

VOLUME 35

STORY PAPER

NUMBER 420

COLLECTORS

DECEMBER 1981

DIGEST

PRICE 32p



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STORY PAPER COLLECTORS DIGEST

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by

W. G. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Founded in 1946 by

HERBERT LECKENBY

Vol. 35

No. 420

DECEMBER 1981

Price 32p

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Whatever else is lost among the years

Let us keep Christmas -
its meaning never ends ...

Whatever doubts assail us, or what fears -

Let us hold close this day -
remembering friends

ALL OUR CHRISTMASES!

When I was a child, the great thing to look forward to at Christmas Time was the month before Christmas. The weeks leading up to the great occasion. The Season. The Festive Season.

Getting reading for Christmas was a joy. Stoning the raisins,

washing the currants, pitting the prunes, shredding the peel. When Mum made the puddings and the cakes. And when Mum gave one the dish to clean out with a spoon. And then the day when the puddings boiled for hour after hour in the copper or the big saucepans.

Preparing the Christmas cards for posting. Making the paper-chains. Home-made chains in the dining-room or sitting-room or whatever one called it. More elaborate, bought chains, with holly and mistletoe in the drawing room, or parlour, or simply the front room, maybe. We hadn't got to the pretentiousness of "lounges" in those happy days.

The shops all individually decorated. The Penny Bazaar, which was what they called the Marks & Spencer's shops - nothing over a penny. You would not get much for a penny nowadays - not much for one of the tuppenny-halfpenny diddlers. Mr. Woolworth's 3d. and 6d. Store - nothing over 6d., and all three floors looking like fairyland.

The grocer gave Mum a Christmas present to express his thanks for her year's custom. "To thank you for your patronage!"

The trams, with the drivers jumping on the sand-pedal if the lines happened to be icy. Service: a car every ten minutes from early morning till late at night. The barrel-organ playing "The Mistletoe Bough". The Salvation Army band playing "While Shepherds Watched". The waits singing "Good King Wenceslas".

At the tram stop, the little man with his barrow with the glowing coals, selling hot chestnuts at a penny a bag.

Christmas Time was not normally a busy period for the cinemas, but certain films seemed to come round, year after year. Frank Keenhan in "The Bells", a weird and snowy adventure to chill our marrows; Marguerite Clark in "The Seven Swans", a piece of fantasy to get us in the Christmas mood, or Betty Bronson in "Peter Pan" to delight everyone, and with a magnificent musical accompaniment by a particular cinema's famous orchestra.

And every week in the run up to Christmas brought a special Christmas Number of our favourite papers. And even though Double Numbers were things of the past, there was still something very special about any Christmas Number. Fifty years ago, if we were about then, we had the Ghost of Mauleverer Towers - one of the best Christmas

series - in the Magnet, and, in the Gem, we enjoyed the re-telling of Tom Merry's first Christmas, brought forward from 1907 when the Gem was a new boy in the shops. Great days.

Enough of day-dreaming. We can't enjoy yesterday's Christmas again, except in our memories. But we can make the most of this Christmas, remembering that it is the birthday of the Saviour.

I wish you all a very, very happy Christmas among your loved ones. And may the New Year bring you every blessing.

MAGIC! ENCHANTING!

Earlier this year I wrote of a revival of the lovely show "Cavalcade", (which opened fifty years ago at Drury Lane), at the Farnham Redgrave Theatre. Later, I gave the information that the show was to be presented for a further seven weeks at Farnham. Some of our readers managed to get along to see it.

"Real magic! Absolutely enchanting!" was how Mr. Maurice Hall described it, after going one night with a family party. "We enjoyed it so much," said Mr. Hall, who made the journey from his home at Weybridge. "After the glowing account in C.D. there could so easily have been an anti-climax. There was not a trace of it. The C.D. account did not over-praise the show. It was absolutely great, we all agreed. If I could get seats to see it again, I would be there like a shot."

Equally enthusiastic was Mr. H. G. Martin of Orpington. "Our 1½ hour journey to Farnham was amply repaid by the really splendid production of 'Cavalcade'," wrote Mr. Martin. He, like everyone who saw it, was deeply impressed by the crowd scenes and the way the immense cast, hundreds strong, was handled.

"I must," stressed Mr. Martin, "try and get a seat to see it again before the final curtain, but meanwhile I give you another line from the play, which I think is particularly apposite to our hobby:
Jane (to Ellen) "Time changes many things, but it can't change old friends."

And Mr. Martin wound up with: "Thank you again for bringing to my attention this wonderful production, through the pages of C.D."

Madam and I went to see it again, this time with two dear friends, one of my Old Boys and his charming wife who is one of my Old Girls,

who came up, all the way from Hereford to see "Cavalcade". We loved every minute - every second - of that wonderful show. And then we sat up till the wee small hours talking over old times.

Many scores of readers have sent me letters of appreciation this past summer over our memories of "Cavalcade" in C.D. Letters tumbled in from all over the country and all over the world, from people with long memories. I could not reply to them all. But my very sincere thanks to all who wrote.

ANYONE REMEMBER MY GAL?

In a fine article concerning Gilbert Chester in last month's C.D., Mr. Christopher Lowder mused over the author's expense accounts in the year 1927, and quoted: "A gallon of petrol - 2/6". If there was no mistake in the entry, then I can only say that there must have been considerable deflation in the following years.

I bought my first car in 1936. At that time, and for a good many years afterwards, the best petrol was National Benzole, Cleveland Discol, and Shell - and the price was 1/6 a gallon. I regularly paid out six bob for four gallons. And cheaper brands were 1/4 a gallon, and, at some places, even 1/3.

When I got rid of my last car about a dozen years ago, there still had not been any very considerable increase in the price of a gallon.

THE PRINCESS SNOWEE'S CORNER

"My Mum was out at a church meeting. My Boss was upstairs in his Den typing away like a maniac. I had been out on an official engagement. I returned home about nine, and went in through my own cat-door. That infernal tapping was still going on upstairs. My Mum was still out. I went into the small recess in the hall where the telephone is. I got up on to the telephone seat. It's not really a telephone seat. It's a piano-stool, but we haven't got a piano any more. Whatever it is, I spread myself out in comfort.

By an by, down came the Editor. He opened the front door, went out on the porch, and called: "Snoweeeee! Ting, ting ting!" He closed the door, went through the hall, past me, and out at the side door. He called: "Snoweeeee! Ting, ting, ting! Where are you Snowee?" He

closed the side-door, and went out the back door into the garden. I heard him: "Snoweeeeee! Ting, ting, ting! Come in out of the cold, Snoweeeeee!" Humans! Very embarrassing to us cats now and then.

He came in, and back into the hall. His eyes fell on me, on the telephone-seat. "Where have you come from?" he demanded.

I rather like this Christmas weather. My bed is one of those long wicker carriers with two handles. Humans carry their babies about in them. Provided they change my bed cushions every week, I like it very much. It is under the Editor's desk, right up against the radiator. I retire to it about 9 o'clock most nights.

About ten, he comes up with my dish of warm milk. He goes down on his hands and knees, and crawls through to me. It's really a very undignified position for the Editor of an important magazine. And, at his age, I should think it's risky. He could easily get cramp, and get stuck, so that my Mum might have to send for the Fire Brigade to get him out.

I wake up and drink up my milk, and then, he says "Good little gel!" scurps his way out from under the desk, and staggers to his feet. They spoil me.

My Mum wishes you all a Very Jolly Christmas, and so do I.
Yours, with that Christmas feeling, Snowee."

THE EDITOR

* * * * *

Heartfelt thanks Eric for another year of sheer nostalgia. Happy Xmas all.

CHARLES VAN RENEN

* * * * *

Merry Xmas and Happy New Year to all Old Boys.

McMAHON, HOZIER CRES., TANNOCHSIDE.

* * * * *

Christmas Greetings to Bill, Jack, Eric & Madam, Norman, Jim, Jay Gee and all hobby friends.

ERN, AUDREY, LARRAINE and SHARYN DARCY

47 FISHER ST., MAIDSTONE, VICTORIA 3012, AUSTRALIA.

* * * * *

WANTED: 1930's Puck, Sunbeam, Bubbles, Playbox.

H. V. HEARN, 20 WINGATE WAY, CAMBRIDGE.

Danny's Diary

DECEMBER 1931

No snow for Christmas. Woe is me! No white Christmas this year. But plenty of heavy rain. 1931 has been the most sunless year in living memory.

The Nelson Lee Library's Christmas series has run throughout the month, commencing with "The Whispering Peril". Acute danger comes to Jimmy Potts from far-off China. The long arm of revenge stretches out. Next week brought the Christmas Number with Christmas in a haunted castle. The story is "The Castle of Terror" and Jimmy Potts is still on the receiving end from the sinister mandarins. Next "The Well of Doom". The well is deep in the dungeons of Somerton Abbey. Many met their death there long ago. It looked as though Jimmy Potts might join the other victims. Finally, the grand climax of the series in "The Man in Black", with Jimmy's enemies unmasked at last. A good series, full of Christmas fun and shivers.

I saw a good joke in the N. L. L. over Christmas. Slow waiter: "Have you ordered anything, sir?" Disgusted diner: "Well, I asked for Christmas pudding, but that was so long ago that you'd better bring me a hot-cross bun."

A week before Christmas there was a smash on the Fenchurch St. line near Dagenham. In dense fog, a passenger train crashed into part of a goods train. Nobody was killed, but a number of people were injured.

Lovely tales in the Schoolboys' Own Library for Christmas. The first was "Coker's Christmas Party", a sequel to the story in the November S.O.L. Coker has been kidnapped by the wicked secretary Poynings, to prevent Horace from going to Holly Lodge, Coker's home. But the Famous Five rescue Coker, and go home with him for Christmas. An unusual setting for Christmas, but great. The second story is "Trailing the Phantom". The Fistical Four have come home from Canada, bringing with them to Rookwood the American boy, Texas Lick. Jimmy invites him to the Priory where Lick plays ghost. At the end of the story, back at Rookwood, Lick doesn't like Rookwood, runs away

after making the place too hot to hold him, and is never seen again by the Rookwood chums. He's no loss.

I have had two Union Jack's this month, and they are both very, very good. The first one is "A Corner in Crooks" by Robert Murray. This is actually an old story, it appears, and it started a series about the Criminals' Confederation, which was headed by the sinister Mr. Reece and Sir Phillip Champion. It was the most popular series ever to feature in the Union Jack, so the editor says. The rest of the series will follow this one. An old man and his nephew arrive at Mrs. Raggetts' boarding-house in the Edgware Road - and eerie and dangerous things follow. I loved the story, and look forward to some more.

The other Union Jack was the Christmas Number, and the story is "The Phantom of the Pantomime" by W. J. Elliott. A theatrical touring company find themselves booked to play Christmas week in a disused and derelict theatre in a small town - and gruesome things follow. A fine tale of Christmas mystery.

In real life, there has been a terrible crime in London, just before Christmas. A little girl of eleven, named Vera Page, was reported missing from her home. Two days later, on 16th December, her body was found across the tradesmen entrance of a house in Kensington. She had been murdered. At the inquest, suspicion seems to be pointing towards a man named Percy Rush, but there has been no arrest so far.

The Modern Boy's Christmas Number has 48 pages. There is, for the one week only, a story of Greystones School entitled "The Human Banana" by G. E. Rochester, and I expect that is the last of them, for his new series about Porson's Flying School has now started. In the Modern Boy there is a new series by Alfred Edgar about weird visitors to Britain from the earth's core after an earthquake. And the Captain Justice stories by Murray Roberts are still going strong.

Mr. Winston Churchill has been knocked down by a taxi in New York, and has landed in hospital. I hope that he will get on all right.

The Gem opened this week with its Christmas Number, and it's a lovely story, "St. Jim's for Merrie Christmas". It is an extra-long tale, and everything else has been dropped to make room for it. Carol-singers, the Rev. Dodds, and Cousin Ethel and Marmaduke Smythe all turn up with our favourite chums at Tom's home in

Huckleberry Heath.

Next, "The Big Nine at St. Jim's". In the end it is the Terrible Three who catch Jim, the Nailer. Then "Journalists of St. Jim's" in which Tom Merry starts his famous weekly and Miss Fawcett pays him a visit. Finally, "Tom Merry - Editor", in which Tom Merry's Weekly No. 1 appears, limited to one copy. And there is no charge for reading it.

In Rome the roof of the Vatican Library collapsed, and 15,000 valuable books were ruined and lost to the world.

Only three Rookwood tales in the Gem this month. "Silver's Splendid Spook", featuring a ghost at the Priory. Then "Muffin Finds the Way", with Muffin turning up at the Priory. The third had been announced as "Silver's Spook Succeeds", but when it appeared it was just called "Silver's Spook" which was very odd, especially considering the title of the tale of a fortnight earlier. A sub-standard Rookwood Christmas series, which tried hard without much success.

The Magnet opened the month with a truly splendid single story "The Bounder's Blunder" in which Vernon-Smith has a bitter feud with the French master. Then another single tale "A Brother's Sacrifice" in which Frank Nugent tried to sacrifice himself for his younger brother. I, also, have an older brother, but I don't suppose he would sacrifice himself for me.

Then the start of a magnificent Christmas series "The Ghost of Mauleverer Towers". It's just gorgeous, as Bunter tries to tack himself on to the party, but the pals are not at Wharton Lodge this Christmas, but at Mauly's home. But Bunter finds a way, by way of a well, into the Towers. Next in the series, "The Unknown Hand" with threats being made against Mauleverer. And Bunter discovers that Mauly's "man", Orris, is in debt to bookies. A lovely series that goes on next month.

My own brother may not be like Frank Nugent, but he's not so bad. He gave me the new Holiday Annual on Christmas morning. I didn't say so to Doug, of course, but this is really the worst of all the Holiday Annuals so far. Heaps too many short stories. The main attraction is a cricket tale of Greyfriars, "The Vanished Eleven". There is a St. Frank's story, and it may be the first time St. Frank's has been in the Annual.

Christmas Day is on a Friday this year. After Christmas, Dad has booked to take Mum and me to the New Empress Theatre at Brixton where we are going to see "Dick Whittington". The stars are Daisy Dormer, Harold Walden and Carmo, the Magician. Doug has booked to take his young lady, Edith Gill, to the Playhouse Theatre in London to see Gladys Cooper in "The Painted Veil".

At the pictures this month we have seen Clara Bow in "Kick In" which was lively; Jack Oakie in "June Moon"; Ramon Novarro in "Daybreak"; Will Rogers in "Young as You Feel"; Wallace Beery, Jean Harlow, and Clark Gable in "The Secret Six" which is a terrific gangster picture; Buster Keaton in "Romeo in Pyjamas"; Gary Cooper and Carole Lombard in "I Take This Woman", which Mum liked and I didn't; and Victor McLaglen and Jeanette Macdonald in "Annabelle's Affairs".

The Post Office has delivered millions of letters and parcels this Christmas, and, when you think of the cost, you can see the money they have taken: Letters $2\frac{1}{2}$ d., Postcards 1d., Printed matter $\frac{1}{2}$ d. for 2 ounces; and parcels 2 lbs. for 6d.

(EDITORIAL COMMENTS: The 1931 Gem story "St. Jim's for Merrie Christmas" had been entitled "Tom Merry's Christmas" in 1907, and it was Tom Merry's first Christmas in the Gem. A pleasant tale with no plot but plenty of atmosphere, it was the first Christmas at Laurel Villa. All sorts of people were invited, and there is an amusing sequence when Tom Merry sends off telegram after telegram to ask permission to invite his guests. At 6d. a wire, the telegram was cheap in those days. Marmaduke Smythe was re-introduced as one of the guests, which was a bit odd, really, for Tom Merry had not yet arrived at St. Jim's when Marmaduke had his adventures and misadventures as related in our recent serials. Cousin Ethel is also there, but whether she had yet changed from Miss Maynard to Miss Cleveland it is impossible to say, as her surname is not mentioned in the story. In one delightful sequence the boys go carol-singing, and a man sets a dog on them. The dog's name is Pongo, and it remained the same in the reprint. Of course, Wally D'Arcy and his Pongo were still in the wings at this time, but Hamilton's propensity for repeating names was really quite remarkable. "The Big Nine at St. Jim's" was originally "The Nine Detectives". "Journalists of St. Jim's" had been "Head Cook and Bottle-Washer" in 1907, and "Tom Merry - Editor" had originally been "Tom Merry's Weekly". This was Hamilton's first school magazine.

The Holiday Annual story "The Vanished Eleven" was a reprint of "The Match with St. Jim's", a Red Magnet tale from the summer of 1914.

S. O. L. No. 161, "Coker's Christmas Party" comprised the last two Magnet stories of 1926. S. O. L. No. 162, "Trailing the Phantom" comprised six Rookwood stories of the Boys' Friend Christmas season of 1923.

Danny's reminder that the famous Criminal's Confederation yarns started a re-run by special request in December 1931 is fascinating. Is there anyone left in our Sexton Blake Circle who remembers them? If so, why doesn't someone sit down and give us a brief history of the C. C. for Blakiana? Our Blakiana Column is always complaining about shortage of material. A short history of the C. C. would be most welcome now, even if it has been done before. Come to think of it, Kestrel and Zenith also seem to be sadly neglected by our Blakians.)

THE VERA PAGE CASE

Anybody who is old enough to have walked into the newsagent's shop and bought the Magnet's "Mauleverer Towers" series of 1931, must surely remember the Vera Page case which took the headlines in the newspapers in the few weeks before Christmas of that year. Danny reminds us of it this month in his Diary.

The 11-year old girl, Vera, had been missing for two days when her body was found in the area of a Kensington house. She had been ravished and strangled. Her face and clothes were smothered with soot, candle-grease and coal-dust. Caught up in her coat-sleeve was an adult size finger-stall, with lint which had been over a small suppurating wound, and it smelt of ammonia. It was believed that death had occurred two days earlier, and that the body had been kept in a warm, dry place.

There was circumstantial evidence against a man named Percy Orlando Rush. He had worn a finger-stall similar to the one found on the body, he worked in a laundry where ammonia was used, burned candles were found at his home, soot was on his clothing, and he had no alibi for the time when Vera Page had disappeared. While Rush was being questioned, a woman in the court shouted "That man is lying, sir."

There was evidently insufficient evidence against Rush, and the jury returned an open verdict. The murderer was never found, and the mystery is unsolved.

The police probably had memories of the recent Wallace case, in which Wallace had been found guilty at his trial, but the verdict was overthrown by the appeal court on the grounds of insufficient evidence.

* * * * *

Happy Holiday all readers. Several books, autographed Richards and Hamilton, available.

ELLIOTT, 01-472-6310 AFTERNOONS

* * * * *

"MADAM" and the PRINCESS SNOWEE wish you, one and all, a VERY HAPPY CHRISTMAS and a BLESSED AND JOYFUL NEW YEAR.

(EXCELSIOR HOUSE)

* * * * *

WANTED: Magnets prior to No. 1138; also No. 1421. Reading copies welcome. Exchanges possible. Details - D. Wright, 13 East Lane, Sandiway, Northwich, Cheshire.

BLAKIANA

Conducted by JOSIE PACKMAN

May I take this opportunity of wishing all my readers a very Happy Christmas with plenty to eat and heaps of lovely reading. When you have recovered from the Christmas fare please try and think of something to write for Blakiana. Material is still very low, but I have received an interesting piece from Mr. Churchill and the usual items from Raymond Cure and William Lister. All my thanks to them.

"THOUGHTS ON E. S. BROOKS"

by C. H. Churchill

When one considers the Sexton Blake saga it comes somewhat of a surprise to discover the large number of stories written by E. S. Brooks over the years. Especially so when one remembers that for most of the period he was producing Sexton Blake yarns he was also having published EVERY WEEK a story in the Nelson Lee Library.

In the Union Jack second series he contributed approximately seventy stories. Half of these were Waldo stories and of the remainder, 14 included Nelson Lee and Nipper in the tales. The first of all was in No. 431 dated 13.1.12, entitled "The Motor Bus Mystery" and the last one was "Village Vengeance" in No. 1530, dated 11.2.33, a Waldo story and just before the good old Union Jack became the Detective Weekly, to nearly everyone's sorrow, I would say.

The Sexton Blake 4d. Library commenced in 1915 and in January 1916 (No. 5) Brooks' first story in this publication appeared entitled "Midst Balkan Perils". Altogether in this series he had 14 stories. The last one was No. 374 in March 1925, "In the Night Watch".

He had six in the Sexton Blake second series, but only two of these were original, the others being reprints of earlier stories. His last effort was in August 1941, No. 6, third series, entitled "The Riddle of the Body on the Road", an original story.

In addition to all these, seven Union Jack and eight Sexton Blake Library ones were attributed to L. H. Brooks, but were almost certainly written by E. S. B.

As mentioned above the Detective Weekly commenced in 1933 and he was soon on the job, his first being as early as No. 11, "The Hollow

Giant". Altogether there were 23 of his stories issued by 1940. However, the last six were reprints of U.J. and S.B.L. yarns.

Mr. Brooks also produced four serials in the D.W., one of which "Enter Sexton Blake" was serialised on the B.B.C. in 1939.

The Waldo series had a good run in the U.J., 35 of them in all and my favourite is the last one "Village Vengeance", No. 1530. A jolly good story in the D.W. is No. 66, "The Mystery of the Miser Landlord" so if anyone fancies a good read I suggest they borrow these two items from Mrs. Packman's Sexton Blake library pronto.

A WAR-TIME CHRISTMAS

by Raymond Cure

Considering the long life of the "Union Jack" and other periodicals containing further adventures of Sexton Blake, there seems to be a shortage of tales with a festive flavour. In later years Gwyn Evans and a few others provided us with a glorious galaxy of Christmas fare. However, as a lover of Christmas I wish there could have been even more. Probably the demand for Christmas fayre was not as keen as in later years. Time was when I would have been inclined to think that the editor or editors were to blame.

The tale we are about to consider was released to the public around December 19th, 1914, not a very happy year, though indeed the two or three Christmas days that followed knew more heartbreaks, sorrow and disillusionment. After all, readers of the Union Jack in those far-off days were bound up with such thoughts as "It will be over by Christmas".

Thousands of young men were flocking to the colours. War-fever reached a height that was to wane later, and as far as England was concerned was never to reach the same fever-like pitch again. Recalling the year 1939, while many answered the call I don't think the pitch was so high. We live and learn. We know now that it was to be Christmas 1918 before the lights of Europe went on again, as after 1939 came the Christmas peace of 1945. However, more of that later.

Reading the editor's personal column of the Union Jack, especially this edition, "A Soldier and a Man", U.J. No. 584, dated December 19, 1914, I realise that the editor of our favourite detective paper was no Scrooge. He had done his best to create in his paper a festive spirit and

that in spite of a war and the lack of an author of the Gwyn Evans variety. (N.B. This story for 1914 was written by G. H. Teed, one of the best authors of the Sexton Blake Saga. J.P.)

Take the cover illustration (the equivalent of the posters outside your local cinema) a little something to whet your taste-buds. The red banner overhead proclaiming "The Union Jack" in snow-capped letters, underneath a smaller banner, white, and heralding "Special Christmas Number" (double number) of Yvonne and Sexton Blake.

As snowflakes fall on an already snow-covered battlefield a lonely soldier sits gazing at a small tree-twig fire, the rising smoke thereof forming a picture of his wife sitting by a table looking at a photograph of her husband, underneath the title "A Soldier and a Man". So far, so good.

Turning the pages one can view a King-size Christmas pudding of the kind your grandmother turned out, as Charles Dickens would say - "Never was there such a pud", round, plump, laced with white sauce and crowned with a piece of red-berried holly. The kind of pudding which puts the tinned variety in the shade. Bottles of wine, a bowl of punch, a large bowl of fruit all surrounded by holly and mistletoe, complete this festive heading.

Two full page drawings of a crowded gambling den, framed in holly, as are most pages. For the rest we must bend to the happenings of the day; World War 1 of 1914. Highlanders, the London Scottish, British Tommies and the rest of the Allied forces storm across our picture pages chasing the Hun from his hide-out.

While the story content is not in the best Christmas tradition one can see the editor has done his best to maintain the festive spirit. As to the tale itself, while having little Christmas content, is a fine tale.

We live in a day when thoughts of yesteryear are "catching on" due, no doubt, to the long running TV series, "Upstairs - Downstairs" and other similar series of the pre-1939 era, but keep in mind that this Union Jack story is no flashback in the mind of an author of 1981, but a writer on the spot. He wrote amid the fervour of the day. Allowing four or five weeks for publication he was really catching the war atmosphere surrounding him. A clever mixture of war and detective work with just a hint of Christmas.

Take a good look at the British Tommy on the cover, dreaming of home and his wife. Feel sorry for him? You should do. As you turn the pages you will learn who he is, and why he is there. You will be able to read his thoughts. How he was reduced from a position of great wealth with a rich, beautiful wife and estate, to a drunken, gambling bum. How he fought his way back to honour and into the arms of his loving wife, though much-wronged wife as he had gambled away her fortune as well as his own. All this with a background of murder, robbery, deceit, and of love, romance, of detective work by Sexton Blake, of social work by Yvonne. (Mademoiselle Yvonne Cartier to you.) Yvonne to Sexton Blake who had a secret crush on her. Blake had a very successful detective career, but a most unsuccessful love-life - still you can't be good at everything.

If you write you find that you cannot please everybody. I have made a point of not revealing the end of a story so as not to spoil it for those who have yet to read it. Recently, a friend in America wrote to say that the only complaint he had of some of my articles was that he never knew how the tale turned out. Reason? Some are not in his collection, he lives too far away to borrow from the O.B.B.C. Library, lastly, owing to age, etc., he could not read as much as he used to. So, seeing that it's Christmas, forgive me in this one instance. I quote from the seventh chapter, headed Xmas Day. Our Tommy from the cover page is home - thanks to Blake and Yvonne, though badly wounded and heavily bandaged - he is home. Enter the wife -

"Oh, my dear - my dear" she said, "I cannot bear to see you thus". The next moment she was wrapped about by his one sound arm and he was whispering over her bent head. "Can you forgive me Marion?" Her soft fingers went towards his lips. "There dear" she said gently, "if there is anything to forgive I have forgiven you. I have ached for you and yearned for you, my dear."

"I was a mad fool Marion, but I have paid the price."

"We have both suffered dearest" she whispered, "but things will be different. Now come with me, I am eager to show you my Xmas present to you." (end of quote)

Guess what it was folks? A little baby son, born after her husband had left home and reared unbeknown to him. Bob and Marion Fenmore

find the white road to trust and happiness which heaven reminds us of each Christmas day. So our story closes late on Christmas Day, 1914, with "That evening there was joy in the Fenmore flat as it had never witnessed. There was feasting and toasting and many cheery tales until the clock struck midnight all joining hands to sing a carol of thankfulness."

To close, let me give you the editor's view of the festive season, he appears to have been a man after my own heart.

"I cannot refrain from once more wishing all and everyone of my readers the old, old wish of a Happy Christmas. I can imagine in my mind's eye the sort of Christmas that I hope every reader is going to have.

"Jolly fine games in the morning, snow-fighting, sleighing, making the snowman and all the fun that can be gained in a snow-covered field. On the frozen pond a group of figures skating with all the vim and vigour of youth. That reader is the sort of Christmas I am wishing you."

Good for the editor. We may, many of us, have lost that vim and vigour of youth, but we do have our memories.

* * * * *

Nelson Lee Column

THE GHOST WITH A SKELETON'S HEAD

by William Lister

It was 11th December in the year 1920. Plans were afoot for the purchase of a large, old house for the excellent purpose of converting it into a cinema for the inhabitants of Bannington; to say nothing of out-lying districts, including the boys of St. Frank's.

Take note that I have made it plain it was in the year 1920. Anyone buying a cinema today, or a building with the intent of converting it into a cinema would be mad. I see even the giant J. Arthur-Rank Picture House magnates, proud owners of the 'Odeon' chain are (according to the papers) putting up 29 of their cinemas for sale, due no doubt to the influence of television, heating costs, and the outrageous price for a seat.

However, our story commences in 1920 when a cinema was a cinema - indeed a magic carpet into the world of comedy, travel,

adventure and romance. So let's wish the boys of St. Frank's every success in their venture.

It's not the cinema as a cinema that is of interest to me, it's the fact it is nearly Christmas and this old building is reputed to be haunted and that is sufficient to appeal to my yuletide tastebuds.

By 18th December of the same year, my hopes bear fruition. From the entrance to this building destined to become a cinema:-

"A strange, terrible figure appeared. It was white, and it had the head of a skeleton! It flitted along over the snow, and finally vanished among some trees."

I wouldn't be the kind of fellow to agree to everything that Edward Oswald Handforth has to say, but at this point I certainly do agree.

"It's nearly Christmas and it doesn't seem right unless everything is covered in snow" exclaimed Handforth. "So let it come. The more snow the merrier."

During the week there are further sightings of the Ghost of Bannington Grange, and a few illustrations to prove it. Schoolboy Levi saw it too.

"As though out of the blackness itself - a figure came into view. It came gliding over the floor noiselessly." Levi's heart nearly stopped beating. By the look of the thing I think my heart would have skipped a jump. It's not only that confounded ghost, it's also the surroundings. Let's join the boys on a ghost hunting expedition.

"The clock of the old Bannington Church was just chiming the hour as we arrived at the gates of the old haunted house. We could not have timed it better. Snow was falling again and the Bannington High Street was deserted. Not a soul was to be seen anywhere. We went up the steps of the snow-covered, gloomy building. Nelson Lee led the way, and we were soon standing in the dark, lofty hall. It was very chilly in there, and all sorts of queer sounds came to us, creaking and groanings."

All this and a ghost thrown in for make-weight!

25th December, 1920. The great day has arrived. The school of St. Frank's has broken up for the holidays. The Bannington Cinema project has been shelved for Christmas - a party of St. Frank's boys approach - 'TREGELLIS CASTLE'.

"The snow came down pitilessly and the wind was biting. This was winter indeed - a real Christmas."

The boys are on the verge of exposing 'A Christmas Plot'.

Mr. Isaac Levi, father of the schoolboy and financial mover behind the Bannington Cinema project, had vanished. A party of the boys, led by Lee, brave the elements.

"The snow whirling round in myriads of flakes. The wind was cutting and snow lay everywhere, feet deep. It had been swept up by the wind and piled against the hedges. They pressed on, bending their heads against the gale. It was almost impossible to face the whirling hail of snowflakes."

Needless to say Mr. Levi was found, villains Webb and Ryan, no doubt behind the hauntings at Bannington, were allowed to go (because it was Christmas).

As to the rest, they all returned to Tregellis Castle to spend the remainder of a happy Christmas.

At this point the editor promises us that the New Year will bring the unfolding of 'The Bannington Grange Mystery'. So far as I am concerned, it's still a mystery. Having on loan, bound volumes of the 'Nelson Lee' I find the series I am reading skips from the December 1920 issue to February 1st, 1921. As there is a caption saying, "These books were loaned to the O.B.B.C. by Mrs. F. Brooks. They were part of Edwy Searles Brooks' personal collection. Treat them with care. Thank you."

Then the whole of January copies of N.L. are missing. There's no 'Mystery of Bannington Grange' which itself is a mystery. I wonder where they are!

"THOSE LOVELY XMAS COVERS"

by C. H. Churchill

There is no doubt that in our youth the day when the Xmas number of our favourite paper appeared on the bookstalls was a red letter one. This, I suggest, was particularly so in the case of the old small series Nelson Lees, largely because these papers usually had most attractively designed covers in more than one colour.

To start with, E. S. Brooks nearly always gave us a super Xmas

story or small series of stories, at this time of the year. In addition, the covers were multicoloured in red and blue usually, and with decorations of holly, etc. (although blue) and of course lashings of snow, very deep! !

The first Xmas number was No. 78, pre St. Frank's, and was dated Dec. 1916. The cover showed a snowy scene with a figure lying in the snow (Eileen Dare actually) and the rogues who put her there making off towards their car in the distance. (One of them was the infamous Jim the Penman.) This cover had an attractive border in red and blue all around.

The next Xmas number was a double one (64 pages), No. 130, containing the famous "Phantom of Tregellis Castle". This is my favourite Xmas story, but the cover was not too wonderful, being rather dark as it showed the "Cavalier" crossing the snow covered lawn at night.

No. 186 "The Mystery of Grey Towers" came next and had a better cover. It showed Sir Edward Handforth's car stranded in a ditch with Sir Edward and Handy & Co. standing around and Grey Towers in the background. Plenty of snow too.

The next year (1919) Brooks gave us three stories for Xmas, but only the cover of the first one was any good. The others were very poor actually. The first one was No. 237, "Dorrie's Christmas Party" and showed a train snowed up in a railway cutting and the Juniors climbing up the steep bank.

Xmas 1920 gave us one of the best covers ever with No. 290, "The Christmas Plot". Tregellis Castle stood there bedecked with snow and two men in the distance gazing fixedly at it. A nice "holly" surround, although blue and red, and a red panel at the top containing Nelson Lee Lib., etc., and at the bottom a blue panel with the story title in red and white.

1921 was a bit of a let down, the picture being confined to half of the page on the left. Although a pretty scene depicting the Juniors attempting to oust the rebels from the Ancient House, with snow falling it is rather spoilt by the other half page being taken up by adverts of the contents.

For 1922 we were right back on top again with a red and blue "Holly" surround and a picture of Fatty Little fleeing from a Ghost and

shedding pastries as he ran. Blue and white N.L. Lib., etc., in a red oblong on top and the title "The Ghost of Somerton Abbey" below.

Two very good covers ushered in Xmas 1923, and the stories were some of the very best Brooks. The first one showed "Santa Claus" in other words Nipper, sitting on a sleigh drawn by the other boys wearing animal head masks. The second number had a very thrilling cover, the Juniors watching a "ghost" gliding down a staircase. The two stories were "The Schoolboy Santa Claus" and "The Ghost of St. Frank's".

"The Ghost of Glenthorne Manor" in No. 498, dated 1924, had a comical cover for a change as it showed Handy & Co. carol singing outside in the snow. A figure was in the distance running in a panic but not from the carol singing by the way. The second story, "The Secret of the Panel" had an undistinguished cover and the less said about it the better.

The last Xmas stories in the old small series Lees were in Nos. 550, 551 and 552 and described Xmas at Dorrimore Castle. Three quite topical covers, the first depicting a Xmas party, having a meal in a gayly decorated room, the second a banqueting Hall all laid ready for a meal and the third showed the guests having a good time on the ice.

As for the Yarns at Xmas in the large new series the drawings were of a different style and system. They were not usually so picturesquely drawn, so many of them having no background although the "Nerki" ones were fairly good.

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DO YOU REMEMBER?

by Roger M. Jenkins

No. 173 - Magnets 1401-3 - Christmas at Hilton Hall Series

At the end of 1934 the Golden Age was wearing a bit thin and base metal was beginning to show here and there. The master hand had lost a little of its cunning and the stories were not quite what they had been. The freshness of the imagery and the zest in writing had suffered some decline. The Christmas series of that year is a fine example of this transitional period.

In a way, it seemed to have everything going for it. There was

the traditional fall of snow and horseplay that went with it. Hilton let fall an incriminating letter which Bunter found, and Charles Hamilton went to some pains to relate a series of incidents that gradually culminated in Bunter blackmailing his way to Hilton Hall in Devonshire and getting the Famous Five included as well, for protection and financial aid.

At this time there was still here and there an example of the old skill in analysing the complexity of human relationships:

There was a determined expression on his thin, rather foxy face. Quite different from the easy-going dandy of the Fifth, Price always knew exactly what he wanted, and meant to get it. At the bottom of his heart he knew that Hilton did not care much for him, and would not have missed him if he had not been there. The friendship existed because it suited Price, and Hilton was too lazy and indolent to think for himself.

Perhaps what was missing in this series was the traditional Christmas atmosphere. The plot revolved around a convict who had escaped from Blackmoor prison: he continually approached Hilton Hall, causing a feeling of menace to arise, but the menace came from outside, not from within (as in most of the celebrated Christmas series) which disturbed the effect of cosy intimacy. The reader was invited to sympathise with the convict on the icy moor, but as his behaviour was as brutal as a wild animal's it was difficult to feel much concern. There was indeed mention of Christmas celebrations, and Price even chose a convict's costume for the fancy dress ball, but an escaped convict could not produce the same comfortable frisson of fear of a Christmas ghost, and this was where the Yuletide atmosphere disintegrated. This might have been an exciting series at another time of the year, but police, armed warders, and bloodhounds were very far from being seasonable Christmas cheer in the Magnet.

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THIS TIME OF YEAR

by Esmond Kadish

This time of the year inevitably sends me scurrying Magnetwards to unearth, yet again, my favourite seasonable Greyfriars story - the Wharton Lodge series of 1933-34. Unlike other Hamilton Christmas stories, which form part of a larger series, it is short and self-

contained, and seems almost custom-tailored for the holidays. What matter if the magic of Hamilton's setting bears little resemblance to Christmas in the big, bad world of today - I can always bask in the cosy glow of well-being engendered by Christmas at Wharton Lodge with Harry Wharton and Co. No doubt this demonstrates how out of touch I am with reality - as if anyone today can possibly ignore it, or escape from it!

Oddly enough, another series which I re-read constantly was written at the same time. It is the "Old-Fashioned Christmas" series, written by John Wheway, under the pen-name of Hilda Richards, for the "Schoolgirl" of 1933-34, and features, of course, Barbara Redfern and Co. of Cliff House School. Babs and Co. are to spend Christmas, exactly as it would have been a hundred years earlier, in 1833, in a romantic old castle called, appropriately enough, Christmas Castle. They dress the part, too, and if the costumes - crinolines and petticoats - as pictured by Laidler, seem to be reminiscent of a slightly later Victorian period, they look very fetching in his illustrations. The Victorian setting might seem, at first hand, to have come straight from a novel by Georgette Heyer or Barbara Cartland, (no disrespect intended to these two ladies!) but there the resemblance ends. The setting is simply ideal for the holiday season, and the story has a persuasive charm which envelopes you once you have dipped into it.

The plot is familiar enough, and concerns the befriending by Babs and Co., of a "waif" and her brother - Olive and Jacob Christmas - who turn out to be (surprise, surprise!) the true heirs to the castle which Clara Trevlyn's father has leased for the holiday season. There is the missing part of a will to be searched for before the pair can claim their inheritance, and they are helped by the Cliff House party, and hindered in their efforts by an unscrupulous (of course!) relative, garbed as the ghost of an eighteenth century highwayman, known, colourfully, as "Mad Meredith". He is naturally seeking to find the will himself and destroy it, thus claiming the estate for himself. At one point, the ungallant fellow waylays the Cliff House party and robs them, but as this is really 1933, and not 1833, none of the girls swoons, even though Jack Trevlyn is wounded by a shot from the rascal's pistol. Eventually, all comes out right, but not before some stirring adventures befall the Cliff House

chums, and the customary seasonable events and ingredients are woven delightfully into the plot.

In fact, the story has loads of "atmosphere". Apart from Mad Meredith, there is a ghost, called the Red Crusader, whom a palpitating Bessie Bunter, clad as Santa Claus and carrying an ancient blunderbuss, encounters one spectral night. There are old-fashioned games to be played:- Hoodman Blind, Hot Cockles, and Snapdragon, where you pour spirit over a dish of raisins, set light to them, and scramble for the hot raisins. Bessie, of course, ends up with the empty dish perched precariously on her head. There is even an ingenious cryptogram which helps to lead the girls to the missing portion of the will, and the puzzle is actually drawn into the text so that readers may solve it in company with their Cliff House favourites. Naturally, there are the usual seasonable activities of carol-singing, feasting and merrymaking to accompany all this.

Above all, there is John Wheway at his very best, writing passages redolent of Christmas which warm the heart of impressionable old softies like myself. London, for instance, where "the lamps flared aurora-like in the white mist, and the winking electric signs, reflected in the mirror-like pavement, added a colourful gaiety". Or, on the way to Christmas Castle:- "On sped the car, the howl of the wind blending with the frosty crackle of the road under the tyres . . . a reluctant moon came peering behind the silver-lined edge of a black cloud, showering a fairy-like radiance upon the scene." Later on, "the trees waved white-laden welcome to the adventure which lay ahead". Finally, who can fail to be charmed by this description of the old Baronial Hall of Christmas Castle: "Its stern old oil portraits, framed in frolicsome wreaths of bright red berries and shining green, its long refectory table glistening with white napery and gleaming silver, and huge tankards and brilliant glassware, scintillating in the light".

Ah, well . . . bring me the individual frozen turkey pie, waiter, and, to follow, I'll have a portion of Mrs. Peek's pre-packaged genuine Christmas pud. please; or, maybe a Lyon's mince pie - that is, if you can tear yourself away for a moment, from that plump, bespectacled youth in the tight check trousers. (Haven't I seen him before somewhere?)

At least, no-one can say that I don't keep my feet firmly planted in the nineteen-eighties!

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WITH CHRISTMAS IN MIND

by Mary Cadogan

THE VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS BOOK by Antony and Peter Miall (Dent £3.50) is a large and well-produced volume that bursts at the seams with Christmassy cheer in the shape of seasonal prose, pictures and poems. Every aspect of the Victorian Christmas is covered from its preparations (present buying and making, cards and decorations) to the Day itself (stockings, mattins, enormous dinners, parties and charades). And it takes in pantomimes and Christmas charity too. The text is lively and entertaining, but the book would be worth buying for the illustrations alone; there are masses in black and white and 16 pages in full colour. It strikes just the right note of nostalgia to put everyone in the perfect mood for Christmas.

Some time ago in the pages of the C.D. there was an attractive review of a facsimile reprint of PETER PAN with Mabel Lucie Attwell's inviting illustrations. The same publishers (Hodder & Stoughton) have now brought out a facsimile of their 1916 edition of Charles Kingsley's THE WATER BABIES. This is another beautifully produced book and it has superb pictures by Jessie Willcox Smith (12 in colour) and line illustrations on almost every one of its 240 large pages. A collector's item, worth its price of £10.95, especially if you happen to receive some Christmas book tokens.

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CHRISTMAS MEMORY-TEASER

A couple of years ago we ran a "memory of old songs" competition in C.D. It was very popular indeed, and, since then, we have had a great many requests for another one. So, here for Christmas, is just that. Following are a number of extracts from the lyrics of songs which were very popular in their day. Can you give the TITLES of the songs from which the extracts come? Jot down the titles on a sheet of paper, making sure to number each one in the order as given. Add your name and address, and post to the Editor of C.D.

It is really just for your amusement, but, just to add to the fun, we shall send a copy of the Sexton Blake Library containing an old Kestrel story, "The Case of the Bendigo Heirloom", nicely bound in red with the title in gold (a choice little item from the Fayne collection) to the sender of the first all-correct solution opened. If no entirely correct solution is received, £1 will be sent to each of the two senders of the first second-best solutions received. Not much, but it's just for fun. Have a shot at it.

You could try out the little contest at your own family Christmas party, and club secretaries might try it out on their next meetings, and let us know how the various clubs coped with it.

1. It's a corner of Heaven itself, though it's only a tumbledown nest.
2. They fly so high, nearly reach the sky.
3. Nearly everyone knows me, from Smith to Lord Rose'bry.
4. Don't get the breeze up.

cont'd ...

5. Go to sleep my baby, close your pretty eyes.
6. There would be such wonderful things to do.
7. They sprinkled it with stardust just to make the sham rocks grow.
8. God gave thee to me, and mine thou shalt be.
9. They can play a bugle call like you never heard before.
10. Let me put my arms around you; I could never live without you.
11. They all go out for a walk, walk, walk; a quiet old spoon and a talk, talk, talk.
12. When the sun has gone to rest, that's the time that we love best.
13. Come with the love-light gleaming, in your dear eyes of blue.
14. Singing ay-ay-yippee-yippee-ay.
15. Well, what do you know, she smiled at me.
16. Though there's one motor gone, we can still carry on.
17. God dwells above you, knows how I love you.
18. When they only paid him thirty bob a week, he called me his little turtle-dove.
19. So kiss me, my sweet, and so let us part.
20. Many a heart is aching, if you could read them all.
21. Why don't you make your way there, go there, stay there?

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News of the Old Boys' Book Clubs.....

MIDLAND

OCTOBER 1981

We just reached double figures with an attendance of ten. It was a cheery meeting and there was never a dull moment.

We sorted out a problem which has come up lately. We have our meeting in a Quaker establishment and the rules:- no smoking, no intoxicants, no animals and a prompt vacation of the premises at 9.30 - have not been carefully observed. We decided in future to observe them. We do not wish to lose our cosy room.

Our usual features, Anniversary Number and Collectors' Item, were on display. Neither was connected with Charles Hamilton's work, which was unusual. The A.N. was Boys' Magazine No. 347, published on 27th November, 1928 and 53 years old to the day. The C.I. was a Dixon Hawke Library (4d.) and published by D. C. Thomson. It was No. 124 entitled "The Council of Six" and date of publication - 31st March, 1924. Tom Porter's comprehensive collection never ceases to excite wonder.

Vince Loveday has recently done a valuable piece of research on the Howard Baker

books. All members of our club know exactly what Magnets have been reprinted and those that have not. He has received a warm letter of appreciation from Howard Baker.

The game 20 Questions was played. The winners were Vince Loveday, your correspondent and Geoff Lardner.

An amusing reading was given by your correspondent from Chapter 23 of "Billy Bunter's Rebellion". Bunter tricks Quelch and locks him in the punishment room. When asked by the Removites where Quelch is Bunter calmly tells them that Quelch has had to rush off to catch a train, as his grandmother was very ill with apoplexy or appendicitis.

Another game was Greyfriars Bingo. Geoff Lardner won. He is always amongst the winners. Must have second sight or something.

We left strictly on time - 9.30 p.m. and we meet again on 24th November and 15th December.

JACK BELLFIELD - Correspondent.

CAMBRIDGE

We met at the home of Vic. Hearn on Sunday, 1 November, 1981.

The Secretary reported receipt of a letter from Neville Wood offering to come up and give a talk on detective stories; Neville suggested several subjects, and it was agreed that a talk on "Tools of the Trade" would be welcome. Adrian Parkins and Mike Rouse reported on the convention on Comics of 1981 recently held. This had dealt mainly with American comics. Mike Rouse produced various items, including sets of postcards on comic characters, including "Weary Willie and Tired Tim".

The next meeting on 6th December would be at the home of Edward Witten and will include a talk on stories with a relation to the "regression" theme, and Christmas items.

Bill Lofts spoke about Frank Minnett, a minor artist of the 1930's, Minnett got a certain amount of work from Fleetway House, but at one time worked as a road sweeper. After the demise of the Magnet, Billy Bunter became a strip picture character in "Knockout". Chapman appears to have been the artist for the first few strips, but then gave up this work, and Minnett got the job of carrying on with the strip series. Minnett's Bunter was not up to Chapman's standard, but he continued with the work until around 1961. Mike Rouse produced various issues of Knockout showing the difference between the work of Minnett and his successor. Bill commented that while the Magnet had run for 32 years the Knockout with Bunter had run for 35 years. Bill added that while Charles Hamilton did not write the strip stories he received a weekly "royalty" while these were running.

Bill followed up this talk with a revelation that showed his Nelson Lee touch. The O. B. B. C. movement began in 1947 with the formation of the London Club. During a visit to the West Country Bill had found that a "Magnet Club" existed in Bath in 1939. Bill had traced and met both the Secretary and the Chairman of this Bath Club and gathered much information about it.

Bill was warmly applauded for these talks.

Mike Rouse spoke about "Weary Willie and Tired Tim", probably the longest running of all comic characters. He spoke of their creator, Tom Brown, and of other artists, including Percy Cocking. He illustrated his talk with many copies of "Chips", with postcards, and with a number of proofs.

After enjoying Mrs. Hearn's sumptuous tea, Bill Thurbon said that he thought one of the most interesting things about Charles Hamilton was the dominance he seemed to have over the A. P. publications from the time he began the St. Jim's stories until the final ending of Magnet

and Gem in 1940. An interesting discussion followed.

The meeting closed with a hearty vote of thanks to Vic. and Mrs. Hearn for their hospitality.

LONDON

An interesting disquisition about the Bath Magnet Club that existed in the 1930's was rendered by Bill Lofts. This discourse was enjoyed by an excellent gathering of members at the Walthamstow meeting. Bill had a couple of photostat copies of the magazine which this forerunner of the present day clubs published. The Bath Club dealt with the Magnet and the Companion papers and also Nelson Lee. Generous applause was accorded to Bill at the conclusion of this interesting item.

Bill Bradford gave an interesting talk on his personal selection of Desert Island Authors, Josie Packman's Schools Quiz was won by the old firm of Jenkins and Lawrence.

Eric Lawrence had some Clubland Hero tapes for playing over and the one chosen by those present was that of Leslie Charteris.

Then it was the turn of Laurie Sutton to render his fine treatise on Hamilton and other authors who contributed to the Vanguard, School and Sport and other old books and papers. Laurie received the acclamations of the interested listeners at the conclusion of his discourse.

Down Memory Lane, read by Bob Blythe, dealt with the Leytonstone and Dollis Hill meetings in November and December 1964.

One interesting visitor was Darrell Swift who came along with Bill Lofts.

The Christmas meeting will be held at the home of Bill and Thelma Bradford, 5 Queen Anne's Grove, Ealing, WS 3XP, 'Phone 579 4670, on Sunday, 13th December. Kindly advise if intending to be present. A full tea will be available.

Votes of thanks to the ladies for making the tea were expressed.

BEN WHITER

379th Meeting, Saturday,
14th November, 1981.

NORTHERN

Fourteen members were present. A welcome was given to Nandu Thalange from Bolton, and Michael Bentley - both of whom making return visits. Nandu had spent the afternoon in Wakefield, viewing the extensive library of Geoffrey Good. We were pleased to welcome a first-time visitor, Keith Smith.

Copies of the "Charles Hamilton Calendar" were passed round for inspection, along with a bound volume of "Vanity Fair" and "The Collectors' Miscellany". Darrell gave a report of his recent visit to the London O.B.B.C. Greetings had been exchanged between the two Clubs.

Mollie gave a talk on "My Collection" - how she had read some of the old girls' papers when a girl. Then, how she had progressed to THE MAGNET and never really thought that it was perhaps a boys' paper! Over the years, Mollie had built up quite a collection of various material and her library consisted of adult fiction and crime, side by side with children's literature - Enid Blyton, Jennings, William and her recent "discovery" the Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew stories, from America. Mollie had also brought along a few of the "give-aways" presented with some of the old papers.

During refreshments, Michael Bentley produced a box of items for sale - most of which were quickly disposed of. Harry Blowers presented a quiz.

Our next meeting will be the Christmas party on Saturday, 12th December. Everyone is most welcome. Please note the different timing - 4 p.m. for tea at 5 p.m. We meet at the Education Centre, Swarthmore, Leeds 3.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

The Postman Called

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

GORDON HUDSON (Ouston): Biggles fans will no doubt be pleased to learn there is a new biography of Capt. W. E. Johns available in the shops now. "By jove, Biggles" is by Peter Berresford Ellis and Piers Williams and is published by W. H. Allen at £8.95. The first half of the book refers to his days in the Royal Flying Corps and the other half to his writings. The appendixes should be of extreme interest to collectors for the authors have listed all the books written by Johns both under characters and chronological order. There are 102 Biggles books listed. Some of the stories are shown as having first appeared in "Popular Flying" and "Modern Boy" and then Boys' Friend Library before appearing in hardbacks. The authors state that there is some confusion over the earlier books as they first appeared under one title which was then changed but that later a completely new story was issued assuming the original title which had been discarded. They also state that the author left one uncompleted manuscript at his death. There are copious references to all the sources of information, but one very up-to-date one that caught my eye was Collectors' Digest, January 1981.

JACK MURTAGH (New Zealand): Keep up the good work! The arrival of C.D. is the brightest spot in the month, and the Annual a blaze of glory in the year.

JIM COOK (New Zealand): Re Bill Lofts' desire to know if Edwy Brooks wrote all the Trackett Grim pieces in the St. Frank's Magazine:- Here is a reply he wrote to a reader in New Series No. 122, Sept. 1928: "Yes, Micky Sullivan, I did write all the old St. Frank's magazines, of course, including the Clarence Fellowes' Parodies..." I feel sure that answers Bill's problem.

JOHN McMAHON (Tannochside): I attended a "Comic (ugh!) Display" in the Glasgow McClellan Galleries recently. The exhibits were mainly American pulps. But I met one chap who had a beautiful assortment of Old Boys' Books. He had a copy of every old magazine I could recall, but he would not sell any of them at any price.

D. WRIGHT (Northwich): An article by Tony Glynn in C.D. has solved a problem for me caused by both Time and poor memory. I found that I was acquainted with the Billionaireing Series and the Popper Island Series. Yet I know I was too young to be taking the Magnet when they were first issued. I didn't start buying new Magnets till 1938, but Mr. Glynn's mention of Sid's second-hand bookshop was the answer. No doubt Sid was the Sid Gill of Princess Rd., Moss Side, who kept me supplied with the older numbers. Thanks! Now I can start worrying about something else.

M. WILLMORE (Oldham): Congratulations on the excellence of the Digest, which always gives me great enjoyment, particularly the Greyfriars pieces, for the Frank Richards' stories are my real interest in the field of schoolboy fiction. I especially enjoyed the article by M. M. Hall in the Coral Jubilee issue.

G. W. MASON (Torquay): Mr. Wernham has most adequately and ably expressed our sentiments in the middle pages of the wonderful Coral Jubilee issue, regarding the fine record of C.D. Mr. Wernham's faithful bookbinder, like the harvester in the cornfield, has indeed laboured long, and has bound the leaves of a "golden harvest" unsurpassed in its own particular field of literature.

J.E.M. (Brighton): Congratulations on the Coral Jubilee issue of C.D., a total delight from your heart-warming Editorial to Len Hawkey's appropriately entitled "When You and I Were Young". What an incredible publishing triumph C.D. is! I also much enjoyed Chris Lowder's "Nuts and Bolts" (Blakiana); background information on favourite authors is always welcome.

To Jack Adrian (The Postman Called) and his friend Frank Pepper, my sincere apologies

for confusing the source of the Rockfist Rogan stories!

On the subject of PC 49 you are, I am sure, correct about that old music hall song. Certainly, like "Convict 99", "PC 49" has a long history. As a sort of archetypal bobbie, "49" long predates the radio series about which Brian Doyle writes so informatively.

W. T. THURBON (Cambridge): On the correspondence in the present "Digest" I agree with Brian Doyle and Simon Garnett that "PC 49" was a character in a Radio series around the late 1940's or early 50's. But I also think that there was either a character, or possibly a comic song, before World War I about "PC 49". Memory begins to fail, but I still think it was something of a catchword at that time.

I was also interested in Mr. Hawkey's reference to the Young Folks Tales. These I think had green covers. I remember them from about 1910 or 11. Both the "Mabel" and the "King Pippin" series. Our greatly missed friend, the late Gerry Allison, was a great fan of the Pippin tales, and wrote an article about them in an early "Annual". I recall in the "Pippin" series that the king rode on a giant hawk - curiously enough this reference has brought to my mind a clear vision of part of the plot of one of the "Mabel" stories. How the Digest brings back long forgotten memories.

(Editorial Comment: The late Otto Maurer wrote a number of fine articles on "Young Folks Tales" and "Tales for Little People" in the C.D. Annuals of the early Sixties.)

Fr. F. HERTZBERG (Wirral): As the person who prompted Mr. Lofts to ask Mr. Blythe for the Trackett Grim list, I was interested in his statement that that detective was definitely not intended to be 'a take-off of Sherlock Holmes'. It is surely inevitable that all fictional detectives must owe something to Holmes, even if it is an intention of being totally different! It is notable that Brooks gave his slapstick detective the usual formula name, as defined by Ellery Queen - a bi-syllabic first name and a monosyllabic surname. Certainly, as we might expect, the artist (Parlett?) responsible for the Trackett Grim strip appearances dressed him in the usual 'Sherlock Holmes' style of deerstalker cap and curved pipe.

Two grouse about the issue, and both about money. It is neither necessary nor desirable for Mr. Lowder to translate the £sd amounts he quotes into decimal equivalents. And, yes, typewriter ribbons, like so much else, appear to be very expensive, especially to those having much to do with old papers marked with cover prices of 2d. But, as I have commented so often, allowances must be made for current earnings. I have just noticed an advertisement in a 1948 Picture Post for a ball-point pen: 8/6. As earnings have increased ten times since then, we should expect to pay over £4 now, but do not.

(Editorial Comment: "Earnings" and "wages" are not always the same thing in these days, though that is beside the point. We know what Fr. Hertzberg means, and he is right, though a ballpoint pen is not a good example to take. Ballpoints were new in 1948, and the early ones were comparatively expensive. But within a few years mass production came in, and prices tumbled. The Ninepenny Bics were first-class and reasonably priced ballpoints, and, indeed, still are. On the very first morning that Decimal Currency came in I entered my newsagent's shop in Surbiton. "A ninepenny Bic, please," I requested. The young lady handed me one. "Five pence, please." "But that's a shilling," I protested. Almost tearfully she whispered: "That's what I have been told to charge."

And that sort of thing has been going on ever since, and we don't necessarily have to be familiar with old 2d. papers to see what is going on under our noses. Wages are a major cause of inflation - but not the only one.)

Rev. J. P. H. HOBSON (Reigate): I do not think I have ever seen "Chums" mentioned in C.D. I wonder why. It was so much better than B. O. P.

W. O. G. LOFTS (London): I can assure Nic Gayle that many people have expressed the view that after 35 years of the C.D. everything must have been written by now - and I strongly disagree with them. There are dozens of subjects and themes not yet touched on. Nobody for instance has ever written about the checkered career of Ferrers Locke who featured in so much of Charles Hamilton's and detective stories. Tom Tartar's Schooldays was written by E. Harcourt Burray - reputed to be one of the best of the Victorian boys authors - though his style had become completely outdated by even 1900. In answer to Norman Kadish, the artist who took over from H. F. Foxwell was B. O. Wymer. Original painting of Foxwell covers were sold at auction for over £50 each some years ago.

REG MOSS (New Zealand): Two matters mentioned in recent Digests have drawn my attention. Firstly the use of the term 'jigger' for bicycle. This was commonly used in Wellington and I expect in New Zealand as a whole during the 1920's and 1930's. At both Primary and Secondary Schools we would refer to a bicycle as a 'jigger' -- Lend'us your jigger? Secondly the 'Americanese' in the Magnet. I have always taken these expressions to be the vivid imagination of Frank Richards. Nowhere else have I seen them in print or heard them spoken. That is - until the other day. New Zealand newspapers have just published a report from Cape Town on the arrival of the yacht 'Ceramco' in the round-the-world race. BBC correspondent, Bob Fisher, watched the arrival and reported - 'Everyone in Cape Town thinks they are the bees knees'. Shades of F. T. Fish?

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P.C. 49 - EAGLE'S BACKWARD POLICEMAN

by F. Hertzberg

Simon Garrett is quite right, P.C. 49 isn't the best remembered of Eagle's characters. This is not, however, because he was bumbling, but because he was misplaced. The slow and careful way in which his stories were built up would have been more appropriate in an adult newspaper strip than a children's weekly.

But in one way he most certainly was backward - his uniform.

In 1947 recommendations were made regarding police dress.

The main recommendations were for the abolition of the tunic and belt where still worn, and the substitution of the civilian jacket with collar and tie for the close-necked jacket. As a member of the Metropolitan Police, 49 should have ceased to wear the tunic and belt in 1948, but hadn't eighteen months later in the first issue of Eagle. He should have adopted the open collared jacket in August 1948, but did not for another four years, even though other constables drawn by the same artist (some of them even in his own strip) had done so. Even when he at last made the change, six months later he turned up at the boys' club Christmas party in the old uniform: someone must have had a strong word with him, for in the next issue, at the same party, he is back in the new one.*

Perhaps it wasn't so much backwardness as a realisation of just where such changes were leading. Surely he wouldn't approve of the constables without caps, the general abandonment of any jacket at all (no need for a 'shirt sleeves order'), the selling-off of whistles?

* The close-collared jacket was retained for night and winter duty until about 1950 in some Forces, and is still used in the latter case by the New York Police Department. 49 would have obviously have been happier with the more traditionally minded City of London Force, who are the only ones to retain the duty sleeve band and traditional helmet and one of the few to use the cape; the two City constables at the top of the steps of Saint Paul's at the Royal wedding looked splendid in their ceremonial tunics.

