

STORY PAPER
COLLECTORS DIGEST
THE NELSON LEE
LIBRARY of SCHOOL STORIES

VOLUME 33

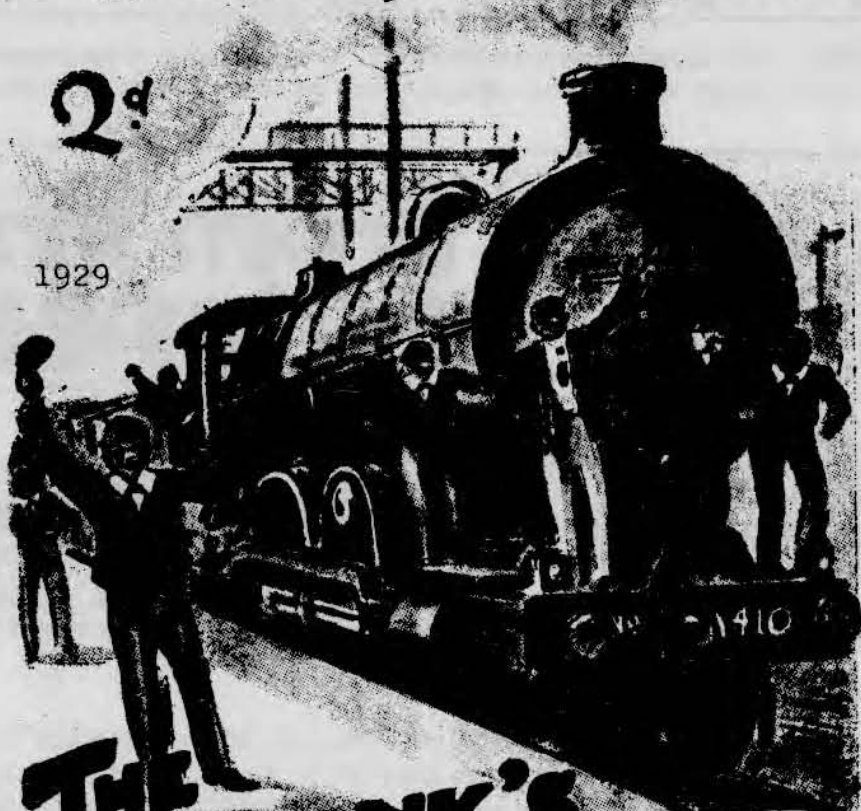
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THE ST. FRANK'S SCHOOL TRAIN! 26p

COLLECTORS DIGEST

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**TIME CHANGES EVERYTHING**

As we have commented before, nostalgia has become big business in recent years, and nowhere more than in the kingdom of old boys' books. Idly, one wonders why our own hobby, which started so modestly and went on that modest way for very many years with a nucleus of enthusiasts, has become top of the pops in the nostalgia field.

I was reading only today of a very elderly man, just on a hundred years old, who says that he lives only for tomorrow. Yet the vast majority of people, including plenty young ones, seem to live only for yesterday. It doesn't say much for today. It isn't all that good to live

in the past too much. To do so undermines the present. What on earth has become of Utopia?

When I was young, people did not live in the past. They used to tell me how lucky I was to be living in what was the present then. The best is still to come, they used to say, and you will reap the benefit of it. We hadn't the money then; we hadn't a car in a garage; Dad didn't give us a "music centre" then to compensate for Mum being out all day; we didn't have meals laid on at school or buses, free, to take us to our seats of learning; we didn't have television in the lounge or a refrigerator in the larder or a latchkey in our pocket. Yet "You don't know how lucky you are!" the adults would say to us.

And I'm sure we were. Most of us, perhaps, would not change our own childhoods for those of the modern youngster. I know I wouldn't. In a store in the town near my home I saw this morning T-shirts being sold, in a boyswear department. Printed across the front of the shirts were the words "I Hate School". It struck a chill at my heart. What kind of a land are we making for the next generation? No wonder nostalgia is big business.

A close hobby friend of mine was telling me yesterday that at one time he used to keep a scrapbook in which he enthusiastically stuck anything appertaining to the hobby acquired from newspapers and magazines. He doesn't do it any more. So thick and fast do articles and tit-bits about the old papers appear that one would fill any scrapbook nowadays in next to no time.

Even special publications on the old papers come along so frequently that they cannot have the effect that Turner had years ago with his "Boys Will Be Boys" or Fleetway with their facsimile of Magnet No. 1, not to mention "The Best of Magnet & Gem".

The latest of this type of thing (at the moment of writing) is a large-sheeted 20-page publication entitled "Those Good Old Comic Days". There are plenty of real comics on show and one is rather sad to see a Gem peeping out on the front cover and a Magnet trying to hide itself on the back page. The editor undermines criticism by saying that it seemed a good title, but he is well aware that the story-papers were not comics.

The publication comes from a Midlands newspaper "Sunday Mercury" and at 20p it is exceptionally good value for money these days.

It is quite the best of its type ever and well worth buying if you can get hold of a copy. The large picture reproductions, mainly of real comics, are excellent and the colours are true.

"Yaroo!" is present, naturally - when could they ever write of the Magnet and leave it out? Several articles are interesting, and include one of Cliff House by Mary Cadogan. Readers' letters show avid enthusiasm, even though some old memories play their owners tricks.

It's all a very pleasant wallow in nostalgia, and it is well worth while. But, like all of this sort of thing, it is aimed at adults - and mainly at older adults. One is rather saddened that something is never produced just as it was, especially for the age group for which it originally was produced. For instance, a facsimile run of the Jester or of the Butterfly, available in the shops week by week, would surely appeal to today's young idea. The Howard Baker books could hardly be bettered, but their splendid bindings and the volume form put their price far beyond the pocket-money of any child, even in these unprecedented times. The Baker books are for the connoisseur, not for the average child.

In any case, the average child might not care for the Magnet. But surely he could not help being caught by a weekly Film Fun or Jester facsimile, which, one would think, could be priced on the same level as the masses of comic stuff on the bookstalls. But nobody ever even tries.

THE CANTERBURY

My recent mention of the Canterbury Music Hall in the Westminster Bridge Road of London has brought me plenty of letters from people who used to visit it. When I went there a few times, its music hall days were over, though the old name was retained. It was a cinema which specialised in what was known as "cine-variety", with two big films, a number of variety acts on stage and a full orchestra. A very large house, but one had to be there early to make sure of a seat. Whenever I went there, the theatre was always packed to capacity for each performance. But I must have deserted it, long before the end.

One reader mentioned that the noise of the trains could be heard in the auditorium. I cannot remember that at all. One walked down a very long foyer - it must have been the longest in the country - with walls

bedecked with photographs of film stars, and one could hear the trains overhead somewhere. But I do not recall that noise ever percolating into the theatre itself.

A pungent memory, however, is the smell of a nearby soap works. One noticed that very strongly in the foyer, and the not very pleasant odour certainly penetrated into the auditorium. I wonder whether that soap works was there in very early days.

Not far down the road from the Canterbury, on the opposite side, was Gatti's Cinema. I wonder who Gatti was. Somewhere else, I'm sure, I have come on another Gatti's.

Like the Sebright at Hackney, which I mentioned once, Gatti's was very cheap. 4d. up and 3d. down, perhaps - like the Sebright.

Many a time I stood outside Gatti's and felt the urge to go in, but I had the same feeling that I might have experienced outside a Limehouse opium den. If you go in there, young feller, you'll never come out. So I never went in. I wonder what it was like. I had, of course, been reading too many Sexton Blake stories about Leon Kestrel, the Master Mummer, and all his villainy.

BILLY & BESSIE

It is probably a coincidence that several readers who have written to me recently have observed that both Billy and Bessie Bunter were spoiled for them by the fact that they had first met the stout pair in strip form in comic papers. Charles Hamilton once chuckled ruefully when he told me that he was paid two guineas a week to allow Billy Bunter to appear in this form in the Knockout.

Just why any editor wanted Bunter in comic strip form is a question I can't answer. Those who knew the real Bunter would probably be more irritated than delighted by Bunter as a comic paper character, and, for the very young, it would be merely a name for a fat boy. Apart from the name there was no real link with the great days of the Magnet.

It was a form of prostitution which, perhaps, has coloured the work of some of the younger writers - and producers - who turn their attention to the world-famous Bunter family nowadays. I find myself a bit depressed by it.

THE EDITOR

Danny's Diary

JUNE 1929

The South African cricket team is in England ready for the 1929 Test Matches. It is the youngest team ever to play for any country in cricket tests. It is going to be an exciting series, but Chapman, Hammond and the rest are ready to give them socks.

"Trigo" won the Derby this year. I wish I had had a tanner on it, but Mum says it is wrong to bet. Besides, I hadn't a tanner.

Ken King is still going strong in the Modern Boy. In the first story of the month, "The Way of the Whaler", Captain Skeet, the skipper of an American whaling ship, tries to shanghai Ken King and his crew.

In the next tale, "The White Man of Aao", Ken visits a small coral island, and finds a rather sinister young man living on it. His name is Poynings. Next week came "The Mystery of the Pearl Island". Ken begins to be very suspicious of Poynings, and finds himself in real danger. Ken is kidnapped, and in the following week's tale, "The Prisoners of the Coral Cave", he finds himself in a cave with a number of other kidnapped men, and one of these is the real Poynings.

Final of the month is "Guardians of the Cave", in which Ken manages to turn the tables, and the kidnapper gets his just deserts.

Air Mail post, started so successfully to Europe, is now extended to India. The British are the pioneers in this form of postage. The planes go non-stop to India, and a letter posted by air mail in London is delivered in Bombay two days later.

The School Train series continues in the Nelson Lee. First of the month is "St. Frank's in the Midlands", in Sheffield and Norwich to be precise. It's all very novel.

In "The St. Frank's Touring School", Nipper & Co. are in Leeds and Newcastle. At the latter place, Irene Manners and some of the Moor View girls turn up to visit them. The next tale is "The School Train in Scotland". Handforth is disappointed not to find everybody wearing kilts and playing bagpipes. However, he gets himself up as a full-blown Scot.

Next in the series is "Archie's Lancashire Lass". At Blackpool Archie Glenthorne falls in love with Peggy Ann. Final of the month is "The Kidnapped Schoolboys", Handforth and Co. go down to the docks at Liverpool and nose round a tramp steamer. And that's the start of some more exciting adventure.

It is exactly one hundred years since Sir Humphrey Davey was born in Penzance. He invented the miners' safety lamp, and down in Cornwall they have been having high jinks to celebrate the centenary.

At the pictures we have seen Rin Tin Tin in "Rinty of the Desert". Rin Tin Tin is beginning to become an elderly dog now, and other dogs like him are said to do the more active part of his pictures. It is said that Rinty saved the film firm from financial disaster at one time, and he is treated like a temperamental film star. We have also seen Lon Chaney in "Mr. Wu"; Douglas Fairbanks in "The Gaucho"; "Bringing Up Father", which featured the characters in a daily set of cartoon pictures which appear in the "Daily Sketch"; Bebe Daniels in "Hot News"; Marion Davies and Marie Dressler in "The Politic Flapper"; Karl Dane and G. K. Arthir in "Circus Rookies"; Ramon Novarro, Joan Crawford and Anna May Wong in "Across to Singapore"; and my second talkie "The Doctor's Secret" starring Ruth Chatterton, H. B. Warner and John Loder. This last named is directed by Cecil B. de Mille, and it is his and Paramount's first talkie. I loved it, and it has converted me to sound films.

In the Gem, two stories about three unusual new boys, named Wallace, Willis and Woolley, and introducing Spalding Hall and the bevy of girls. The titles "The Inseparable Three" and "The Trouncers' Triumph". At the finish they go back to their former school.

Next, two tales about Talbot and his past which turns up again in the form of an old friend of his bad days, Jim Crow. The tales "The Downfall of the Toff" and "Talbot's Enemy".

Last of the month is "Tom Mix Junior" which brings in a circus, a rider named Tommy Mix and the Spalding girls. A bit of an effort. An air liner "City of Ottawa", flying from Croydon airport to Paris, came down in the sea near Dungeness, and seven people have been drowned.

Two good stories in the Schoolboys' Own Library this month.

"Not Wanted at Greyfriars" is about a new boy named Sir Harry Beauclerc. In the first half he is really a boy from a farm who has been persuaded to take the real Sir Harry's place. In the second half, the real Sir Harry turns out to be a scoundrel.

The other SBL is "The Schemer of St. Jim's" in which Levison is taken away from St. Jim's and comes back in the guise of a bootboy named Higgins. He causes great trouble. The second half of the tale is about Tom Merry's Weekly, and how Levison inserts an insult to the Head. Lovely tale.

Tip-top month in the Magnet. First tale is "The Prefect's Plot" which has Wingate and Loder at war, with a cricket background. Bunter overhears a plot to send a telegram to Wingate to cause him to miss a match. The sequel comes the next week in "Prefects at War". Hurree Singh has written details of the plot in a letter which Wingate had been minding for days. When the fake telegram arrives, they ask him to read the letter.

Next week "Out of Bounds", a great tale about Loder at war with the Remove this time. Then a sequel, "The Black Sheep of the Sixth". A lovely tale for the longest day of the year.

Final of the month, "A Lesson for Loder" which brings a rare series, mainly about the seniors, to a close.

First Rio Kid tale in the Popular this month is "The Grafter". John B. Irons, the financier, is after the mine of young Charley Calhoun, and he means to get it. But the Kid takes a hand. Next week, in "Hunted on the Plains", the Kid promises to guide a young Mexican girl, Estrella, and her father, across the plains, but he little knew what he was letting himself in for.

"The Trail of the Traitor" and "Facing Fearful Odds" continue the series about the Mexican Senorita and her worthless old father. Last of the month is "The Trail of Vengeance" with the Kid's proteges being trailed by Don Guzman and his men who intend to kill the old man. Great Mexican series which carries on next month.

The early St. Frank's stories have now ended in the Popular and have been replaced by adventure tales of the Pacific.

Early on Saturday evening, on 22nd June, a tobacconist named Oliver was battered in his shop and his till was rifled. He died a few

hours later. The shop is in Cross Street, Reading, and the police are seeking a drunken man who was seen nearby and who may be able to help them with their enquiries. They think it may have been racing men from the Ascot meetings. It's a sad tale, for Mr. Oliver was just planning his first holiday for years for his wife and himself.

(EDITORIAL COMMENT: S.O.L. No. 101, "Not Wanted at Greyfriars" comprised two consecutive red Magnet stories from the early summer of 1914, entitled respectively "The Boy from the Farm" and "The Wrong Sort". May have been popular in its day, though the theme became a little hackneyed later.

S.O.L. No. 102, "The Schemer of St. Jim's" comprised two consecutive stories of the blue Gem of early summer 1913, entitled respectively "The Schemer" and "Tom Merry's Special Number". Though each tale was excellent, they did not weld too well into one long story, though I daresay that readers in 1929 loved the S.O.L. The theme of a boy returning to his school as a bootboy was something of a favourite of Hamilton's. Lowther did it in disguise in early days; Levison did it in disguise in this one of 1913; and Momington did it in disguise at Rookwood, when he called himself Sandy Smacke in a fine series; and Talbot, in a rather unlikely move, went to the New House as a bootboy in his own name, not so long after the Levison story. The second part of the 1929 S.O.L. "Tom Merry's Special Number" was probably Hamilton's best tale of all his stories concerning the junior school magazine. It was great fun, with some amusing verses. "The Schemer" was reprinted in the thirties in Gem No. 1465, but I think the Tom Merry's Weekly tale was not reprinted. It was, however, excellent of its type.

It is interesting to see a Poynings turning up in the Ken King stories. Goodness knows how many times Hamilton introduced a Poynings, down the years, and always for a scoundrel, I fancy.)

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WANTED: Bullseye (A. Press); Boys' Magazine (Allied Newspapers); Scoops; and all other comics/papers with Science-Fiction stories.

RON HOLLAND, P.O. BOX 43, PORTSMOUTH, HANTS.

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SHERLOCK HOLMES - anything always wanted (including Herlock Sholmes in Greyfriars Heralds).

48 SHALMARSH, BEBINGTON, WIRRAL, L63 2JZ.

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WANTED: two or three "Adventure", 1932/4; Bullseye 41, 89; Surprise 3; Film Fun 571; Boys' Mag. 602. Buy/state exchange, wants.

SUTTON, 41 SWALECLIFF AVE., MANCHESTER 23.

Nelson Lee Column

A LETTER FROM ST. FRANK'S

by Jim Cook

A period of St. Frank's history that has been chronicled as "The School With a Bad Name" is famous for three reasons. It was Reggie Pitt's first term as captain of the Fourth, which came about from Nipper's absence from the school. Nelson Lee and Nipper were away fighting the Green Triangle.

It was an acid test for Pitt at a time when boys were being removed from St. Frank's in large numbers by their parents. St. Frank's had been disgraced by a most unfortunate incident, and this being made public resulted in many indignant parents taking their sons away from the school.

It was due to the fine leadership and courage of Pitt that the school was cleared of the stigma the press had stained it.

But before that St. Frank's went through a terrible time. It all began when a few seniors who should have known better fixed up a celebration party to wind up the holidays and after lights-out three juniors from the Lower School left their beds and crossed past the Fifth Form dormitory and entered a room where sounds of subdued voices, chink of glasses and the rattle of money were audible from the passage.

During the course of this party a senior had died from over indulgence and the press had got hold of the story and enlarged upon the facts.

So there were the events of the death of a senior and a trial for Reggie Pitt at a time when a strong leader was needed and Nipper was away. Two great reasons that has gone down in the history of St. Frank's to make it famous for perpetuity.

The third reason concerns a junior who arrived at the school at this time called Claude Carter. He came unheralded and unsung. St. Frank's has its share of cads and rotters, but this new junior, this unspeakable and contemptible boy, made it his business to prolong the agony the old school was suffering by arranging with a dud reporter on

the Bannington Gazette, the local rag, to stage a fake party. He filled a study table with champagne and alcoholic drinks plus all the ingredients to suggest an orgy was about to take place. The scene was set for the reporter to write up the scene. Carter had arranged with the reporter to get copy for his paper with a promise of thirty shillings for the set-up.

But luckily the plot was overheard and the reporter was sacked by his editor when the facts came out.

I think Carter's sojourn at St. Frank's was the shortest in the annals of the College. That he was the most despicable, the most hated of all schoolboys that ever studied at St. Frank's was confirmed at his expulsion.

There have been some bad masters and evil minded characters during the history of St. Frank's, but there never can be a worse rotter than Claude Carter, late of the Fourth Form.

Wellbourne & Co. of the River House near St. Frank's have at times acted as ruffians and blackguards towards the boys at St. Frank's, but Claude Carter could have showed them a thing or two in that line.

Whenever I see this junior's name when browsing through the records of St. Frank's College, I wince at the name as it reminds me of a thorough young villain whose stay at the school was both temporary and sour.

Like a bird of passage, Carter came and went. One must wonder why he ever arrived at all since his main purpose was to bring St. Frank's down in the mire. Fortunately he failed. But it was touch and go. And with the stigma of shame that held the school at such a time, and Nipper's absence, it was a very trying time for Reggie Pitt. On such occasions when the school looked for a leader it was always accepted that Nipper would see them through. And it proved Pitt was just as able as Nipper on this occasion. Perhaps some of Nipper's fine leadership had rubbed off to Reggie, and Pitt and the school had benefited thereby.

Luckily there were never another Claude Carter at St. Frank's. I don't think there could be another as bad as this boy. He was really the ultimate in vicious, vindictive reaction.

ATTRACTIVE EXTRAS

by R. J. Godsave

It could never be said that the Nelson Lee Library was a dull paper. Variety in the form of additional items were occasionally included in the Lee. The best of these was undoubtedly 'Nipper's Magazine' which was introduced as a supplement when the Lee was increased to 2d. in 1922. Another one was the wonderful drawings of St. Frank's and famous public schools by E. E. Briscoe.

Not so famous, although equal in quality, were the five Studio Portrait Studies which were included in the 'Happy Caravanners' series o.s. 415/422. These fine portraits were full page size, the subjects being Nipper, Handforth, Clarence Fellowes, Archie Glenthorne and Nelson Lee. The inclusion of Clarence Fellowes was solely owing to his introduction as a future St. Frank's scholar who fell in with the caravanners during their stay at Brightside-on-Sea.

Incidentally, o.s. 416, 'The Schoolboy Minstrels' was one of the funniest Lees ever to come from the pen of E. S. Brooks. As usual Handforth took his part in the Minstrel Show given by the St. Frank's juniors very seriously. Apart from forgetting his lines, he was deliberately distracted by Reggie Pitt, who as 'Brudder Pete' interrupted the poem 'The Village Blacksmith' being delivered by Handforth by indulging in cross talk with 'Brudder Sambo', in other words Nipper. Naturally, this cross talk confused Handforth who found himself inserting words in the poem never thought of by Longfellow.

There is no doubt that E. S. Brooks was equally at his best in the quieter domestic scenes as he was in his more exciting ones.

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SALE: (postage extra): Howard Baker Gem Vol. No. 1: £3. C.D. Annuals 1977 and 1978, £2 each; Billy Bunter's Own 1953 (no dust cover), £1; 14 S.O.L.'s (£1 each), 1 Rookwood; 12 At. Frank's; 1 Cedar Creek. 42 Collectors' Digests 1973 - 78, 10p each.

P. HANGER, 10 PARK SQUARE, KING'S HEATH, NORTHAMPTON.

* * * * *
WANTED: S.O.L. No. 27, in good condition. I can offer £5. Regret that I have no swops at present.

W. SETFORD, 155 BURTON RD., DERBY, DE3 6AB.

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

Once again I present two articles from two of our most regular contributors. I feel sure you will all enjoy their work. I have checked through the Collectors' Digest for the period mentioned - i. e. 1963, but cannot find any trace of an article being written about this subject. Either no-one saw this copy of the London Magazine or if they did were too disgusted to even bother with making a reply. It shows just how these reporters get things wrong, something which we have pointed out many times before, but we are grateful for Mr. Swans' recognition of it as an item of interest.

ONLY A SHEET OF PARCHMENT

by William Lister

Inspector Coutts is for the most part treated as a buffoon or stooge for Sexton Blake by many of the authors of the Union Jack tales. Occasionally, Coutts really does the spade-work, before laying his findings before Sexton Blake as in the story called "Absolute Authority", in U.J. No. 1116, dated 1925. From the first chapter we have the lay-out before us thanks to his efforts though later even in this tale he reverts to his part as the great detective's stooge. This first chapter also raises the point as to how far Sexton Blake would avoid public recognition in those days in view of the fact that the author says "The public are very unobservant, and even Sexton Blake - much to his satisfaction - would often pass unrecognised in a crowd". True! He mentions if Tinker and Pedro were with him it would ring a bell. From what I hear celebrities today go out of their way to disguise, with dark glasses to boot, to avoid recognition. Many of the top stars, spend the summer season in Blackpool and you can be sure if they don't take precautions they are soon surrounded. Not always because these holidaymakers have seen the show, but because they have seen them on TV. Had Blake been around in 1979 instead of 1925, as in this tale, the public would soon be baying at his heels wherever he went.

At this point however, I would submit to any Blake fans who would suggest that Blake would not be recognised by the modern TV portrait of him (not no-how) nor indeed would Tinker, though the TV Pedro might give them away.

"Absolute Authority". Almost every individual or politician, etc., would like to have this, and in the right hands good could come of it. Unfortunately it gets in the wrong hands. If some of our British shop stewards were in the Russia they seem to love and they mentioned (even under their breaths) that six letter word "Strike" or that parrot-like phrase "All out" they would find themselves in Siberia before their feet touched the ground. A good thing if Authority is in the right hands, but in the hands of evil men the innocent suffer.

History has proved that in politics, among Kings or Unions, even in religion - to wit - before the Reformation, Absolute Authority has not been a raving success. However, in the hands of Sexton Blake, what have we to fear? It can but speed the ends of justice. Even Zenith, Blake's enemy falls before it. Mind you in the story it was only granted for 24 hours from 12 midnight on 11 January, 1925. Finally let me quote the exact document.

"Blake took from his pocket a sheet of parchment, and, without allowing it to leave his hands, offered it for the inspection of the other."

It was draped like a Christmas tree with the seals of the entire Cabinet and signed George R.I. and bore the photograph of Sexton Blake.

The officer read: "Know all men by these presents; that our beloved and faithful servant, Sexton Blake, is for the space of 24 hours, from 12 o'clock midnight on the 11 January of the year of our Lord, nineteen hundred and twenty-five, invested with all powers over all and sundry our subjects, whatsoever. To which our Ministers of State have set their seals. Given at our Court of St. James". There followed a date and the Royal signature.

Those of my readers who are fortunate enough to possess a copy of this "Union Jack" or to borrow one, besides enjoying the story, will see the afore-mentioned document fully illustrated in colour on the cover page.

At the drop of a hat it secured for Sexton Blake, on demand, a two-seater aeroplane and a machine gun. He was the pilot and Inspector Coutts the passenger. Also a second aeroplane and machine gun piloted by an officer to follow him. So its "Watch out Zenith - Blake is coming".

On this rather interesting note, I beg leave of my readers and

leave the rest to their imagination or their reading.

A COMEDY OF ERRORS

by S. Gordon Swan

Some time ago I came into possession of a copy of The London Magazine -- not the familiar publication of the early decades of the century, but a "new series", designated as Vol. 3, No. 8 and dated November 1963. As I have never seen a more recent issue of this magazine I suspect that it is now as defunct as its predecessor. In any case its contents did not have the appeal of the original periodical.

The most interesting item to me was an article entitled "Seventy Years of Sexton Blake" by J. Maclaren-Ross, notable more for its inaccuracies than for any other features. So far as I am aware this article has never been dealt with in the C.D. so I will make a brief comment on it.

The author stated that the first Sexton Blake Library he ever read was The Valley of Fear (issued five years after the Sherlock Holmes novel of the same title and bearing no relation to it in scene or content). Soon after this, the writer added, "we all went to France, where the S.B.L. was more difficult to obtain, but on our return two years later I bought at a railway bookstall two new volumes, one of which, entitled The Red Dwarf, was subtitled 'by the author of The Valley of Fear'."

There is some discrepancy in time here. The remark "we all went to France" implies that The Valley of Fear was published before or in the early stages of the Great War, whereas it appeared in 1921. As the second story, The Red Dwarf, was published only a few months later in 1922, the time-lapse indicated by J. Maclaren-Ross is difficult to reconcile with the facts.

The following statements were still more incorrect. The writer went on to say: (Both these stories may have been the work of the late Gwyn Evans, said by some to have originated the character of Sexton Blake, and certainly the creator of one of his principal antagonists, the sinister Hindu, Gunga Dass . . . another possibility is Eric W. Townsend).

The number of errors in this paragraph is considerable. We know that the two stories in question were written by F. Addington Symonds whose writing was very much unlike that of Gwyn Evans. As

for the latter being the possible creator of Sexton Blake, that was an absurd assumption for Evans did not appear in the Blake Saga till some thirty years after the great detective had made his debut. It must be admitted, however, that a footnote was added to this preposterous suggestion -- "The name of Blake's first chronicler was actually Hal Meredith" -- which we are aware was a pseudonym for Harry Blyth.

We also know that Gwyn Evans was not responsible for the character of Gunga Dass, but an author best known to us as H. Gregory Hill (H. E. Hill) and that later stories of Gunga Dass were written by Coutts Brisbane and Anthony Parsons. The speculation that Eric W. Townsend might have written *The Valley of Fear* was unfounded; the writing did not resemble his style. The only Blakes he might have written were the Furg the Fur-Man stories in *The Union Jack*, which are attributed to S. Gordon Shaw, who probably revised them.

It is a pity that writers of articles about our favourite characters do not check their facts before submitting them for publication. My only regret is that I am nearly sixteen years too late in commenting on this effort; had I seen it in 1963 I should not have hesitated to write to the magazine in question and point out the errors.

The remainder of the article dealt mainly with Anthony Skene and John Hunter -- the latter described as "probably the best boys' writer of his day" -- and with the new look Blake. No mention was made of G. H. Teed, Jack Lewis, or Anthony Parsons.

One cannot fault the writer's summation at the end:

"And over the years a portrait (as promised in an early editorial) has been built-up, crudely perhaps and by many different hands, yet not differing in essentials: the portrait of a man who, though not an idealist, represents nevertheless an ideal; who is not, like most of his fictional colleagues, devoid of compassion, a sadistic brute, or an eccentric bore; but who continues, in the human interest, to combat injustice and crime: a man doing, at any rate, to the best of his ability the work he set himself to do, and adhering still, to the principles he formulated in *The Marvel* seventy years ago: "if there is wrong to be righted, an evil to be redressed, or a rescue of the weak and suffering from the powerful, our heart assistance can be readily obtained ..."

The article ended on a note of regret that *The Sexton Blake*

Library had ceased publication with No. 526 of the new series, The Last Tiger. This, of course, was before Blake appeared in Mayflower Books, and in a few hardcover novels.

* * * * *

CHARLES HAMILTON AND "BLEAK HOUSE" by Roger M. Jenkins

There can be little doubt that Dickens was one of the greatest novelists who made an indelible impression on Charles Hamilton's mind. Of all Dickens's novels, it is certain that "Bleak House" was the most influential: in all sorts of ways the attitudes Dickens expressed in this novel are revealed time and time again throughout Charles Hamilton's stories.

The main theme of "Bleak House" is an attack on the legal system and the lawyers. The power-seeking Mr. Tulkinghorn in his rusty black and the insidious Mr. Vholes buttoned up in clothes of the same colour are surely the predecessors of a whole line of shady lawyers in the Magnet from Mr. Gedge to Mr. Sarle, all unscrupulous and all dressed in clothes of the darkest hue, suitable for villains of the deepest dye.

A contempt for Parliament was particularly noticeable in the Gem, where more than one parliamentary election was related and there were frequent disparaging references to politicians generally. Dickens's attack on the two-party system, calling M.P's Boodle, Coodle, Doodle and Buffy, Cuffy, Duffy suggests the source of this distrust of all politicians.

The neo-classical preference for type names was something Dickens showed strongly. "Bleak House" has an old soldier named Squod, a maid given to fits called Guster, and a shopkeeper named Krook. Charles Hamilton provides in the Magnet Miss Bunn at the cake-shop, Dr. Pillbury the doctor, and Mr. Lambe the vicar; in the Gem there is Mr. Tiper the printer; while Rookwood boasts Inspector Screw the detective. It all suggests a riotous game of Happy Families, and does much to destroy the sense of realism in the case of both authors.

Dickens never went to a public school and seems to criticise them (though he sent his sons to one!). In "Bleak House" Richard

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Carstone is considering a possible career and how his education at Winchester has prepared him for one. He realises that "he had been eight years at a public school, and had learnt, I understood, to make Latin verses of several sorts, in the most admirable manner". In Gem 750 the St. Jim's juniors were hard up and considering ways of raising cash but "there was, as Lowther said, no market for Latin verse". Similarly, in Boys' Friend 836, Erroll was asked, "Are you going into the labour market, saying that you can construe Virgil, that you can compose Latin hexameters?"

The reality of poverty was never far from Dickens's mind, and the topic kept recurring in Hamiltonian stories before the first world war. "Bleak House" makes much of destitutes like Jo, the crossing sweeper (who has points of resemblance with Joe Frayne), while Gem 150 provides a vivid picture of Tom Merry's experience in the slums of London, similar to those of Bolsover Minor in Magnets 206 and 228.

Charles Hamilton's unquestioning adoption of Dickens's attitudes in "Bleak House" may well indicate that both authors possessed the same cast of mind: they were reformers, not revolutionaries, suspicious of government and all its works, convinced that the solution to the human problem lay in individual effort and private benevolence.

* * * * *

LET'S BE CONTROVERSIAL

No. 228. ABSENT FRIENDS

One of the curiosities of Hamiltonia, particularly in early days, is the way that, on occasion, certain characters were away from their respective schools, for various lengths of time and for some rather vague reason or other. In the ancient "classic serial" which we are now running, Digby was away. In early days, Digby was often away from the school. In the same serial, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was also away - said to be in the sanatorium recovering from his experiences when he was held prisoner in the castle crypt, as related in one of our earliest serials.

It seems strange that Gussy should have been absent at this time. One could suspect that the story was actually written before the

'Gussy Kidnapped' tale, and that the little bit about Gussy being in the sanny was inserted editorially to explain his absence. Personally, I do not think it likely that, so very early in the series, stories would have been published out of the order in which they were written. There would seem to be no reason for it, apart from the fact that such little oddities as characters being absent were a feature of early Hamilton series.

Our serial stars Marmaduke Smythe for the first time, and, though Marmaduke left St. Jim's after his "misadventures", he dropped into various stories, at intervals, during the first few years of the Gem. But the Gem was still very young when Marmaduke appeared for the last time.

Just what reason there may have been for re-introducing Marmaduke on occasion is obscure, but I must admit that it always gave me a warm glow of the heart when, unexpectedly, he paid a visit to the Gem. But a minor character like Marmaduke was in a different class from some of the permanent characters who, inexplicably, took long holidays from their schools.

Monty Lowther was one, who, in early days, was absent for a while now and then. For a time, in the early Gem, Lowther was away, and Tom Merry and Manners were known as the Terrible Two.

At Greyfriars, Johnny Bull was absent for a long period, and, somewhat unbelievably, Squiff took his place in the Famous Five. Skinner, also, was away for a considerable time, having suffered explusion. It is not altogether clear why Hamilton brought him back.

Even in later times, we still find the phenomenon present, for Alonzo Todd, in the last decade of the Magnet, was only in attendance at Greyfriars for short periods and at long intervals. He made his last appearance in the Portercliffe Hall series of the summer of 1935. It was a pity, perhaps, for he was a good character study.

Characters like Marmaduke Smythe and Alonzo Todd, who were absent now and then for long periods, were in a different category from characters like Bulstrode and Lumley-Lumley, who, after playing substantial parts in early days, were unaccountably dropped entirely.

In yet another category were those like Valentine Outram in the Gem and Jim Valentine in the Magnet, who won great popularity on their

initial appearances, and then were brought back, years later, to star again. Reviving former stars in this way was a mistake, even though it was a novelty. The return visits never equalled the originals, and disappointment was there.

In the case of regular characters who went absent for a time and then returned, it is hard to explain the workings of the author's mind. But it adds piquancy to the study of Hamiltonia.

* * * * *

Our Classic Serial from the Serene Days of Good King Edward the Seventh.

THE MISADVENTURES OF MARMADUKE

Marmaduke did not appear at dinner. A little later Kildare came up to Blake and his friends.

"Have any of you seen the new boy, Smythe?"

"We were just wondering what had become of the bouncer," said Blake. "It looks as though he's done a bunk."

Kildare stared at the junior.

"Do you mean that he has run away from school, Blake?"

"I believe so. He spoke of it."

Kildare looked worried and went off in search of further information. Taggles, the porter, volunteered the information that he had seen a boy climbing the gate. The captain went to the Head to report his discovery.

Dr. Holmes's brows contracted with anger as he listened.

"Call Mr. Kidd, please," he said.

The housemaster soon came, looking very disturbed.

"The boy really seems to be gone," he exclaimed. "He uttered a threat to the effect that he would run away, I remember, when I caned him yesterday."

"I suppose he is certain to make for Rylcombe to take the train for London," said the Head, frowning.

"Undoubtedly!" said the housemaster. "Fortunately, there is only one train after nine in the morning, and it does not go till four o'clock." He looked at his watch. "It is now half-past one. If Smythe has been waiting, he has still two and a half hours to wait, so we have ample time to find him and bring him back."

"That is very fortunate," said the doctor. "Will you go down to the station, Mr. Kidd, and see to bringing the runaway back?"

"Certainly! I will take a couple of boys with me, in case the foolish lad should bolt when he sees me. It is very likely to happen, and I could hardly chase a runaway boy at top speed through the streets of Rylcombe."

The doctor smiled.

"Take Kildare and Blake."

"Yes, I was thinking of them."

Blake whistled expressively when he learned what was wanted of him. He had so often broken rules himself that he

was doubtful whether he ought to take a hand in recapturing the new boy.

"It's for his own sake, Blake," said Kildare, who easily read the junior's thoughts. "He will be caught anyway, and the sooner the better for him."

"Right-ho!" said Blake, "I'm on!"

So the housemaster drove down to the village in the doctor's trap, with Kildare and Blake. Blake was cheerful. A drive in the sunny spring afternoon beat lessons in the classroom hollow, in his opinion.

The trap stopped at the station, and Mr. Kidd alighted and inquired if a boy had taken a ticket for London that morning. The booking-office was closed, but a porter was able to give the required information. He grinned as he gave it; evidently he knew Marmaduke again and found him amusing.

"The young gent took a ticket, and didn't he carry on when he found there wasn't a train till four o'clock! Wanted a special, he did! Fact, sir, wanted a blooming special put on for him. He's still on the platform waiting.

Mr. Kidd spoke a word to Kildare, and went on to the platform. Rylcombe was a country station, and the platform was bordered by a bank of flowers, with a slight fence at the top, on the other side of which was the country road. Kildare and Blake waited in the road in case Marmaduke should bolt over the fence.

Mr. Kidd looked up the platform. Yes; there was Marmaduke with a black expression on his face, munching chocolate he had extracted from an automatic machine. He looked up and

saw Mr. Kidd, and dropped the chocolate. As Mr. Kidd strode towards him, he scrambled up the bank beside the platform.

"Come back!" cried Mr. Kidd.

"Shan't!" retorted Marmaduke.

"Come here instantly."

Marmaduke did not deign to reply further. He was clambering over the fence into the road. Mr. Kidd did not follow him. He turned and walked out of the station.

Kildare and Blake were watching the fence. As Marmaduke jumped down into the road, they ran towards him. He gave a gasp of alarm and turned to flee. Kildare gripped the collar of his jacket.

With really remarkable agility, Marmaduke slipped out of the jacket and fled, Blake's tackle just missing. Marmaduke sprinted down the road and into the village street like a hunted deer.

"After him, Blake!" cried Kildare.

"Trust me!" said Blake cheerfully. And he was on Marmaduke's track like lightning. Mr. Kidd came out of the station and joined Kildare.

"What! You have not caught him?"

"He cannot get away from Blake, sir."

"This is very unfortunate. It is creating quite a disturbance," said the housemaster, frowning.

It was indeed. Nothing ever happened at Rylcombe. The inhabitants were unaccustomed to anything happening. Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife, they kept the noiseless tenor of their way. Therefore, the sight of a boy

in his shirt-sleeves, red with wrath and gasping with terror, hotly pursued by another lad, awoke the interest of the village. The inhabitants evinced a deep interest in the chase, and began to shout lustily:

"Stop thief!"

Marmaduke ran as if fear had given him wings. Several of the Rylcombe people joined in the chase, but Blake kept well ahead of them.

"Stop thief!"

The yell behind him added to Marmaduke's terror. Suddenly a rural youth came bolting out of the Green Man, and planted himself in Marmaduke's path.

"Oi've got 'um!" he shouted triumphantly.

Marmaduke lowered his head, and butted the rural youth in the stomach. The youth rolled over. Marmaduke ran on, but the concussion had made his head reel and he had lost his stride. Blake reached him and gripped him by the collar.

Marmaduke sprang at him like a wild cat and Blake staggered back from the savage onslaught. Marmaduke tore himself loose and sprang away, but the villagers were now upon him, and, firmly convinced that he was a thief, they did not handle him gently.

Marmaduke was struggling and kicking and biting. The chase had ended close to the horse-pond. They dragged Marmaduke to it and hurled him headlong in.

He came up gasping, and stood in the middle of the pond, drenched, dirty and shivering. Hoots and yells of laughter greeted him.

"How do 'ee loike yer bath?"

"Yah - thief!"

"Here, I say," said Blake, pushing forward. "Let him alone. He ain't a thief."

"Then wot you roonin' after 'um for?"

"He's run away from school, and I've got to take him back."

"I won't go back!" yelled Marmaduke.

The sympathy of the crowd veered round as soon as they knew the facts. Their anger found a new object, and that object was Blake. Hands helped the soaked Marmaduke from the pond and several voices suggested flinging Blake in, in his place. Fortunately, Mr. Kidd and Kildare arrived upon the scene.

Hoots from the villagers greeted the housemaster.

"Let the youngster alone!"

"Haven't you been feeding the pore boy?"

"He's bin a-using him cruel, Garge. I can see it in his eye."

Mr. Kidd took no notice of the free comments of the Rylcombe folk. With a heightened colour, he gripped Marmaduke by the arm and led him away. Some of the villagers looked inclined to interfere, but neither the athletic housemaster nor the stalwart captain of St. Jim's looked an easy customer to tackle, so they thought better of it.

Glad was Mr. Kidd when he reached the trap and bundled Marmaduke into it. The prisoner was not tamed yet, and Kildare had to hold him while the housemaster took the reins and drove off.

"I won't go back!" roared Marmaduke.

"Your mistake," said Blake serenely. "You're going. If you don't keep still, I shall sit on you."

And as Marmaduke did not keep still, Blake kept his word, and he sat on

the captive until the trap rolled in at the gates of St. Jim's.

(MORE OF THIS OLD, OLD STORY NEXT MONTH)

BIOGRAPHY OF A SMALL CINEMA

No. 63. SARATOGA TRUNK and EASTER PARADE

The new term opened with Ronald Reagan in "King's Row", from Warner Bros. This was a splendid drama and the best answer for those who try to pretend that Reagan made nothing but second-feature films. It was probably his best picture, but he made a number of other tip-top films. He was always popular in the Small Cinema. A coloured cartoon in this programme was "Imagination", and a 2-reel comedy had the 3 Stooges in "Beer-Barrel Polecats".

Next week from M.G.M. brought Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn in "The Sea of Grass". This must have been an outstanding film in its day, but I remember nothing of it. It was a long picture of 11,111 ft., a playing time of over two hours. The supporting programme included a 3 Stooges Comedy, a coloured cartoon entitled "Uncle Tom's Cabana", a Pete Smith novelty "The Domineering Male", and the News.

Then, from Warner's, Joan Leslie in "Cinderella Jones". The bill included a coloured cartoon "Snap Happy Traps".

The following week brought Fred Astaire and Judy Garland in "Easter Parade" in Technicolor from M.G.M. This was an excellent musical. The title song is everlasting, and I have a feeling

that this was the picture which first gave us the "Couple of Tramps" number. In the supporting bill was a coloured cartoon "Daffy Duckeroo".

Next, also from M.G.M., was "Balalaiks" starring Nelson Eddy, which sounds like another musical. A Tom & Jerry coloured cartoon was "Kitty Foiled", and a glorious pot-pourri of Mack Sennett was "Once Over Lightly".

Then, from Warner's, Humphrey Bogart in "Conflict" with a big supporting bill which included two coloured cartoon "Rippling Romance" and "Who's Who at the Zoo".

Next week, from M.G.M., Ann Southern in "Undercover Girl". A coloured Tom & Jerry cartoon was "Salt Water Tabby".

Then, from Warner's, Gary Cooper and Ingrid Bergman in "Saratoga Trunk", a big film in its day. I have a feeling that the Saratoga Trunk of the title was a road of some sort, though I may be wrong. A coloured cartoon was "Lonesome Stranger".

Then, from M.G.M., Joel McCrea in a good western "Ramrod". A coloured cartoon was "Hound Hunters", probably a Droopy cartoon.

Next, from M.G.M., Robert

Montgomery in "The Earl of Chicago" which sounds like a gangster picture. A coloured cartoon was "Red Hot Ranger".

The following week from Warner's, brought Joan Leslie and 62 Big Stars in "Hollywood Canteen" which sounds like a giant musical revue. Luckily I haven't recorded the names of the "62 Big Stars" but they probably included everybody on the Warner pay-roll. The 3 Stooges were in the supporting bill plus a documentary, a coloured Tom & Jerry cartoon "Puss 'N Booty" and a second colour cartoon "Room

and Bored".

Then, from M.G.M., Van Johnson in "The Romance of Rosy Ridge", a title which intrigues me all these years on. A Tom & Jerry coloured cartoon was "Tee for Two".

Finally, from M.G.M., George Murphy and Elizabeth Taylor in "The Rich Full Life". A coloured cartoon was "The Uninvited Pest".

The Universal News was still included in every programme - but the sands were running out for the news reel.

* * * * *

The Postman Called

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

JIM COOK (Auckland): I heard a very interesting item of news on N.Z. National radio this morning about the storing of books. It appears if you want to keep your old and rare books in good order you should keep them in deep freeze!

I can't see myself interring all my lovely Old Boys' books and papers into the dark recesses of such a machine even though it prevents paper rot.

The fellow who broadcast the item suggested books and such like should be kept out of sunlight. Well, we have managed to retain our hobby books in good order for the last sixty and more years ... but putting them in a deep freeze! Never!

H. P. CLARK (Nuneaton): A few thoughts about that famous form-master, Mr. Quelch. I have noticed that in later Magnets he is depicted (by Shields, I think) as an elderly gentleman with spectacles. I cannot recall Charles Hamilton ever mentioning that Quelch wore spectacles - it would certainly have detracted from the gimlet eye image.

I can clearly recall that in a Holiday Annual of the early twenties he was pictured (probably by Chapman) as a much younger man who did not require the aid of spectacles. It seems to me that it would have been more logical if artists had endowed him with the same ageless

qualities as those possessed by his famous Peter Pan pupils.

J. JONES (Newcastle-on-Tyne): I dislike Billy Bunter, and that dislike is due to the comic strip series which appeared in the Knockout and spoiled him for me. It seems strange that he was made into the main character in the Magnet, and then came the comic strips in the Knockout which did his image as a school character much harm.

Mrs. I. RADFORD (Bridgwater): When my monthly copy of the Digest arrives I turn to it with relief from reading my morning paper which is always full of depressing news, sex and violence. (The only thing I like in the daily paper is the crossword puzzle.) Your magazine really relaxes me and brings me back to sanity.

R. CUSHING (Kimpton): Collectors' Digest, steeped as it is in nostalgia, has over the years evoked for me many memories that have extended over a wide range of topics. The April edition proved to be no exception, and, in this instance, "Danny's Diary" has struck a very distant chord which reverberated with bell-like clarity at mention of "The Monster". The "monster" met his just deserts half a century ago, but the memory lingers on. I saw that lurid melodrama at the old Hammersmith Palace, long since demolished.

ERNEST HOLMAN (Leigh-on-Sea): Your mention of 'Salesperson wanted' called to mind a notice outside a local Employment Agency recently - 'Draughtsperson required'. Perhaps the best story I have heard in this respect, however, concerns a Local Authority in this County requiring the services of a 'tea-lady'. An advertisement appeared for a 'Beverage Dispenser' and in addition to receiving much literature for the supply of such commodities, they also had a visit from a sales representative who turned up with six variations of such machines for demonstration!

Danny's reference to a story by cricketer Wally Hammond sent me to Lofts/Adley's 'Men Behind Boys Fiction'. It seems that a Fleet Street writer and agent named F. T. Bolton 'ghosted' many tales reputed to have come from sporting personalities, and the Hammond story was one of them. This book also gives Alfred Edgar (later to become Playwright Barre Lyndon) as the 'ghost' writer of a story by

cricketer Patsy Hendren.

In your review of 'Tom Merry's Best' you refer to the character of Marco Frulo in 1913 having his name changed for the 1936 reprint. By sheer coincidence, I may have solved the mystery. A recent reading of the Magnet 1936 Brazil series shows that the Manager of the Valentine estate was one, Joao Frulo. No doubt the Editor of the Gem, realising that the name was then appearing in the Magnet, decided to make a change.

G. W. MASON (Torquay): Many thanks for the C.D., this marvellous little magazine, conceived in the forties, and now marching forward, proudly, towards the eighties! What a record of dedication and endeavour! In the words of a bygone weekly, "Cheer, Boys, Cheer!"

* * * * *

News of the Clubs

MIDLAND

The weather was reasonable and travelling conditions fair on the occasion of our April meeting.

We were glad to see Vince Loveday and George Chatham recovered from their recent bouts of illness, but not so pleased that Tom Porter, who is not so well these days, absent because of not feeling up to coming.

A presentation was made to Ted Sabin of one of Howard Bakers volumes by Geoff Lardner. The book was "The Making of Harry Wharton". It came from the late Bill Morgan's small collection of Hamiltoniana. Ted is probably now our oldest member and a very good one too. He rarely misses a meeting. The gift was accepted gratefully.

Our feature Anniversary Number was missed out owing to Tom Porter's absence, but a Collectors' Item was brought along by your correspondent. It was the famous "Boys will be Boys" now selling in glossy covers at about £2.50. I paid 6d. for it from a stall in a fete and gala run by the boys of Repton School. Tom Porter and I visited

Joe Marston who lives in Burton and he took us along. This was about fifteen years ago.

The discussion was mainly centred on the respective merits of the stories of the three main Hamilton schools. Although written by the same author they each had their own characteristics. Greyfriars stories were really the most ambitious. The complicated plots of the long series and the width of the background, often far away countries in the holiday series, made them a major undertaking.

The St. Jim's stories mainly, though not always, were concerned with the school itself and house rivalry and sheer animal spirits gave them a charm of their own. Some people prefer "The Gem" because of this.

The Rookwood stories were much less ambitious. The school itself was almost always the background, but the grace of style, dry wit and humorous situations in these stories were so marked that Charles Hamilton rarely wrote better. Quite a number of our members expressed a preference for Rookwood.

We broke up at 9.30 having spent a couple of very enjoyable hours.

JACK BELLFIELD

CAMBRIDGE

The Cambridge Club met at 5 All Saints' Passage, Cambridge, on Sunday, 6th May. This being the Annual Meeting a report was given on the year's very successful activities and the accounts, which showed a healthy balance, approved. The officers of the Club were re-elected with the addition of Mike Rouse as Vice-Chairman. A vote of thanks to the retiring Secretary was passed. Arrangements for the annual visit to the Swelling home of Neville Wood were discussed.

Mike Rouse called attention to the new I.P.C. Comic, "Tornado", and to its "Victor Drago" - "Terror of Troll Island" serial. The author of this was Chris Lowder, an authority on Sexton Blake, and the series was obviously a "pastiche" of Sexton Blake. The artists, Bill Henry and Mike Dorey, were, presumably to instructions, drawing in the style of Eric Parker. When Mike held up an illustration and asked "Who does this remind you of?" there was a chorus of "Sexton Blake" and "Eric

Parker". Mike also showed to the Club material he was gathering together for a projected book on East Anglian Resorts in the Edwardian period. He produced an album of postcards covering many facets of the subject.

Jack Overhill tested the literary memories of the Club with a Quiz, based on some sixty years of very wide reading, in which members were asked to name the authors of forty books, ranging from Scott, Dumas, Dickens, to Leslie Charteris. A tantalising quiz, since names would not always come to mind. No-one could recall the author of Ulysses (James Joyce), but one member took up Jack's challenge to identify the author of "Cashel Byron's profession", Bernard Shaw.

After enjoying Mrs. Thurbon's tea, the meeting resumed and Jack gave the answer to his quiz; the winner being Bill Thurbon.

Bill Thurbon then produced items from his collection, including a bound collection of "Chuckles" of 1915, and Volume I of "The Scout". The meeting closed with a vote of thanks to Mrs. Thurbon for her hospitality.

LONDON

There was another excellent attendance of thirty members and friends at the Twickenham meeting on Sunday, 13th May. Sam and Babs Thurbon were the hosts.

Sam Thurbon played all the characters when reading the Herlock Sholmes story "The Missing Millionaire".

Local member, Millicent Lyle read her treatise which was entitled "The Greyfriars Experiment". It was all about characters at the school during a period of no discipline and was rendered in rhyme. Millicent always comes up with a splendid item of entertainment at her home meeting here at the lovely name of Strawberry Hill.

Bob Blythe read extracts from newsletter, 3rd May, 1962.

Winifred Morss read a couple of chapters from the Terror of the Form and afterwards set the company present, thirteen questions about what she had read. Larry Morley had all the questions answered correctly and thus won the book prize that Maurice King had kindly donated. Mary Cadogan presented an excellent slide show which consisted of ones showing covers of various books and papers plus some

of the B.B.C. slides of her recent telecast in the Nationwide programme. Mary had brought along copies of the excellent and beautifully produced Sunday Mercury Special, "Those Good Old Comic Days". This Special must be one of the best ever published and at 20p is a bargain. Bill Lofts had sent me a copy plus one of his very fine essays "Memories of Fleetway House".

The next meeting will be held at Greyfriars, Hollybush Ride, Wokingham, Berks., telephone 034 46 4626, on Sunday, 10th June. Eric and Betty Lawrence will be the host and hostess.

BENJAMIN WHITER

NORTHERN

Meeting held 12th May, 1979

Though all the Club officers were unanimously re-elected at our A.G.M. last month, Secretary Geoffrey Good is still waiting, sadly, to enter upon his new term of office. Geoffrey and chauffeur Nigel Shepley were victims of a breakdown on the road and missed our May meeting altogether, and other mishaps kept away some of our other regulars.

Ten members, however, ensured an enjoyable if somewhat re-arranged evening. Darrell Swift had a pile of 1934/5 Magnets for sale in very nice condition. Chairman Geoffrey was delighted to report that a friendly tip from Neville Vear had sent him to a second-hand shop in York, which had some pre-war SBL's in stock, and that as a result he had been able at long last to complete his collection of the works of Anthony Parsons.

An indoor cricket match, on lines suggested by Alf Hanson, was staged between Greyfriars and St. Jim's, and proved a worthy encounter. The former batted first and made 221 (Cherry 61) and the match looked well in hand when St. Jim's made a disastrous start to their innings. Blake (69) pulled things round with the aid of D'Arcy and Cardew, and when last man Fatty Wyn arrived his big hitting promised to win the game for the Sussex men. In the end, however, and in the best Hamiltonian traditions, Greyfriars won by 5 runs. A curiosity for the record-books: both captains, Wharton and Merry, made ducks!

Geoffrey Wilde gave us the evening's talk, which he entitled

"Three Little Mysteries". The Mystery of the Roving Rotter concerned the strange movements of Cecil Ponsonby. Pon so often, said the speaker, waylaid Greyfriars fellows not only on Courtfield Common but also in Friardale Lane or Friardale Wood - a lengthy walk for a lazy fellow; and what could induce a coward to wander so deep into enemy territory anyway? The Mystery of the Missing Mums centred on the fact that so many leading Hamilton characters had fathers but not mothers - Smithy, Redwing and Fisher T. Fish, to name three.

Literary considerations, said Geoffrey, could well explain these two matters, but for his third mystery he had no satisfactory explanation. Illustrations from the old papers and period photographs, samples of which he showed us, demonstrated that a generation or two ago even the poorest people felt it necessary to wear a hat out-of-doors. Nowadays the wearing of headgear was very much the exception rather than the rule. Where had all the hatters gone - and why? After discussion of this last point the meeting broke up without a definite conclusion. We did feel, though, that you simply couldn't get a hat on top of some of the modern hairstyles!

JOHNNY BULL

* * * * *

RUPERT

by W. O. G. Lofts

Rupert Bear was my favourite children's newspaper strip character in my childhood days, but it really depended on what National newspaper one's parents bought. Rupert was of course in the Daily Express, The Daily Mail had its Teddy Tail (a mouse) The Daily Herald had Bobby Bear. The Daily Sketch/Graphic an elephant by the name of Uncle Oojah, whilst the Daily Mirror had an extraordinary trio of animals the pets Pip (a dog), Squeak (a penguin) and Wilfred (either a rabbit or hare never known exactly). Whilst the old Daily News Chronicle had its Arkubs (a bear with a human family).

What is really interesting to note is that with the exception of Rupert who is now in his 59th year, all the other favourites have long departed - mostly second world war casualties though a few were revived again but then quickly going into permanent retirement. Rupert it must be said has stood the test of time in his never changing world still

dressed in his grey pullover, check trousers and scarf with his main friends Bill Badger and Algy the pug dog sharing his adventures. The series started way back in November 8th, 1920, when Mary Tourtel, wife of a night editor of The Daily Express, created her own wonderland of animals which must now be immortal as Alice in Wonderland.

Curiously at the beginning Rupert did not appear daily, as for two months in early 1921 he was replaced by a strange gnome-like creature with the name of Paper-Cap, who had a hat made out of The Daily Express and drawn by Tom Cotterell, Mary Tourtel also contributed other non-Rupert strips including "Margot the Midget" (who later appeared with Rupert) and "Adventures of Father Christmas", but Rupert was eventually to return on a regular basis, and become a great favourite with the young and old readers.

Mary Tourtel was an early aviator holding a speed record and loved flying "seeing the land as the birds saw it", was never without her sketch book. Unfortunately, and spending so much time at the drawing board around 1930, her eyes started to fade, but she managed to continue till 1935 when she handed over the strips to Alfred Bestall whom many collectors think was a far better artist and story-teller than the creator. Whereas Mary was prone to use the old traditional theme of Witches, Ogres and spells, and having our hero trussed up for the next thrilling instalment, and in horrible predicaments, Bestall used a more modern approach to his tales and stories. Though being brought up on the Mary Tourtel strips I must confess that I loved them, and some of Mary's colour work in the Annuals was really first-class. Alfred Bestall who is still alive, retired a few years ago, though still contributes to the Annuals and other odd publications including the comic "Pippin".

Mary Tourtel died in 1948 aged 74, at her beautiful home at "Bluebell Cottage", Ivy Lane, Canterbury, Kent, surely a place akin to Rupert's country cottages. Such was the enormous sales of the Rupert Annuals that in the year Mary died a total of 861,000 copies were claimed to have been sold, easily a world record. Since the retirement of Alfred Bestall several artists have written the strip, two I have been told were like the creator women, and of course Rupert had appeared on television, and the marketing of his name is big business

in the advertising world.

Over the last six months I have been doing an enormous amount of original research into the whole Rupert saga, especially trying to classify the numerous contents of Annuals and paper-backs. This it is hoped will eventually be printed into a biography sometime in the future.

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WANTED: Greyfriars Book Club Vols. 1, 2, 3, 4; Howard Baker Magnets 18, 21, 23, 29 39; Modern Boys; Holiday Annual (original) 1922.

JAMES GALL, 49 ANDERSON AVENUE, ABERDEEN.

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SOUTH WEST

On 13th May a small gathering of C.D. readers and collectors in the South West met at the home of Tim Salisbury, near Weston-Super-Mare. Mr. Don Webster came up from Bideford to be our guest speaker and read from his article in the 1955 C.D. Annual. He also arranged a Quiz which was won, jointly, by Mr. Ron Nicholls and Mr. Jack Parkhouse. Their prizes were books, kindly given by Mr. Webster.

After tea we played the second side of Frank Richards "Floreast Greyfriars" L.P. and were interested to see some photos of past London Club meetings which Mr. Webster had brought along.

We hope to meet again in the autumn with an even better attendance.

LOCAL C.D. READER DIES

We deeply regret to record the death, a few weeks ago, of Mr. A. B. Holliman of Ruddington, Nottingham. Mr. Holliman, who was only 48, was one of a very loyal group of C.D. readers in the Nottingham area, and he had an immense collection of old papers. He died of a sudden heart attack. He had been a C.D. reader for very many years, and we shall sorely miss his enthusiastic letters. We express our deep sympathy to Mr. Holliman's widow.

D. M. BENTLEY

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