many as I would like to.

All being well, Collectors' Digest Annual will be coming your way in plenty of time to be part of your Yuletide celebrations. As always, it is packed with good things from your favourite writers, and our charming cover is once again drawn by our fine artist Mr. Henry Webb. I hope you will be able to write and tell me that our 1977 Annual is one of the best ever.

And, as I wind up my editorials for the year, I must repeat the good old wish for you all - A Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year.

THE EDITOR

DANNY'S DIARY

DECEMBER 1927

A white Christmas! I think the only times I met snow at Christmas time was in the story papers and the comics, when there was always snow and ice everywhere. But not in real life - until this Christmas.

From the 18th till the 22nd December it was bitterly cold. Then,

on 23rd December, it turned just slightly warmer - and down came the snow. It snowed again on Christmas Eve, and in many parts the train services were affected. On Christy Day it snowed most of the day, and some of it was very heavy indeed. Talk about a White Christmas!

At St. Frank's they have had a Christmas Barring-Out. Handforth was falsely accused of setting a trap for Mr. Pyecraft. Handy started the barring-out with his two pals, and gradually lots of others joined in. Opening tale of the month was "The Remove Rebellion". Then came "Martial Law at St. Frank's" in which peppery old General Carfax takes over to quell the rebellion. Then "Sticking It Out" which continues the war between the boys and the General.

Next, the Christmas Number. The story "The Phantom of the Modern House" is really festive, with a phantom monk, some strange music, and the tolling of a death bell. Finally "The No-Surrender Schoolboys", in which the rebels find themselves without food, owing to their stocks having been tampered with. All packed with excitement. The series continues in the New Year.

Two lovely tales in the Schoolboys' Own Library this month. They are "The Schoolboy Millionaire" about Lord Mauleverer, and also a grand eerie St. Jim's tale entitled "The Eastwood House Mystery".

At the pictures this month we have seen Clara Bow in "It"; a long picture about sea battles in the war, called "The Battles of Coronel and the Falkland Islands"; Jack Holt in "Man of the Forest"; Reginald Denny in "That's My Daddy"; Glen Tryon in "Painting the Town"; and, the best one, Jackie Coogan in "Johnny, Get Your Hair Cut", in which Jackie Coogan gets rid of his long hair.

A lovely Christmassy month in the Magnet. The "Toad" series continued with "Sent to Coventry". Bright, competing with the Levison brothers in an effort to find the lost will of Mr. Thorpe, goes beyond the bounds with his villainy, and the whole form turns against him. Then came "Levison's Luck", in which Bright gets lost in the vaults under Greyfriars, Levison finds him, and they find the lost will of Mr. Thorpe. Maybe this series was a bit heavy on sentiment, but so am I, so I liked it a lot.

Next came a very jolly single story "The Prefect's Secret", in which P. C. Tozer gets "knocked out" while doing his "dooty" on a dark

night. And the knocker-out was Loder. But the Bounder takes a hand, the matter is hushed up, and Tozer doesn't know who sent him the £10 note in compensation.

Then came a couple of magnificent Christmas stories. "Billy Bunter's Christmas Present" was a shilling copy of Dickens's "Christmas Carol", and under the story's influence, Bunter reforms and becomes a philanthropist. But the old man he helps turns out to be an eccentric millionaire. In the sequel "Bunter the Benevolent", the Owl goes to spend Christmas with the millionaire, and lives in clover for a while until his good luck runs out. A novel bit of delight, this festive interlude.

In Fleet Street, the Daily Telegraph has been sold, and now appears under new ownership.

There was a tragic happening on Christmas Eve. Four firemen were killed in Glasgow when a floor collapsed in a big fire in that city.

After the heavy snows all over Christmas, there was serious flooding in Canterbury and Maidstone when a thaw set in. This was followed by a bitter frost, and everything froze up.

In the Gem, "Backing Up Wally" was a sequel to the previous week's tale about Wally in trouble over a hoax on Colonel Bland. Pongo rescues the Colonel's niece, Pamela, from the icy river, so Wally is pardoned for his misdeed.

Then the real Martin Clifford came back to bring Levison back to St. Jim's after his stay at Greyfriars. This story was "Levison's Return". It was slight but pleasant. And Mr. Clifford stayed on in the Gem to write "The White Cavalier" for the Christmas Number. There are mysterious and ghostly happenings at Eastwood House before Cardew lays Jimmy, the Rat by the heels. It was nice to have the real Martin back, even though this was perhaps not so good as some of his other Christmases I have read. Last tale of the month was "The Missing Fourth-Former" in which Digby was kidnapped. But Digby's father won't let the Head call in the police. This series continues - next year.

There is another Rookwood serial in the Gem. It is called "His Own Enemy".

Doug gave me the new Holiday Annual for Christmas. It cost

him six bob. Though I can't tell Doug so, this year's Holiday Annual is not all that hot. There have been much better ones. The best tale is "How Horace Coker Got His Remove" which is a very old Magnet tale. Also good is an old Rookwood tale "Tea with Mr. Manders". Two quite good tales are "Battling Bunter" and a St. Jim's tale "The Arm of the Law" about Gussy. But there is a lot of flimsy short stuff which does not make a really great Annual like some of the others have been.

Not much of a Christmas Number in the Popular. Only one Christmas tale - one about Texas Lick in a ghost business at Jimmy Silver's home.

Dad has booked to take Mum and me to a Christmas show in London on New Year's Day. They let me choose between "Queen of Hearts" at the Lyceum, and "Cinderella" at the Palladium. I chose the Palladium panto. Clarice Mayne is Prince Charming (she seems to be the Prince every year at the Palladium), and Nervo and Knox are the broker's men.

EDITORIAL COMMENT: S.O.L. No. 65, "The Schoolboy Millionaire" comprised a red Magnet of the same title from mid-1911 plus another from more than a year later. The first tells of the arrival of Mauleverer, and the second has him as a somnambulist. Both tales are pruned of a few chapters. S.O.L. No. 66, "The Eastwood House Mystery" is the famous Gem double number of 1913: "The Mystery of the Painted Room".

The Rookwood serial "His Own Enemy" was by the same writer as "The Rookwood Dictator".)

* * * * *

CHAPPIE

by Robert Whiter

I wonder how many collectors and readers of Hamiltonia realise that the Greyfriars Holiday Annual for 1926 contains a self portrait (even if it is only a line drawing) of Mr. C. H. Chapman, the late celebrated Magnet artist. As many devotees will probably remember I was instrumental in bringing this grand old artist back into the fold at a time when most people were under the impression that he had passed on. They were therefore prepared to put up with R. Macdonald illustrating the Bunter Books, which at the time were just getting into their stride. Let me hasten to add - before some irate "Mac" fan throws a cricket ball at me - Macdonald was fine for St. Jim's, and with the

possible exception of Warwick Reynolds there was none better! But when drawing Greystones he just wasn't right.

I remember glancing through my copy of the "Bicycle" magazine and suddenly realising that the style of the artist who had drawn the centre fold (old country yokels and innkeepers, etc., encountered whilst cycling) was familiar. In fact the drawings were by our old friend Charles Chapman.

Without delay I penned a letter to the editor asking him to forward my main epistle, to the artist. Back came a wonderful letter (the first of many) inviting me to his home. I still recall the excitement I felt that Saturday, so long ago now, as I caught the train to Caversham (thinking how it reminded me of the famous Xmas Cavendish Abbey series). He proved to be a wonderful host showing me all over his house - the walls hung in proud array with his pictures; he was very fond of Charles Dickens as several of the paintings proclaimed.

I particularly remember a fine portraiture of Sam Weller. We formed a friendship which lasted down the years - even when I crossed the Herring pond to Fishy's country we still kept in touch. He supplied me with the answers to some of the many questions that I had tried over the years to get answered. One comes to mind. Question:- "Why is it that some illustrations look like your work but on the other hand something about them also suggests Shields?"

Answer:- "Len Shields was a good friend of mine - we often worked together, he'd sometimes start a drawing and I would finish it."

I left him that Saturday armed with a nice selection of his original pictures from the covers and interiors of the Magnet. He even threw in a couple by Leonard Shields. The following month saw "Chappie" honouring the London OBBC meeting, a practice he followed down the years. I still have my copy of the 1929 Holiday Annual with the drawing he drew for me on the fly-leaf at the first book club meeting he attended. I understand he also graced some of the other branches of the OBBC (i.e. Northern and Midland clubs - even becoming president of one of them).

I used to meet him at the station on Sundays at lunch time and then take him to our residence in Wood Green, where he would often spend the night - returning to Caversham on the Monday - sometimes

interrupting his journey with a visit to Frank Richards. On one historical occasion he took several of the club members with him, where they were fortunate to meet the great author. The late Fred Rutherford was one of that happy band I seem to remember. Collectors who were used to seeing Mr. Chapman bald might be interested in hearing how he lost his hair. Apart from a good crop of cranium covering our old friend used to sport a moustache. One morning during the "blitz" after a particularly heavy night's bombing he ran his hand through his hair and tugged at his moustache when to his dismay both just fell out and he was never able to grow either again. It wasn't until he gave me a photograph of himself taken during the twenties that I realised how different he looked.

In your Greyfriars Holiday Annual for 1926 at page 358 you will find Mr. Chapman of that period looking round from the Black Board where he has just drawn a winking portrait of the fat owl of the Remove.

At one OBBC meeting at Wood Green, I had Mr. Chapman drawing various characters on a black board that I had borrowed from a local school, the club members calling out their favourites - I can still see and hear Len Packman (of happy memory) asking "Chappie" to draw him Billy Bunter!

Afterwards I realised I should have hung a large sheaf of papers over the board and given the artist a piece of dark crayon or charcoal. The drawings could then have been preserved - as it was, each drawing was erased from the board as soon as another character's name was called out.

Nelson Lee Column

THE FIRST CHRISTMAS NUMBER

by C. H. Churchill

The first Christmas number of the Nelson Lee Library, and a double one - 64 pages for 2d. old money, was No. 78 old series dated 2/12/16. The story - "A Christmas of Peril" - was written by E. S. Brooks and was pre St. Frank's of course. The cover picture was a

truly Christmas one, coloured red and blue, and showed a female figure left lying in the snow while two male figures (dirty dogs) were making off to a car in the background.

At this period in December 1916, the Green Triangle series had ended with Professor Zingrave presumably dead. The Jim the Penman series also that of Eileen Dare were about halfway through. Mr. Brooks decided that in this special first Christmas story he would include all these characters together for the first and only time. He also brought in Douglas Clifford (who had helped Nelson Lee to frustrate the Green Triangle) together with his wife, Vera, who was Zingrave's stepdaughter. Jim the Penman did appear with Zingrave some years after in the later Circle of Terror stories when St. Frank's was also involved. I do not, however, remember Eileen Dare ever appearing with either Sutcliffe or Zingrave again.

As regards this story in No. 78, it was a very good one, tense and gripping. The plot was too complicated for me to deal with here but I can say that figure on the front cover was Eileen Dare left to die in the snow. Naturally she was rescued just in time by Nelson Lee, Nipper and Clifford. In the excitement Jim and the Professor made their escape.

In the final Green Triangle story Zingrave was presumed to have died in Java. In this story it was explained how he managed to escape. This gave Mr. Brooks the opportunity to evolve the new "Circle of Terror" series which commenced in January 1917, in No. 75.

From 1916 to the end we rarely failed to get each year a Christmas number with a cover depicting all the traditional seasonal trimmings of snow, snow and yet more snow! When the snow was missing we got instead eerie manifestations of ghostly presences calculated to send us up the stairs to bed expecting fiendish monsters to spring out at us from any dark corner!

A LETTER FROM ST. FRANK'S

by Jim Cook

It is a great pity records dealing with the girls of the Moor View School have been so few, although this was not the fault of the chroniclers but rather the publicity shy young ladies of that establishment.

Sometimes, when recording the activities of the boys of St. Frank's,

some of the Moor View girls were involved, and it was only on these occasions they were mentioned.

Like most girls' schools, the Moor View had its share of good girls and not so good. One of the latter kind was Joan Tarrant. Pretty in a flashy sort of way, Joan spoke with rather an affected manner and was regarded by all the nice girls at the school as a "little cat".

I will describe one of Joan's little ways - her penchant for taking delight in ill-natured deception. And this was mostly directed to the boys of St. Frank's whenever the chance arose.

The opportunity presented itself when Enoch Snipe, of the Fourth, cycled down Bellton Lane on his way to the village. Joan, in cool white, rode past him, and a depression in the road surface jolted her bag off the handlebar.

Snipe, who was always jealous of other juniors who were friendly with some of the girls, seized his opportunity and retrieved the bag before the pretty owner could reach the spot.

Enoch Snipe belonged to the East House and was an unpopular junior. Small and thin, and so round-shouldered that he looked hunch-backed, he had sharply pointed features, and a foxy expression. His red-rimmed eyes were pale and watery. He was a cringing sort of fellow, and was renowned for his vindictive cunning. He would take a blow meekly - but would generally retaliate in some spiteful fashion behind his enemy's back.

Joan gave Snipe a dazzling smile and thanked him. And Snipe, completely at her mercy, accepted her invitation to walk down the lane together. His vanity was touched. He was so conceited that he was perfectly blind. It was Joan's pleasant intention to lead the unfortunate Snipe on, and then laugh him to scorn when she had grown tired of the comedy.

But Snipe's vanity notwithstanding, he wasn't the first to fall for a young lady's wiles, and most certainly not the last. Snipe was entirely unsuspecting. He hadn't the faintest idea Joan was deliberately fooling him.

Arrived at the village they entered the little confectioner's shop where, at Snipe's expense, Joan finished her third ice-cream.

Mean as Snipe was, he felt no pang being out of pocket. He

would have paid all his pocket money in order to boast of his friendship with one of the Moor View girls. It was something for which his shallow little spirit had never dared to hope.

Giving him another of her dazzling smiles she remarked how strange they had never spoken to one another before.

Enoch Snipe suggested they walk through the village. Joan nodded and thought it a wonderful idea to go out into the country lanes. It was so much quieter there.

Any other fellow but Snipe would have seen through this. Quite apart from the fact Joan Tarrant regarded all boys with supercilious scorn, Enoch Snipe was about the last fellow in the world she would have chosen for a friend.

After they had walked a short distance, Joan thought it better to leave it for another day. It was so much better strolling down the lanes in the evening. She suggested that night at ten o'clock. If she was game enough to break bounds wasn't he. So it was arranged to meet at the stile. And Snipe was filled with joy.

Inwardly, Joan shook with laughter. She wouldn't have dared to break bounds for a young prince, let alone this young whipper-snapper. But what a huge joke to tell the girls!

A St. Frank's fellow breaking bounds to meet her at the stile at ten o'clock. Her only regret was that she couldn't be there to witness his discomfiture.

She rode off, giving him a warm handshake and a flashing glance from her dark eyes.

Snipe was so bewildered thinking Joan had found him attractive he wasn't quite sure where he was going. He suddenly found himself looking in a jeweller's window. Perhaps a trinket or bangle that girls so dearly love might be bought cheaply.

He entered the shop and noticed a lady's watch - just the sort of thing that would look ripping on Joan's wrist. While the jeweller was absent at the back of the shop Snipe's thoughts were wild. He absently picked up the watch and slipped it into his pocket. The chaotic state of his mind suddenly cleared to make him realise he was a criminal. Just because girl had smiled at him he was ready to turn thief.

Snipe wasn't a thief, really - he hadn't the pluck to be one. The

Fourth-former, because the way nature had determined his prospects with his opposite sex, stood very little chance of enjoying the friendship of a Moor View girl. But Joan Tarrant had found it so easy to fool this junior who should have known better that she decided to teach him a lesson although it is doubtful if Snipe would benefit from it.

This Letter would have terminated had not the jeweller saw the gold watch gently disappear into Snipe's pocket. Threatening to call the police, the jeweller demanded Snipe to replace the watch. If ever Enoch Snipe was on the point of fainting it was at that moment.

The scene is not too difficult to imagine. A Public schoolboy - a scholar of St. Frank's! Accused of theft! And he never had any real intention of pocketing the watch. That was the cruel part of the affair. He seemed to be a thief, and yet he wasn't one.

Determined to teach the junior a lesson the jeweller gave Snipe the chance to buy the watch for five pounds by seven o'clock that day. Otherwise he would have Snipe arrested.

Even in that heady situation it must be confessed the Fourth-former still believed that Joan Tarrant would keep the appointment at the stile.

But his cup of bitterness was soon to be pressed down hard and running over. On his way back he passed Doris Berkeley and Mary Summers of the Moor View School. These girls were of a very different type to Joan Tarrant. Their prettiness was more wholesome, being natural - for Joan, in spite of her youth, was in the habit of resorting to artificial aids.

They told Snipe that Joan had been fooling him and had heard Joan laughing uproariously as she described meeting Snipe and arranging the ten o'clock tryst at the stile.

It struck Doris and Mary as being particularly mean of Joan to fool the unhappy Snipe.

How the East House junior obtained the five pounds to take to the jeweller that involved the threatened expulsion of Handforth major is another part of the story.

But the affair did expose a spark of decency in Enoch Snipe that surprised everybody. And strangely enough it had its origin in the mean trick Joan Tarrant had played on him. For had not the spiteful Joan

played on the vanity of Snipe we might never have known of his latent courage.

* * * * *

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

Once again we have arrived at the end of a year but not a sad end because we all hope to enjoy a Happy Christmas. The short article by myself called Christmas Joys was written by request, for our Church Magazine, but I thought other people might like to stroll down Memory Lane with me. May I say thank you, a special one, to all those Blake fans who have contributed articles and kept Blakiana going throughout this year and I look forward to the same help next year. A very Happy Christmas to you all and a more prosperous New Year.

THE U.'s LAST CHRISTMAS CROOK

Just as Dickensians turn, at this time of the year, to the story of Tiny Tim, Marley's Ghost and the redemption of old Ebenezer Scrooge, so Blakians tend to cast a nostalgic eye at the Yuletide tales of Gwyn Evans. For no one ever mixed a better cocktail of seasonable sentiment and thrills for lovers of detective fiction,

Strictly speaking, Evans wrote his last Christmas story of Sexton Blake in 1933 for the Detective Weekly No. 43 (The Christmas Circus Mystery) but his most famous and best remembered case from the season of goodwill was surely the Masked Carollers published the year before in Union Jack No. 1521. This was a special Christmas number in every sense for there were to be only ten more weeks of publication before the Union Jack's total demise. Gwyn Evans' story came as something of a parting gift, brightly packaged in one of Eric Parker's most evocative covers which caught both the spirit of the season and a sense of mystery. In any comparison the later DW tale would lose out on the absence of that coloured cover alone.

The Masked Carollers came near to the end of a 40-year case-book filled with the most daunting names from Plummer and Count Carlac

to Prince Wu Ling and Zenith the Albino. It is, therefore, surely worth asking who was the last crook in the U. J.'s annals to challenge the powers of Sexton Blake at Christmas? If his name does not readily spring to mind, the story in which he appears is not so easily forgotten. The actual narrative of *The Masked Carollers* contains all the old Evans magic in abundance: a group of engaging down-and-outs on the snow-covered Thames Embankment, a Christmas fairy godmother who arrives not by pumpkin but in a Rolls-Royce, a welcome appearance of that ebullient Fleet Street Scribe Splash Page and a fascinating display of Blake's deductive powers which would not have disgraced a Dupin or a Sherlock Holmes. For good measure there is also a dash of romance. Gwyn Evans was always skilful at jerking a tear or two and I have sometimes thought he could have made a fortune as a writer of heart-throb novels for the ladies.

But what of the villain who precipitates this colourful yarn? Well, there is no question about his extreme nastiness which shows up in the sharpist relief against the unbelievable virtue of almost everybody else in the story, (if we overlook a reformed burglar with a heart of gold and an unnamed Slate Club defaulter who gets a passing mention).

Nevertheless, villain number one remains a surprisingly shadowy figure. Parker's drawing of him reveals a bearded man with a small head and receding hairline, seedy looking rather than sinister, bad-tempered rather than evil, a harassed individual angry at being interrupted in the course of a long busy day rather than a super-crook caught red-handed. In the story itself he has been extraordinarily elusive, making an early brief appearance and emerging in his true identity only on the final page. No other criminal from the Baker Street Index ever kept such a low profile and it is only in the last few paragraphs that he even acquires a name! Yet his role in the *Masked Carollers* is vital and, in retrospect, we are made sharply aware of his earlier sinister presence. So, if he cannot be regarded as the most impressive of master criminals, Dr. Robille at least deserves to be remembered for providing one of Sexton Blake's most exciting and memorable Christmas adventures, and certainly he can claim the unique distinction of being the Union Jack's last Christmas Crook.

HYPNOTISM AND WEDDING BELLS

by William Lister

Hypnotism - its been around some time and sooner or later Sexton Blake was bound to come up with it, and before we go any further let us see what the dictionary has to say about the subject. "An artificial production of a state resembling deep sleep in which the subject acts only on external suggestion", so that's fair enough.

Now in this case the subject is a certain handsome young man by name of Frank Morton. Frank definitely did not believe in this hypnotic business, I mean, somebody casts a spell on you and makes you do what he wants - nonsense!

Quite a number of writers have used hypnotism as a plot for their stories, indeed, some Sexton Blake authors too. However, John Hunter, the author of our tale in S. B. L. 269, 3rd series, makes a good job of it. Now let me assemble the cast:-

Andrew Morton	Frank's Dad. A wealthy business man.
Frank Morton	Our handsome young hero.
Hilda Ranley	Frank's sweetheart.
Sexton Blake and Tinker.	

Paul Patro Hypnotist, healer by suggestion, tall with great dark eyes and a rich deep voice, a rather compelling fellow. Add to this a couple of real murderers and a small supporting cast and we are all set for a special John Hunter production.

Now round about this time there was one of those haunting tunes called "Star Dreams" and if you happened to get hypnotised and this tune is in the background, believe me you are in trouble. At least Frank Morton was. Well, to cut a long story short our crooked hypnotist does the dirty on our handsome hero. Paul Patro, with his dark eyes, rich voice and compelling way and with the aid of "Star Dreams" puts Frank under this thing that poor Frank did not believe in. Result! Andrew Morton, Frank's father, is found dead with a knife in his back and our hero is there but does not know why, and a similar thing happens later. Frank is in the soup, but cheers, our beautiful heroine, Hilda Ranley stands by him through thick and thin, if you know what I mean. (That is a horrid name for the author to give a sweet young lady. J. P.)

Enter Sexton Blake and Tinker to sort out the problem. Don't

be too hard on Paul Patro, there is a surprise ending. If you haven't a copy of this yarn the Josie Packman Library of Sexton Blake yarns has one on loan.

By the way our story fades out with Wedding Bells ringing out for Frank and Hilda, thanks to Sexton Blake and Tinker.

CHRISTMAS JOYS

M. J. Packman

No this is not the usual tale of Christmastide. It is a short trip down Memory Lane which may bring joyous memories of bygone Christmas's to the older members of our Church.

In those pre-war days of our far-off youth, when the bookstalls and newsagents abounded with piles of our favourite weekly papers, one of the joys we looked forward to were the Christmas Numbers. Sometimes these were Double Numbers costing 2d instead of the usual 1d, but all were eagerly awaited. Does anyone remember their first Christmas number of that beautiful comic The Rainbow? The front page was adorned with snow and holly, and the Bruin Boys were preparing for their Christmas Party. In the 1920's all these papers went up in price to 2d weekly and there were no more double numbers. From comics we moved on to the boys or girls' papers, the Magnet, Gem, Union Jack, Nelson Lee, The School Friend or the Schoolgirls' Own and many others.

The Christmas numbers always came out a few weeks beforehand, and if we who read the tales of Sexton Blake in the Union Jack and the monthly book The Sexton Blake Library, were extra lucky, we had two Christmas Tales.

However, the best of these Christmas Numbers appeared in earlier years when most of us were still too young to read. The only way to procure them was to frequent the second-hand bookstalls and hope they would eventually turn up. The best known stall in this area was the one situated at the Rye Lane end of Choumert Road, presided over by a very kind lady who had a wonderful memory for our wants. My late husband and myself were customers of that bookstall and many a paper we wanted was brought from "under the counter" when we turned up on Saturday afternoons. When we first met in 1928 we discovered we had both been buying these books from the same stall. So right from the start we had a mutual interest. We borrowed each others' collections

to read.

Apart from these weekly papers there were the Christmas Annuals. Practically every popular paper had its own Annual. These were published in the September of each year but we had to wait until Christmas Morning before finding the hoped for Annual amongst our Christmas presents. These Annuals were a joy to behold. Lovely coloured pictures on the covers and more inside. They usually contained about 400 pages and cost 6/- (30p in this horrid new money). My favourite was the Greyfriars Holiday Annual. I remember receiving a Puck Annual as a Sunday School prize about 1920. Happy days and joyous Christmas's. I have been tempted to say: another world, another time.

* * * * *

DO YOU REMEMBER?

by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 147 - Gem No. 37 (Old Series) - "Tom Merry's Christmas"

The first penny Gem was not, in fact, No. 1 of the new series in 1908 but No. 37 of the old series dated 23rd November, 1907. Christmas Double Numbers for years afterwards tended to be published in November, presumably because the young readers found their pocket money running out in December.

It was quite clear that Charles Hamilton was not at his best when faced with such a long story for the first time. Just over half the St. Jim's story was devoted to episodes at the school beforehand, with a number of seasonable snowball fights (from this time onwards there was always snow at Christmas!) and there was also a succession of telegrams sent to Miss Fawcett as more and more juniors were invited by Tom Merry to spend Christmas with him. There is a certain wry amusement in reading about telegrams at a halfpenny a word and replies coming back within an hour or so.

The holiday episodes concerned such things as skating, carol-singing, and dancing in the evening, and, although nearly all the events were quite inconsequential, they possessed a certain period charm peculiar to the early numbers. Two old friends, Digby and Marmaduke Smythe, joined the party, and they were both given a hearty welcome, but neither had any real part to play in the story. Eleven juniors plus

Cousin Ethel and a host of unnamed female relatives of the boys - to say nothing of Mr. Dodds, the curate - produced one of those enormous parties that ended up being lists of people most of the time.

I have written before about Miss Priscilla Fawcett who was presumably conceived as a joke for a single story but then, as Tom Merry became more famous, the author found himself saddled with an old sketch who had a morbid fixation about people's health. In one chapter she went round the juniors' rooms when they were in bed and dosed them with medicines and pills.

One has only to consider the cosy atmosphere of Wharton Lodge and the sane personalities of Colonel Wharton and his sister, and then compare all this with the zany atmosphere of Laurel Villa and its eccentric mistress to understand why Christmas with the Magnet is always superior to Christmas with the Gem, and why Tom Merry stories were always better if Miss Fawcett was not mentioned. But this is being wise after the event: seventy years ago the Gem readers must have been eminently satisfied with their Christmas offering.

* * * * *

HEROES, REBELS, COWARDS AND CADS

(or, Is Charles Hamilton Good for Us?)

by J. E. M.

As every enthusiast knows, we got more from Charles Hamilton than mere entertainment. With their celebration of virtues like loyalty, honesty and chivalry, his stories also provided us with a moral diet as well. This was, of course, part of Hamilton's intention, though, as he pointed out, the moral "pill" was always well coated with jam! Critics as well as admirers have always recognised this aspect of his work - if not necessarily with approval. In that famous (notorious?) essay on boys' weeklies, George Orwell suggested that the social values represented by the Greyfriars and St. Jim's sagas were out-dated, and he has not been alone in such a view.

What admirers and critics alike sometimes overlook, however, is that there is a very different side to Hamilton's writings and it is amazing that the critics, if not the admirers, have tended to miss it. This oversight is especially noteworthy in Orwell's case. In one of his other essays on popular culture, he argued that we all sometimes

have the urge to kick over the traces, cock a snook at authority and in general introduce a little selfish anarchy into life. How right he was and how remarkable he did not see that Hamilton catered brilliantly for just this corner of the human heart!

Orwell did concede that Hamilton gave us an enormous range of characters - not all of them saintly - with whom we could identify. He recognised that the Bounder, for example, was "a great favourite". He saw that "even the cads (Loder et al) probably have their following". How then could he conclude that Hamilton's stories were part of a conspiracy to brainwash young minds into becoming strait-laced fuddy-duddies and cap-touching yes-men? He might have noted that even archetypal heroes like Harry Wharton more than once showed a streak of self-willed outlawry, while Bunter, loved if not admired by readers, would surely subvert any orderly society with his greed, cowardice and untruthfulness! If the cads, the cowards and the rebels, as well as the flawed heroes, held the affection of so many, it is clear that Hamilton understood perfectly our desire for much more than displays of spotless virtue.

As we know, he sharply dismissed as rubbish the kind of socially and politically slanted stories Orwell wanted to inflict on the young. Yet his own work is hardly free from what might be called "anti-Establishment" themes. His tales often dealt not only with individual opposition to authority but even with mass insurrection against it (Rebels of the Remove, the Brander Rebellion series, etc.). It is true that rebellion at Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood never provoked the intervention of armed militia as once actually occurred at one of Britain's greatest public schools, but the various barring-out series were violent enough. More to the point, they were also firm favourites with readers and an old CD poll actually put them at the top of the list. Running close behind in the same poll was the Wharton the Rebel series, surely the classic saga of individual rebellion. It is also significant that Hamilton's rebels were rarely without a cause.

From all this some fascinating questions arise: Did Hamilton - contrary to Orwell's view - actually, if not intentionally, encourage us to question the authority we all live under in some form or other? Since the "cads" undoubtedly had a following, were their vices - "blagging",

defying school rules, etc., - made too attractive, in spite of all the author's admonitions? How many readers, in fact, identified with the "baddies" rather than the "goodies"? Were even the "goodies" more attractive to us when they fell from grace (e.g. Wharton)? Do many of us still recall the wayward Vernon-Smith, the caddish Loder or even the morally weak Hazeldene more vividly than cheery Bob Cherry? Did Hamilton in fact sweeten the moral pill so thickly that many of us licked off the exciting couverture and left the pill behind?

One thing is certain: the Hamilton tales are not just sermons for the innocent young. Nor are they, as Orwell and others have thought, simply propaganda in favour of old-fashioned virtues or the social status quo. Any art or literature which so memorably explores human nature and can even excite our sympathies for the weak, wicked or rebellious is far richer than that.

No doubt that is why the Hamilton sagas are read long after more "respectable" scribes and their work are forgotten. Like many great writers, Charles Hamilton may have defeated some of his own conscious intentions. He has certainly confused many of his critics. Even, perhaps, some of his admirers too . . .

* * * * *

LETTERS FROM GREYFRIARS ARCHIVES

by L. Rowley

From Inspector Grimes of the Kent Constabulary to Dr. Locke, The Headmaster.

Dear Doctor Locke,

You will have learned of the successful apprehension of the criminals known as 'Jimmy the Gun'; the 'Dodger'; 'Arnold the Otter' and 'Gelignite Charlie' and will share my satisfaction in knowing that these gentry will not be at large for many years to come.

Although the credit for the arrest of these criminals can rightly be laid at the door of the police forces under my direction, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the assistance rendered to the investigations by some boys of Greyfriars School. I shall be grateful if you would pass my personal thanks on to the boys Wharton, Nugent, Cherry, Bull and their Indian friend whose name I cannot recall. They are a credit to their School.

I am respectfully,

J. GRIMES (Inspector).

From 'Jimmy the Gun', HM Prison, Wormwood Scrubs, to Master Harry Wharton

Master Wharton,

Without interference from you and your friends that fool Grimey would never have put us away. But don't rest too easy in your beds! You'd better think again if you reckon me and

the rest are put away for years. We'll be seeing you all again soon and then you'd better watch out. Your own friends won't know you when we've done with you and perhaps next time you'll not poke your noses into other people's business.

See you soon,
JIMMY THE ONE.

* * * * *

OBVERSATIONS BY FRANK RICHARDS

by John Geal

One of the joys of reading the pre 1930 Magnets is to re-discover Frank Richards comments on, and gentle side swipes at, the society of the day.

I suppose that most of them went over our heads as youngsters, and towards the end of the Magnet when I was in my late teens and so more able to appreciate them, these comments became few and far between. However one can enjoy them now - take this dig at life, woven into the conversation in Magnet No. 882 in 1925. Still as pertinent today! Harry Wharton is bemoaning to Smithy how unjustly he has been treated. The Bounder replies -

"The jolly old universe is simply stacked with injustice", said the Bounder, in his cynical way. "We only see our own little twopenny injustices, and howl about them. I heard a Labour orator once talking about the injustice of askin' a man to work more than eight hours a day - right enough, too; I shouldn't like it myself. But I wondered whether that johnny's wife at home got through in eight hours. Nearer ten or twelve, I imagine - and it didn't worry that johnny at all. "Look at the giddy Irish patriots, howling about the injustice of their country being governed by us against its will - right as rain, I dare say. And now they're free they want to collar Ulster and govern it against its will! Old man, we're told in the good book to take the beam out of our own eye before we worry about the mote in the other fellow's. That's a tip."

Wharton did not answer.

* * * * *

O. A. P. disposing of Collection: Gems 594-596; 598-605: £10. Fair condition Greyfriars Annuals 1939, 1940, 1941, £1.50 each; Cassell's Bunter hardbacks 50p each; postage extra.

ENGLAND, BOUNDARY COTTAGE, PRESTEIGNE, POWYS.

SALE: Nelson Lee's old series (postage extra) Nos. 291 to 568: 60p each; Sexton Blake's 1st series, 43 copies, Nos. 68 to 349 - 75p each.

LITVAK, 58 STANWELL RD., ASHFORD, MIDDLESX. (Phone: Mx 53609)

ESPECIALLY WANTED: complete and in good condition: Union Jacks 493, 512, 529, 548, 555, 594, 599, 633; SBL's 1st & 2nd series; Magnets 707, 795, 999, 1111, 1112; Gems 604, 774, 792, 801, 954, 970, 990, 1206. Will pay over the odds for these; please state price.

NORMAN SHAW, 84 BELVEDERE RD., LONDON, SE19 2HZ.

(01-771-9857)

NOTE TO ALL: Latest date for receiving any "copy" for January issue will be 16th December.

REVIEWS

TIGER TIM'S OWN COMIC COLLECTION (Howard Baker: £8)

This volume is irresistible for anyone who remembers the heyday of the British comic paper - the real comic paper as opposed to what is classed as such today. It also provides ample proof that Britain's comics were far and away the finest in the world. They were unique.

Here we have a specimen of each of no less than 16 comics of the Thirties, covering a range from 1930 until nearly up till the outbreak of war in 1939. I don't recall ever buying comics in the Thirties, but I am struck by how little, if any, they had changed from those of the Twenties. In fact, there would not seem to have been a great deal of change over the whole first forty years of the century, and that must be evidence of how good they were to start with.

It is quite remarkable how loyal editors and readers were to old characters. Charlie Chaplin made "The Kid" in 1920, yet one finds Chaplin with the Kid in a Funny Wonder of 1930, when Jackie Coogan's career as a child star must have long ended. Even more strange, and heart-warming, is it to find Ford Sterling, complete with cop's uniform and the little pointed black beard, in the Kinema Comic of 1930, when we realise that Sterling left Keystone as far back as 1913, and it was his empty place which was filled by Chaplin, in the Mack Sennett studio.

The size of all the papers has been made uniform, which was necessary for a volume like this. The smaller papers, like Film Fun and Kinema Comic, are blown-up in size and look truly magnificent. On the production side, and indeed, in all branches, the volume is quite beyond criticism.

The papers in colour - Tiger Tim's Weekly, the Rainbow, Puck, and the Playbox are the star turns without any question - they are beautiful - but the others - Chips, Larks, Merry & Bright, the Jolly Comic, Comic Cuts, the Joker, Butterfly, the Jester, and others are first-class and a joy for the collector - or for his favourite nephew.

One surprise for me is to see that the non-coloured papers were only One Penny in the Thirties. Somewhere along the line they must have been reduced from three-halfpence, which seems a miracle in itself.

A perfect book for Christmas. An irresistible volume for the young in heart.

THE ST. FRANK'S JUBILEE COMPANION(Edited by Robert Blythe
Museum Press: £3)

This book is the product of real love - and it shows. A wonderful tribute to a writer who entranced generations of youngsters and one whose talents enabled him to write, later on, for the adult detective story market and win further kudos.

Quite outstanding in this new book is a splendid article by Lionel Searles Brooks, a Memoir of his Father. He was a small boy when his father came to the close of the section of his career devoted to writing school stories, and E. S. B's son tells how he grew up as the son of a famous author and how he gradually became acquainted with the stories which made his father world-famous. Always eloquent, deeply sincere, it is occasionally touching, and it will win all hearts.

Mary Cadogan writes in breezy style on Brooks's Girl Characters; a fine article by Geoffrey Wilde analyses the St. Frank's serials which were a feature in the Gem in the thirties; W. O. G. Lofts writes a "behind the scenes" account of Brooks's contacts with various editors; R. Hibbert is in humorous mood, and takes a delicious view of the lot of a Headmaster of St. Frank's - great fun, this.

It would be unthinkable for the enthusiastic Jim Cook to be missing from this giant ensemble, and he is in sparkling form. Mr. Cook kind of suggests that the role of Brooks was to satisfy without educating. I'm sure we all learned a lot from the St. Frank's stories, but no matter. It's a happy, readable article. William Lister, Norman Wright and Marjorie Norris contribute some excellent material. Bob Blythe winds up an all-star programme with a mighty fine piece in which he proves that E. S. Brooks was the Story Writer "Par Excellence".

Lavishly illustrated, with some rib-tickling extracts from "The St. Frank's Magazine", with a lovely complete Trackett Grim tale thrown in for good measure, this book will be a dream of delight and an everlasting pleasure for the St. Frank's fan. But beyond that, it is a superb book for everybody and anybody, and it will win innumerable new followers for the great E. S. B. A great job. Don't miss it.

A special note. This book CANNOT be ordered through the shops. It can be obtained direct from Mr. R. Blythe, 47 Evelyn Ave., Kingsbury, London N.W. 9 (or from the Collectors' Digest office), in return for a remittance for £3.30 which includes postage.

COCK OF THE WALK(Frank Richards:
Howard Baker £12)

This beautifully bound volume, with superlative contents, is one of the Howard Baker "specials". It contains 9 Red Magnets from the summer of 1911, and they are arguably the finest run of stories in the entire red cover period. There is a series of three concerning the adventures of Bulstrode, culminating in the death of Bulstrode's brother - a tragic episode which some have considered out of place in the Magnet. Here also is one of the most famous of red cover tales "Bob Cherry in Search of his Father", a potted travel tale which, many years on, would have been extended into a long series.

"A Schoolboy's Crossroads", a Mark Linley tale, tells of his strivings to win the Founder's Scholarship, a hard task in view of the enmity of the Bounder. "Saved from Disgrace" is a memorable tale with a famous cover, showing Bob Cherry on the signal-post, trying to stop an express train from running into Mr. Vernon-Smith's wrecked car. Mr. V-S had a hold over the Head, and, as a reward from the millionaire for saving him at the railway crossing, Bob

Cherry asks for the destruction of the Head's I. O. U. Glorious 1911 melodrama. "The Cock of the Walk", which gives a title to the volume, tells of the arrival of Bolsover, while "The Schoolboy Millionaire" (Danny tells this month how it was reprinted in the S. O. L. of exactly 50 years ago) relates the arrival of Lord Mauleverer, who was very different from the one with whom we were to be familiar later on.

A magnificent book, drenched with nostalgia.

EXPULSED FROM GREYFRIARS

(Frank Richards:
Howard Baker: £4.50)

Here we have the 5-story series of 1937 in which Wibley is expelled for making fun of M. Charpentier, and returns, in the guise of one, Archibald Popper, to try to win the French master's forgiveness. Full of laughs, and quite unbelievable throughout, it's all delicious comedy.

In the supporting programme there is "Bunter's Big Blunder" from early 1938, a rib-tickling romp in which Bunter gets the idea that Mr. Quelch has snowballed the Head. Finally, two linked tales from January 1939, in which a rascal named Squidge has a shady adventure with Angel of the Fourth, and finally gets Bunter into his clutches. Squidge, who is a blackmailer, finally gets what he deserves in a little couple of tales which happily blend excitement with plenty of fun.

Excellent volume to add to the collection.

THE ART OF DENIS McLOUGHLIN

Francis Hertzberg

Here we have a fascinating study and analysis of the life and career of a world-famous artist, Denis McLoughlin, who was born in Bolton, Lancashire, and who made United States history his own business and the subject of his commercial pen. His mighty action drawings were a feature of the Boardman Comics, from 1947 to 1951; he embellished "Tiger" and "Lion" with his artistry in 1967 up till 1971; and since 1974 has featured regularly in such Thomson papers as "Wizard".

Father Hertzberg writes with intelligence and affection on a subject to which he has devoted a great deal of time, and this little booklet is a "must" for all those who are interested in this branch of the hobby or who would like to learn more about it. The booklet is liberally illustrated from the work of McLoughlin. Obtainable only direct from Fr. Hertzberg, 48 Shalmarsh, Hr. Bebington, Wirral, Cheshire. Price 50p plus 15p postage.

WANTED: mint condition, Howard Baker Magnet No. 18. Also clean copies Magnets 397 and 770. Merry Xmas & Happy New Year to Stan Purslow and all friends.

R. G. ARNOLD, 83 CANTERBURY TOWER
ST. MARK'S ST., BIRMINGHAM 1,

SWIFT MORGAN, Roy Carson, Buffalo Bill: The Art of Denis McLoughlin - 40-page complete history, packed with illustrations. 50p + 15p post/packing, from

FATHER FRANCIS HERTZBERG, 48 SHALMARSH
HR, BEBINGTON, WIRRAL, L63 2JZ.

BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

No. 45. THE MALTESE FALCON and VIRGINIA CITY

Our opening film for the new term came from Warner's and was "A Modern Hero" starring Pat O'Brien and Ronald Reagan.

Next week came a British production, released by Warner's: Michael Redgrave in "Atlantic Ferry". In the supporting bill was a coloured cartoon "Icki and the Lion". This was followed by a double-feature programme, both from Warner Bros.: Miriam Hopkins in "Lady With Red Hair" plus Dennis Morgan in "Tear Gas Squad".

The following week brought, from Warner's, Edward G. Robinson in "Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet", an exceptionally good drama based on the true facts of a medical discovery, though at this late date I forget what the discovery of the Magic Bullet was. There was a coloured cartoon "Snow Time for Comedy" in this bill.

Next, another British production, famous in its day, released by Warner's: John Gielgud and Diana Wynyard in "The Prime Minister".

After that came Bette Davis, Paul Henreid, and Claud Rains in "Now Voyager". It was a popular Davis film, but I'm sure our girls loved it while our boys were not all that enthusiastic. There was a full supporting programme including a coloured cartoon: "John Smith & Pocohontas".

Next, Merle Oberon and George

Brent in "Till We Meet Again", which sounds romantic, and the full bill contained a coloured cartoon "Fagin's Freshmen".

This was followed by the second of Warner's really big Westerns starring Errol Flynn: "Virginia City", a great success in the small cinema. In the supporting bill was a coloured cartoon "Elmer's Pet Rabbit" and a coloured "Organlogue" entitled "Mr. & Mrs. Crawford at Home".

Next a double show: Fritz Kortner in "The Crouching Beast" from Allied Artists, plus Kermit Maynard in "The Wilderness Trail" from Butcher's.

After this, from Warner Bros., came the magnificent Paul Muni in "We Are Not Alone", with a coloured cartoon "Snowman's Land" in the same bill.

Then, from Warner's, a very famous thriller: Humphrey Bogart, Mary Astor, and Sidney Greenstreet in "The Maltese Falcon". The supporting programme included "Dog Gone Modern", a coloured cartoon.

To wind up the term came "Juke Girl" starring Ronald Reagan, from Warner Bros. Also in the show was a coloured cartoon "The Fighting 69th and a half".

* * * * *

SALE: 50 Old Series Lee's, 70 S.B.L.'s (1950's), Film books. S.A.E. lists. WANTED: 'Monster' 5, "Beam Ends" by Errol Flynn, "Thriller Comic Libraries".

NORMAN WRIGHT, 60 EASTBURY RD., WATFORD, HERTS.

 NEWS OF THE CLUBS

MIDLAND

Meeting held 25th October, 1977

After our summer recess it was very much a meeting of the old faithfuls, eight people attending.

It was a cheery party and the usual lively discussion ensued. All our members were in good form after a two months' break.

Two letters were received. One from Stan Knight contained reference to an article in "Punch" holding Greyfriars up to ridicule. Members all agreed that it was about time people stopped writing this sort of thing. Enthusiasts such as ourselves found it offensive and the writer should have confined his literary efforts, such as they were, to something he knew something about.

Joe Marston's letter contained a donation of £2, which was very gratifying.

The Anniversary number brought by Tom Porter was Popular No. 40 published on the 25th October, 1919, 58 years old to the day.

Geoff Lardner pointed out that Howard Baker's Holiday Annual just published contained a Popular story of Greyfriars, "Christmas at Bunter Court", which was in his opinion sub-written. We were inclined to agree with him. More may be heard of this as others are bound to notice it.

The meeting was informal, but two items were on the programme. The first was based on an article by your correspondent, "Snobbery in the Hamilton Schools", based largely on an S. O. L. story of Cecil Cuthbert Montmorency an ex-boot boy in a hotel, who came to Rookwood under false colours, pretending to be an aristocrat. No firm conclusion was reached on whether Charles Hamilton had something of the snob in him as the subject so often came up in his writing.

A reading by Ivan Webster from Magnet 1324 was very amusing.

A cheery party broke up at 9.30 and we meet again on 29th November.

JACK BELLFIELDER - Correspondent.

CAMBRIDGE

We met at 98 Campkin Road on 6 November. The Secretary reported that he had represented the Club at a meeting held by the Navy Admiralty Board on "the need for the Royal Navy today". Jack Overhill reported that he had given an unscripted talk to be taped by Mr. Ron Hall for blind people. The Secretary read an article from a recent issue of the "East Anglian Daily Times" paying tribute to Jack Overhill as a writer, written by Spike Mays.

The first item on the programme was a general Quiz arranged by Edward Witten. This resulted in a close finish; Vic Hearn and Bill Thurbon being joint winners closely followed by Mike Rouse.

Jack Overhill opened an intensely interesting discussion on the work rate of Charles Hamilton. He stressed that the last thing he wished to do was to belittle Hamilton, whose work he greatly admired, and to whom he owed his lifelong writing career. But he wondered at the claim in the Guinness Book of Records that Hamilton had written 72 million words. Considering how Hamilton's best stories were finely built, cleverly plotted, in many cases weaved, rather than written, with a master hand he felt the work load suggested by the figure of 72 million words must be wrong. Mike Rouse and Bill Thurbon as writers agreed with Jack's general conclusions. There was a general agreement that much more research was needed into the actual Hamilton output. Jack posed one final question: was it possible for a reader, without reference to actual information from publishers, etc., to tell a poor real Hamilton from the best of the substitutes?

A discussion followed on a recent review in "The Observer" in which the reviewer had referred to the Gem, Magnet, and other school story papers as "Comics". There was general disapproval of the media's use of the word "Comic" in such a context, and various suggestions were made for alternative descriptions. Cambridge leave this question open for other clubs to consider; Boys' magazines, Boys' Story Papers, etc., were among the suggestions considered. Members then enjoyed Edward's excellent tea, and discussed several general subjects, including children's books.

Bill Thurbon then produced a copy of a paper he had written for the Newsletter of the Henty Society on Henty's position in juvenile historical fiction, which Edward Witten read on his behalf. This was followed by a general discussion of both adult and children's historical fiction.

The hands of the clock inexorably called "time" and another enjoyable meeting ended with a hearty vote of thanks to Edward for his hospitality. Next meeting on 4 December, at 20 Wingate Way, when members are to give their favourite Christmas stories.

LONDON

A highly representative gathering of Leetes and Franciscans assembled at the Rembrandt Hotel to mark the Diamond Jubilee of the late Edwy Searles Brooks' fictitious college of St. Frank's, on Sunday, 13th November. Supporting the president of the club were Bob Blythe, chairman for 1977, Roger Jenkins, Josie Packman and Mary Cadogan. Representing the Cambridge Club was Bill Lofts, Tom Porter from the Midland Club and Alfred Hanson from the Northern Club. Other distinguished visitors were Dennis Gifford and Cyril Rowe, Eric Fayne and Madam.

After John Wernham had addressed the company, Bob Blythe rendered an excellent speech re the late Edwy Searles Brooks, the Nelson Lee Library and St. Frank's. He read out a letter from Lionel Searles Brooks explaining that, owing to indisposition, Mrs. Brooks and himself were unable to attend the luncheon. He sent his best wishes for a happy occasion. A cable was read out from Jim Cook of Auckland, New Zealand, wishing all an enjoyable time. Then Bob gave the toast of St. Frank's College.

Mary Cadogan proposed the toast to the visitors, and a short reply was given by Bill Lofts. Copies of both the St. Frank's Jubilee Companion, John Wernham's latest opus, the cover drawing being admirably drawn by Alf Hanson who also executed the drawing on the other item that was available for sale, the excellent plaque that Wilfred Tittensor had manufactured, a worthy companion to last year's Hamilton one. A very happy and jolly occasion that passed into memories all too quickly.

December meeting at the Baddiell residence, 43 Kendall Road, Gladstone Park, N.W. 10. Phone 452 7243. Sunday, 11th.

BENJAMIN WHITER

NORTHERN

Saturday, 12 November, 1977

A goodly group of us assembled on what must have been one of the wildest and wettest evenings on which a meeting has been held.

Being in good spirits (to comfort ourselves in the stormy night) our conversation (on Hobby matters, of course) almost precluded our arranged programme of events!

We did have time, however, for Jack Allison's clever and exciting team Crossword game. A team's wrong answer gave a clue to the other team and the team with the greater number of letters in the answers was the winner. The completed crossword gave a sentence

from a Magnet. What was required was the title of the Magnet and the character concerned.

Geoffrey Wilde correctly guessed the Magnet title - 'On The Track of the Trickster' and Geoffrey's team guessed the character - Vernon-Smith. They were also winners - by just one letter.

The prizes were edible, and proved a welcome adjunct to our refreshments!

We meet in December for our Christmas Party - on the second Saturday at 4.30 p. m. All are welcome, but please let Mollie Allison know in good time.

REVIEW

BUNTER'S CHRISTMAS CAROL

(Frank Richards:
Howard Baker £4.50)

This is one of the most delightful of all the Howard Baker volumes, and it would form an especially apt Christmas present.

The "Christmas Carol" pair, from Christmas 1927, is one of the most charming Yuletide yarns which the author ever wrote. Bunter, under the influence of Dickens, becomes benevolent, and though the improvement only last over two issues, it is a festive treat while it is "on". Shields, the artist, is at his best, and heart-warming is the picture with the postman in a coal-scuttle hat.

Then the book changes seasons, and we find ourselves nearly five years later in the middle of a glorious summer, with five stories from the longish period when the Bounder is captain of the Remove. They are examples of school story-writing at its very best, for the plots vary and nothing lasts too long. There is no question of anything overstaying its welcome, as the very long series tended to do now and then. The Bounder and Harry Wharton are at daggers drawn for a time; Bunter is at his most amusing as a ventriloquist; Coker is in top form in a cricket story; and an early character, Paul Tyrrell, Bob Cherry's cousin, makes a welcome reappearance. Great stuff, at a period when one series dovetailed so satisfactorily with another.

The final story of the Bounder-Captain series is not included. Presumably it may have appeared in some other volume.

Instead, the lovely book winds up with a tasty morsel from a few weeks later, "Who Walloped Wiggins?" in which Mr. Wiggins is unaccountably punched on the nose by some person unknown.

Those interested, and who have back numbers of C. D. may be interested to turn to a couple of Let's Be Controversial essays, one entitled "Dovetailing", I seem to recall, in which the Bounder-Captain series is analysed, and a later one which dealt with the Christmas Carol couple.

The theme of the black sheep becoming junior captain was used at Rookwood, with Mornington taking over, and at St. Jim's, with Cardew in the hot seat. But the Greyfriars one, the latest, was, without much question, the finest of all.

WANTED: Young Folks Tales, (Betty Series), your price or exchanges in S. O. L's, Magnets, Gems, U. J's, Comic Papers, 1900 to 1940.

WILLIAM HALL, 86 WALDER ROAD

HAMMONDVILLE, 2170, N. S. W. AUSTRALIA.



Mr. John Beck found these Christmas Cards, in full colour, in an antique shop a few months ago. He wondered whether they were just "Free Gifts" or if readers were invited to purchase them. The cards had greetings and spaces for the sender's name on the back.

We thank Mr. Beck for giving another little festive touch to the C.D. Christmas Number. Can any reader shed light on their origin?