

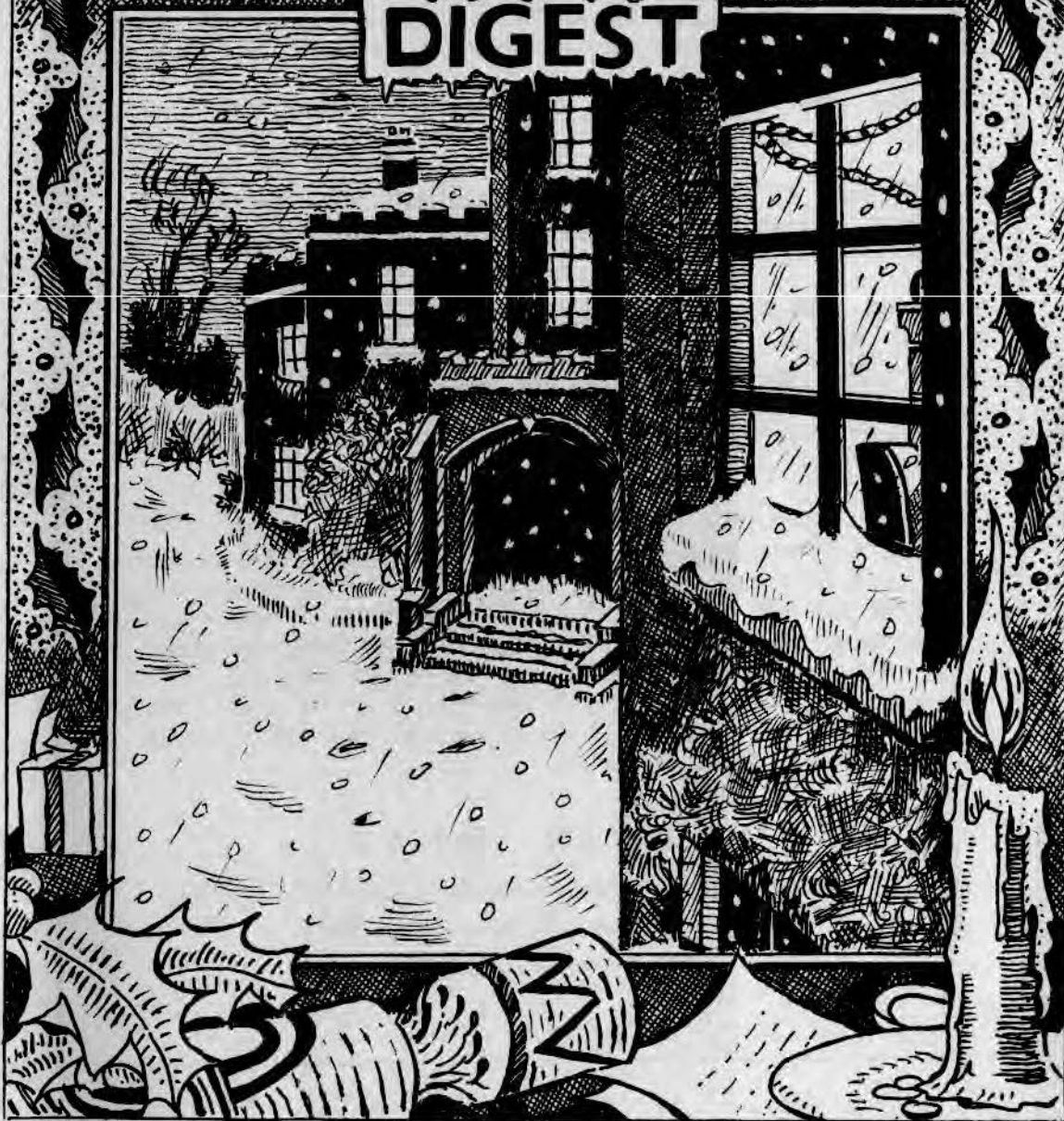
DECEMBER
1985

STORY PAPER

VOL. 39, N°468

52p

COLLECTORS DIGEST



BEST WISHES for Xmas and the New Year to all my Customers and Friends.

Lots of bargains for lots as advertised in last month's C.D.

ALDINES: thousands! Boys' Friend Library, Britons' Own Library, Boys' 1st rate pocket library; O'erland & Sea Library, Robin Hood, Claud Duval.

Special offer of True Blue Library, 50 for £20. 45 copies of the rare Aldines Invention, Travel, & Adventure Library £90.

ORIGINAL ARTWORK: Eagle, Dan Dare, and Sexton Blake Library (covers by E. Parker). Sorry - no lists of these. Have to be seen!

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The Editors Christmas Chat

MEMORIES OF ELIZABETH GERTRUDE

In the forthcoming 1985 C.D. Annual there is a tip-top article by our contributor, Esmond Kadish. It is fascinating throughout, but what intrigued me most is a section devoted to the consideration of Miss Bessie Bunter at the hands of one of the later writers handling the Cliff House saga.

Normally, I have not much time for writers who take over other people's creations and characters and change them beyond recognition. In the case of Bessie, however, the new writer seems

to have made sweeping changes for the better.

As a youngster, I took the School Friend regularly from No. 1 for a period of something just under two years. I recall with pleasure, though I have never read them since those early days, the series concerned with Augusta Anstruther-Browne and Peggy Preston, characters and a theme which owed more than a little to the Bounder-Redwing stories in the Magnet of the white covers; I recall a rebellion against the Loder-like prefect, Connie Jackson; and, best of all, the "lost heir" theme of the holiday series which introduced Grace Kelwyn to School Friend readers. I have an idea that the Grace Kelwyn series was set against a background of the Amazon jungles, though my memories may be playing tricks.

I still have a large number of those early copies, some of the earliest bound in my bookcases, and I cherish them though I may never read them again. Then, after nearly two years, something caused my enthusiasm to lose its fire, and I dropped the paper, never to buy it or read it again. I fancy that the authorship may have changed, and, for my tastes, the quality of the tales deteriorated, but I don't know. Maybe it was the introduction of yet another boys' school near Cliff House. It didn't make sense.

Charles Hamilton, of course, wrote just a handful of stories to give the paper a send-off, as it were. It was he who, in the first number, introduced Bessie Bunter, complete with parrot, and squeaking "I say, you girls!" It was he who, in his fourth tale in the paper, turned Bessie into "The Cliff House Ventriloquist" - a female version, from top to toe, of his most successful character, Billy Bunter.

Looking back on it now, we can see full well what a great mistake he made. Billy Bunter, with his vast collection of unwholesome traits, was a joy. The same traits transferred to a girl were repulsive.

Psychologically it was wrong, too. I think it would be most unlikely for all the bad traits to appear in every member of a family. Families are normally memorable for "unlikes". Even twins, who may look alike, are seldom if ever the same fundamentally.

Hamilton would have been wiser to have made Bessie a striking contrast, so far as character and characteristics went - but he was aiming to repeat the success of Billy Bunter in everything he handled.

I have commented before that, in transferring the mannerisms of Billy to so many of his "fatties", Hamilton ran the serious risk

of undermining the value of the schoolboy who was to be the greatest money-spinner in school fiction.

So, much as I dislike people who tamper with the creations of other and more gifted writers, I take off my hat to whoever turned Elizabeth Gertrude from her Billy-like propensities and made her more feminine.

STAGE STRUCK

Last month we reproduced on our own cover, the Macdonald cover illustrating one of the classic tales of the blue Gem - from the autumn of 1912. A great tale which has always been one of my personal favourites. Maybe there was a little bit of Monty Lowther in me. He starred in "Stage Struck" and, later, in "The Call of the Cinema" - while I myself, though a schoolmaster through and through and dearly loving the job, always had close links with the professional and amateur stage and with the cinema.

But back to that cover. Delightful, but so absurd. Dr. Holmes striding on to the stage in cap and gown. It is most unlikely that the Head, travelling to a distant town, would have gone wearing his scholastic armour - and even if the doorkeeper and stage hands had allowed him to reach the stage, it was indeed incongruous to see him striding thereon in cap and gown.

Presumably a rehearsal was in progress, otherwise it would seem unlikely that Lowther would have been dancing round in his Eton suit. But, if it is a rehearsal, surely the lady in the picture would not be wearing an ankle-length dress and feathered hat for her dance routine, looking like a refugee from "The Country Girl" or some similar production of the times.

Macdonald was by no means the only artist who, now and then, did not use his common sense.

-- TO READ ON THE TRAIN --

A couple of items in this month's SPCD bring trains to my mind. One is Roger Jenkins' loving look at the 1930 Gem story "A Knock-out for Knox". I recall that I had given up the Gem at the time - the long run of sub stories had been the cause of it, and I regarded it as a waste of money to pay out 2d for something I would find unreadable. Then one Wednesday, I set out, after afternoon classes, for London, to pay my weekly visit to Wardour Street, probably, and then to go on to the Holborn Empire or the

Trocadero. On Surbiton station, I saw the Gem on sale at the bookstall. For old times sake - or, more likely, just for something to read on the train - I bought a copy. It was "A Knockout for Knox". I recall glancing lazily through the opening pars, and then I sat up and took notice. I realised it was a genuine story, and started to read in earnest.

It took me back to the Gem, but the story proved only a flash in the pan. By the following week the subs were back, apparently for good. It led me eventually to start my campaign with editor Down for the old stories to be reprinted in the Gem, starting with "Tom Merry - New Boy". The campaign, as C.D. readers know, was a success. The sub stories ended, and the grand old yarns came back.

I have always been thankful for it. I feel sure that the change in policy gave the Gem nearly another decade of life which it would never have had.

Years earlier I had given up the Magnet for the same reason - the glut of sub stories. Once again a train journey brought me back to the fold, and I am reminded of it by Danny's reference to the First Rebel series which started a reprint in the S.O.L. in December 1935.

Early in 1925 I was travelling, for some reason, on the branch line which ran from Grays in Essex, via Ockendon and Upminster to Romford. (I wonder whether that branch line is still open. It is countless years since I rode on it.)

On Grays station I bought a Magnet at the bookstall, just for something to read. My boredom turned to astonished pleasure. It was a genuine story, in the middle of the first Wharton-Rebel series. Later I wrote off to the Fleetway House for the earlier stories in the series (you could get back numbers then, providing they were not more than 3 months old). And I put in my order for the regular delivery of the Magnet the next day - and my news-agent delivered it to me from that time till the paper ended in 1940.

CHRISTMAS

And it's Christmas again. How the past year has flown. Where have all the days gone?

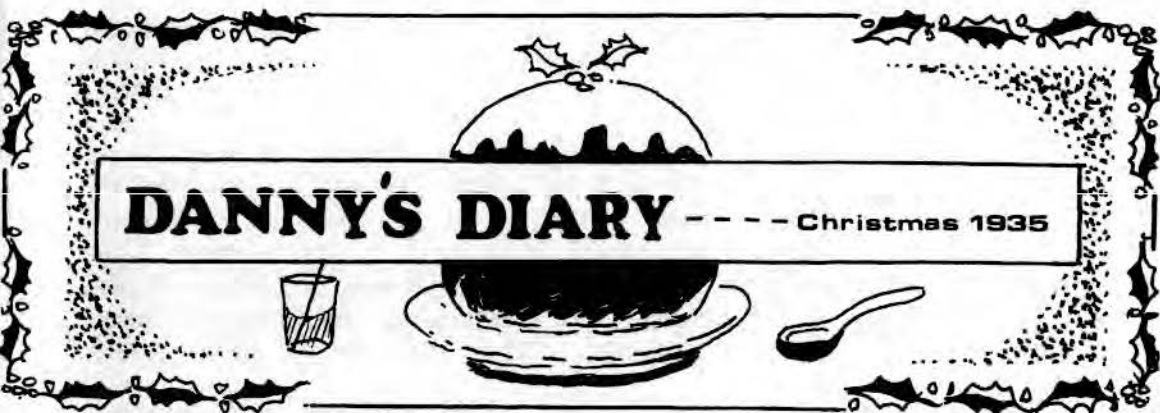
I wish all my readers, the world over, the happiest and most blessed of Christmases. We, in the hobby circle, are lucky. We

can lift a latch, a door swings open, and we can go back to happier times with the old papers. Rosy vistas touched with gold are ours when we pass an hour or two in the company of one of our favourite authors.

May happiness, peace, and love be yours in abundance this coming Yuletide. God bless you, every one.

THE EDITOR

* * * * *



DECEMBER 1935

In Modern Boy the very long Captain Justice series about the Science City has continued through the month and ended at last. First of the month is "Rescue of Captain Justice". The giant airship, Flying Cloud, has gone to the rescue of Justice and his comrades, who are stranded on a sandbank in the middle of a crocodile-infested river, with fierce black warriors prowling on the banks.

Then, in the Modern Boys' 44-page Christmas Number (still at tuppence) came "Black Napoleon" in which Justice throws down the gauntlet in daring challenge to the Master Magician of the Science City. Lovely title for this tale where the villain has set himself up as science master of the world.

And then the final tale of the series "Invaders from Space". Down from the skies they floated, Captain Justice and his army of four fearless adventurers, with nothing but pluck to aid them in their final invasion of the Black Napoleon's Science City. The

final of the month brought "Midge & Co. Make Merry", with a Christmas party and Captain Justice in on the job.

The Biggles serial "Biggles Flies East" has gone on through the month and come to an end in the last issue of December. There is a new series about Football by George E. Rochester - and the Editor announces that King of the Islands will be back in the next issue - next year.

The new parliament has opened, following the election which the Tories won, and the day before parliament opened, the King's sister, Princess Victoria, died.

Colonel and Mrs. Lingbergh have never got over the kidnapping and murder of their baby son, and they have now left the United States, with their second child, and have come to live in Britain for good. I don't blame them.

Another great month in the fourpenny monthlies. A magnificent though sombre tale in the Schoolboys' Own Library is "Bunter, the Mischief-Maker". Owing to the activities of Bunter, Harry Wharton falls out with his friends, and there is a split in the Famous Five. As a result, Wharton goes off to spend Christmas, in Monte Carlo, with Vernon-Smith of all people. He finishes up spending Christmas holidays with the Rookwood chums. This will go on next month, of course.

The other S.O.L. is also great. It is "Captain and Slacker". Cardew succeeds in putting Tom Merry in the wrong, and Cardew is all out to usurp Tom's place as junior captain. Great stuff.

A magnificent tale of Sexton Blake, with Granite Grant and Mademoiselle Julie in the S.B.L. This is "The Soho Cafe Crime". A soldier in the trenches, years earlier, had found a very heavy piece of metal, which he popped in his rucksack and kept. Years later, this piece of metal led to a gorgeous case for Sexton Blake.

Another good S.B.L. is "The Secret Inquest" by Allan Blair. Owing to a report from a journalist, Blake gets an order to exhume the body of an ex-convict. When the grave is opened, it is found to be empty. "The Case of the Murdered Commissionaire" by John G. Brandon is good, too, and it brings in the Hon. Ronald Purvale. Brandon at his best.

In the B.F.L. Captain Justice stars in an exciting novel entitled "The World in Darkness".

For Christmas there is a new Agatha Christie story entitled "The A.B.C. Murders" and Doug bought it for himself for 7/6, and

he let me read it. It's just great. It is the third Christie in the year, all starring Hercule Poirot.

Some really top-hole films on at the pictures this month. A fast action thriller is "G-Men" which stars James Cagney. It's fairly violent, and I loved every minute of it. A gangster drama with a difference

The only good thing I can say about Bette Davis in "Men on her Mind" is that it is short, lasting only just an hour. A novelettish affair that sisters and mums read with their feet up, in "Smart Novels", in the afternoon while the youngsters are at school. Another picture on the short side, but quite good entertainment, was "The Trunk Mystery", with Franchot Tone.

A British picture I liked a lot was "The Clairvoyant", about a fake fortune teller who foretold a disaster which came true. It stars Claud Rains, Fay Wray, and Felix Aylmer.

A gorgeous film about Richard the Lionheart - spectacle with a capital S - was "The Crusades". This one ran over two hours and starred Henry Wilcoxon, Loretta Young, and a host of other big stars.

A pretty good comedy about a girl who married a wastrel in order to reform him is "No More Ladies" starring Joan Crawford, Robert Montgomery, Franchot Tone, and plenty more.

A British historical film is "Drake of England" which starred Matheson Lang. On the afternoon of Boxing Day the whole family went to see a British film "Scrooge", starring Seymour Hicks. It was, of course, the Dickens story, and was good and seasonable.

While on the subject of films, a huge new British studio has been built and newly opened at a place called Elstree. It is open for hire to film makers, and it is so large that 16 films can be on preparation at the same time. This is a sister studio to another big British one at Denham, where Gaumont British and other films are made.

A tip-top month in the Gem with some rattling good St. Jim's tales. First of the month is "St. Jim's on the Warpath" which is a tale of rivalry with the Grammar School. Gordon Gay & Co. meet their match in Tom Merry's "Redskins".

Then came the Gem's fine Christmas Number, with an extra long St. Jim's tale running from cover to cover and nothing else usurping the space. The story is "The Mystery of Nobody's Study." Whoever sleeps in Nobody's Study mysteriously disappears, spirited

away by a spectral monk. Levison disappears into thin air, leaving his clothes in a heap on the floor. Wow!

Then came "The Housemaster's Secret" which shows how the unspeakable Mr. Ratcliff goes spying to ferret out Mr. Railton's secret. Finally an excellent tale "Tom Merry's Last Hope" in which Tom takes pity on Cutts and lends the senior £20 of the Sports Club funds to save Cutts from expulsion - and then Cutts defaults. Tom Merry wins that amount back by standing up to a professional wrestler, without being "thrown", in a circus. It is the first time I ever remember wrestling being featured in any of the school stories. It was a bit far-fetched that a boy like Tom could beat a man, and a professional wrestler, but it's a grand bit of reading.

The Rookwood stories, a new series, has continued in the Gem this month, except in the Christmas Number. The Rookwood titles are "The Unseen Hand", "Tubby Muffin's Christmas Pudding", and "The Phantom Monk". They all feature the new boy, Dudley Vane, who seems to have taken over the Rookwood scene.

My Gran and Auntie Gwen came to spend Christmas with us. It was lovely to have Gran, but Auntie Gwen is a bit of a prize-packet. She dotes on my brother Doug, but isn't so keen on me.

She said to my Mum: "Mildred, isn't it odd that in a family the eldest son can be so intelligent, polished, well-mannered and handsome while his younger brother is - well!"

Of course that was a reflection on me, really. They'll all be surprised if one day, in 50 years time, say, my Diary is published in a famous magazine with my picture at the top. I bet it will be. So there!

Lovely month in the Magnet. The first story "Bunter Spills the Beans" brought the end of the series about the mysterious Fifth-former, Warren.

Then came "Smithy's Strange Adventure", which is the start of the Christmas series. In the forefront are Vernon-Smith and an Italian, Count Zero, who has designs on a property in Cornwall belonging to the Bounder's father. But Mr. Vernon-Smith refuses to sell the property to Zero.

Then the Magnet's Christmas Number on the Saturday before Christmas. (Christmas Day is on a Wednesday this year.) The story is "The Spectre of Polpelly" with the chums as the guests of the Bounder in a lonely old mansion, reputed to be haunted, on the Cornish coast. Final of the month is "The House of Mystery" continuing the Christmas holiday series. I am enjoying it all muchly.

"I'm afraid it's a bit mediocre this year, my boy", said my brother Doug, patting me on the head as he gave me the new Holiday Annual for my Christmas present. (Doug likes to sound a bit pompous. Come to think of it, it's an awful cheek for him to read my Christmas present before he gave it to me.) All the same, he's right. The new Holiday Annual is a bit medi-what-he-said.

There is no very long story in it, and I think that most of the Greyfriars and St. Jim's stories were not written by the real writers at all. There is a Rio Kid tale, which is good, and a St. Jim's one about Trimole pretending to lose his memory. There is a St. Frank's tale entitled "Handforth's Windfall". The Rookwood tale is "Melting Mr. Manders", and there is a song by Frank Richards, with music, entitled "The "Djah Old School". But, all in all, it is the worst Holiday Annual I have seen, though I am grateful to Doug for giving it to me. But it's not a patch on what it used to be.

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NOTES ON THIS MONTH'S "DANNY'S DIARY"

S.O.L. No. 257 "Bunter, the Mischief-Maker" comprised the first three stories of the splendid and mammoth first rebel series which appeared in the Magnet in late 1924. This series, without question, was the most "powerful" that ever featured in the Magnet. More sombre than the later series when Hamilton gave the theme of Wharton, rebel, a second airing, and with little or no humour. One notes that Wharton was actually guilty in this series of acts of which he was unjustly accused in the second series.

S.O.L. No. 258 "Captain and Slacker" comprised 4½ stories about Cardew as Tom Merry's rival, which was an 8-story series which ran in the Gem over Christmas 1923.

"The Soho Cafe Mystery" was a superb Sexton Blake story which had been published as "The Mystery of the Platinum Nugget" (a very bad title which gave away part of the plot before the reader started the story) in No. 5 of the new series of the Sexton Blake Library in 1925.

The 1935 Gem story "St. Jim's on the Warpath" had been "At Grips with the Grammarians" early in 1913. "The Mystery of Nobody's Study" had been the classic story in the Gem's Christmas Double Number of 1912. Though it ran cover to cover in 1935, it still suffered pruning, losing one entire sequence concerning an acrostic which Levison composed for Tom Merry's Weekly. This showed the immense length of the original story.

"The Housemaster's Secret" had been "The Rival Housemasters" in late December 1912. This was probably a sub story. "Tom Merry's Last Hope", an excellent tale, had been "The Last Hope" early in 1913.

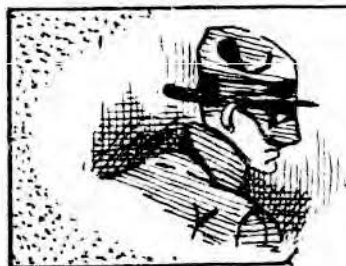
The sub writer who introduced his own character, Dudley Vane, into the new Rookwood series in the Gem, and gave him a prominent role week after week is reminiscent of a sub writer who produced a long series of Greyfriars stories

more than a decade earlier in the Popular when he introduced his own new character, Dennis Carr, and made him over-prominent in the Greyfriars stories for the time that the sub tales has taken over in that paper.

The film "Men on Her Mind" had been released in the States as "The Girl from Tenth Avenue."

1935 was a vintage year for Agatha Christie, with 3 Hercule Poirot stories to delight the fans. "The A.B.C. Murders" is noteworthy as reintroducing Hastings, after a long absence, and it is also interesting for the fact that, early in the story Poirot tells Hastings of one of his earlier cases in which four people met to play bridge, and, in the course of the game, the host was murdered. This was a reference to "Cards on the Table", but that novel was not yet written, and it was, in fact, published in the following year.

* * * * *



BLAKIANA



'TECS? --- THEY WERE A 'DIME-A-DOZEN'!

by Len Wormull

I should think readers will have little difficulty in "topping" E. B. Grant-McPherson's target of "50" detectives. Interestingly and not surprisingly, his selection stems mostly from the Fleetway Agency, a firm renowned for its investigators. Here are more from their files, and others, to swell the number...

Fun & Fiction offered Adam Daunt, a millionaire with an ego to match. Clients had always to advertise for his services! He was killed off when Firefly took over, making way for his nephew, Abel Daunt, the new-look detective. And talking of lolly, Surprise had the wealthiest 'Tec of them all - Martin Holt. Starting out as a penniless adventurer, he became the "Man With 1000 Millions". How he came by it is a story that defies belief. (Nipper began as an urchin selling matches, would you believe it. He managed the fame but not the fortune.) Surprise also had a double act called "The Ace of 'Tecs", a blonde flapper named Kiddie Wix and partner

Barrington Clive. Kiddie always scored over her rival (naturally), a theme not entirely unknown to film audiences. When Surprise merged with Bullseye, Martin Holt went with it, ousting another millionaire detective named Mortimer Hood. This one had supernatural powers. Not forgetting Bullseye's Nick Kennedy, who fought and destroyed the evil Tong leader, Fang Wu.

Three from Boys' Favourite were: Selby Lowe (Elgar Wallace), Grant Swift (Walter Edwards), and Dandy King, the Hobo 'Tec (Arthur Catherall).

The long-running Thriller was a veritable hot-bed of 'Tecs, which I will leave to others more knowledgeable. Neither must we forget the Thomson "Famous Five", sleuth-ridden without a doubt. Rover specialised in Mounties getting their man, while Adventure was lucky in having that dynamic duo Dixon Hawke and Tommy Burke. Here, Tommy sometimes had his own casebook. Two from Skipper were Grip Gregson the silent detective, and a Boy sleuth named Slick Chester.

It's a case of take your pick in the Comics section, two at hand being Jack Keen, 'Tec (Film Fun), and Private Paul Sleuth (sic) (Funny Wonder). These were stories, and serious too.

Editors occasionally encouraged readers to test their powers of deduction. Nugget Weekly invited readers to solve a rather complex Blake and Tinker mystery called "The Fakir's Secret", the first correct solution winning a prize of 2 guineas. A lad from Bradford won it. Startler gave its readers a two-page cut-out called "How To Be A 'Tec", and I believe the Boys' Friend issued a booklet on similar lines.

Thirsty work being a 'Tec, excuse me while I investigate a cuppa. Happy hunting!

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WHEN IT'S YULETIDE IN BAKER STREET.

BY RAYMOND CURE.



It was December the twenty-fifth in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and twenty five, when the most historic Christmas Pudding in the annals of Sexton Blake, was proudly placed on the table before Sexton Blake and his Yule-tide guests, by Mrs. Bardell the famous Baker Street housekeeper.

I say proudly, because there is nothing like a real old-fashioned boiled-in-the-cloth Christmas Pudding. Another such pudding was mentioned by the renowned Charles Dickens on his visit to the home of Mrs. Bob Cratchit, of the "Christmas Carol" who was equally proud when her family agreed that "never was such a pud", poor as the little family were.

Having said that about the old-fashioned pudding, let me qualify that statement by pointing out that it is a lot easier for the lady of the house to present a Christmas dinner these days. No woman can take any pride when she presents ready-cooked or ready-packed meals. It's all very convenient but the cook has been stripped of her pride with that pre-packed Christmas pud. After all, any old bachelor can come up with that stuff.

I am not expressing the value of one against the other time-wise. I merely point out that the Cratchit family had helped to stir that pudding, had helped to light the copper-boiler and ceremoniously drop the cloth-wrapped pudding into the boiling water. However, if you don't grasp my meaning I think Mrs. Cratchit and Mrs. Bardell will.

So, back to Baker Street. Our reporter Gwyn Evans, sets the scene.

"Christmas Day in Baker Street. Outside across the snowy roofs that gleamed white in the pale rays of the December sun, there floated the joyous carillon of Christmas Bells. While inside - That Dinner! It would take the magic pen

of the great master of Christmas himself, Charles Dickens, to express it. The turkey, a magnificent bird, had done its duty nobly on the altar of Christmas. Then came the dramatic moment before the entry of the Christmas Pudding."

Splash Page rose to the occasion - " give you another toast gentlemen - Mrs. Bardell and her incomparable Christmas Pudding."

No modern Super-store could provide a pudding like that (bang one of those in a pan, hot it up and Hi Hi that's your lot). Another peep outside and we shall leave that Baker Street Yuletide of 1925 recorded in Union Jack No. 1157, December 1925. Gwyn Evans reports:-

"Outside through the frosty night, came a mellow peal of bells, trilling their joyous message of "Peace on earth goodwill to all men." Into the festive scene the music sounded like a benison on a perfect Yule-tide day and a night that was yet young."

The story arrives with a full Xmas Kit, containing a real Baronial Mansion and its Christmas Ghost, billed as the jolliest lark that Sexton Blake ever handled. As you will have guessed, Mrs. Bardell is one again our Christmas Star. Mr. Evans sees her as "A worthy and incomparable housekeeper her cooking unexampled, the treasure of every discriminating gourmet who had the good fortune to be invited to Baker Street. Her voice rich but her English weird and wonderful, especially in moments of stress. "She is a good standby for Christmas, is our Mrs. Bardell", according to Splash Page. "Look at last Christmas when we thought we were in for a quiet Christmas and the exciting events that followed the theft of Mrs. Bardell's Xmas Pudding."

I would not think that Inspector Coutts was lavish in his praises, but when it came to Mrs. Bardell he had to say "That woman is a treasure - a masterpiece". Granted she had just fed him well (in the absence of his wife).

Gwyn Evans, to give him his due, was an author who gave us as full a picture of Mrs. Bardell as any other S.B. author. How often he mentions Mrs. Bardell's ample bosom and chubby red face. I have noticed that the illustrator of an Evans story has no trouble in drawing Mrs. Martha Bardell from the description given him.

Now to get some glimpses of Yuletide at Baker Street you must look out for pieces here and there such as "Mrs. Bardell called to give final instructions about the huge turkey" or "Sexton Blake

was seated in a saddle-back chair before a blazing fire in the consulting room grate, a huge volume of the 'Pickwick Papers' in his hand". There is even mention of a visit to the Pantomime, or "Tinker carefully adjusted the holly before the picture rail". The usually austere consulting room had an unwonted gaiety this blustery December night. Of course those lucky enough to own a number of Xmas Union Jacks would find many glimpses among their pages of "Yuletide in Baker Street and the Baker Street Star".

Personally, I put Mrs. Martha Bardell in the super-star class for the same reason I put Extra Quirke in that class. It is perfectly easy to understand the characters that took the limelight week after week without fail, year in and year out, should fasten themselves on our minds in later years. If anybody cared to sit down and figure how large a supporting cast was needed to back up Sexton Blake and Tinker, not forgetting Pedro, I think they would be amazed. Of villains (minor and major) of victims, of young lovers, of detective inspectors, of cooks, cleaners and maids, of Lords and Ladies, of down and outs, of cabbies and railway men, of sports world figures, of the whole host of fictional characters surrounding Sexton Blake in his adventures there could be no end. Some merely glided in and out and are long forgotten, some starred in a whole series and are dimly remembered, while others had but one or two series devoted to them but will never be forgotten. Nelson Lee readers will call to mind Extra Quirke. Magnet and em readers will recall others.

In the world of Sexton Blake a number of leading master-crooks come to mind, as also detectives such as Inspector Coutts, or newspaper men like Splash Page. Mrs. Martha Bardell had a sprinkling of parts over many episodes, but in the odd episodes where she secured a leading role she really comes through and what better time than Christmas. Cook, cleaner, general housekeeper, favourite of any caller at Baker Street lucky enough to be asked to stay for a meal, and comedienne in her own right, Mrs. Martha Bardell - "This is Your Life", and so, members and friends of the O.B.B.C. I give you a toast with your Christmas Dinner:

Gentlemen (and ladies), Mrs. Bardell - star of Mrs. Bardell's Xmas Pudding and Mrs. Bardell's Xmas Eve.

* * * * *

COMING YOUR WAY SOON -
OUR ANNUAL



STEMMING THE DECLINE AND FALL

by R. Hibbert

In September 1930, when I was seven, I was in Standard 1 of St. George's Church of England School, Hyde, Cheshire. Our classroom had been designed by an architect who was either claustrophobic or didn't know his job. It was a room with five doors. One led onto the street, one into the Head Teacher's room, one into the cloakroom and playground and TWO into the next classroom.

We saw a lot of life in Standard 1 - about as much as Kim did on the Grand Trunk Road - and had to put up with more through draughts than most children of our age. We didn't mind the draughts, but it was generally agreed we saw a sight more of our Head Master than was good for us.

Mr. Wood was forever making forays from his den and wherever he was heading for he started out from our room. The kids in the line of desks flanking his usual route were permanently blanched as though they'd been force-raised under buckets.

Anyway, one day Mr. Wood rocketed into our midst at the head of a small procession. There was the caretaker with a step-ladder and two big girls each carrying a framed and glazed picture.

SENSATION

Mr. Wood made these girls show us the pictures, and it's not easy holding up a large picture when God's on the sidelines telling you not to get fingermarks on the glass. There was a picture of camels and Arabs (Aden) and one of a banana plantation (Jamaica). I don't remember, but I don't doubt that Mr. Wood lectured us on them at length. When he'd finished the caretaker had the pictures hanging up in no time at all. When I left the school in 1934 they were still on the wall, and for years after.

Standard 1 took the British Empire for granted. It was there like Hyde Town Hall and our school. Most of us had the idea that the Empire countries provided us with foodstuffs and raw materials and got railways and British manufactures in return. These manufactures included printed cotton goods from our own town's mills. We didn't know it, but we were more or less at one with Lord Beaverbrook who happened to be running an Empire Crusade in his papers in 1930. But Lord Beaverbrook hadn't given Mr. Wood our pictures.

They must have come from Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, because the small print in their bottom corners stated they were issued by the Empire Marketing Board, the body which provided stickers and placards for the Co-op at the top of Market Street and every green-grocer in town. We were always being told to EAT MORE FRUIT and EAT EMPIRE FRUIT.

All this nostalgic preamble was triggered off by my reading

Nelson Lee Library 1st New Series, Number 5

HANDFORTH THE MARTYR

- Fun with St. Frank's at Stamford Bridge -

May 29th AND June 5th, 1926

I suppose the two dates indicate a stoppage during the General Strike.

Handforth had had the idea of holding St. Frank's Junior Sports Day in London. Arrangements were left to William Napoleon Browne, 'brainy skipper of the 5th Form', a character with the mannerisms of Psmith but a better business-man.

'Nobody quite knew how he had secured the Chelsea Ground for Whit Monday' - the Bank Holiday in 1926 coincided with Empire Day, May 24th - and Browne was determined to give the Sports an Empire interest. 'There were boys from almost every part of the Empire in the Junior School. It was a golden opportunity to encourage the Empire spirit.' On Saturday, May 22nd, morning and evening papers carried articles and adverts by Browne urging the general public to be at the Stamford Bridge Ground on the Monday.

TERRACES, ONE SHILLING: STAND FROM

HALF A CROWN UPWARDS

Browne expected, and got, a capacity crowd of 50,000 and was able to hand over the £4,500 takings to the Empire Industries Fund.

He persuaded the British Broadcasting Company to let him

speak to the Nation at 9.30 p.m. on the Saturday evening ... London and Daventry Calling ...

'... we are interested in sport and the Empire spirit... It is the British Empire that matters!' Sundry base scullions are apt to picture the British Empire as a falacy. They glibly assure us that the Dominion of Canada and the Commonwealth of Australia and the Dominion of New Zealand and the Union of South Africa are independent countries, with no real ties to the Motherland.'

Which was just what was said at the Imperial Conference of that same year, 1926. The dominions were then defined 'as autonomous communities within the British Empire, linked only symbolically by the British Crown.'

But back to Browne's broadcast.

'(The dominions) are tied to us with bonds that can never be shattered, and it is our duty, brothers and sisters, to make these ties ever stronger. Let us, therefore, foster the Empire Spirit, and rally round to some purpose.'

With publicity like this Browne packed Stamford Bridge and the Sports were a tremendous cussess.

Besides all this there's a sub-plot about Handforth's latest mania. Browne's Up the Empire talk so impressed him that Edward Oswald started a one boy trade war. Non-Empire goods weren't just to be boycotted, they were to be destroyed.

Before breakfast on Empire Day Handforth had thrown U.S. apples, grapefruit and peaches, Spanish onions, Tunisian dates, Hawaiian pineapples, China tea and Danish butter on to the garden rubbish heap. Then he dumped his father's MADE IN U.S.A. typewriter and even thought of burning his mother's German piano.

At the Sports Ground he stamped his House Master's box of matches (MADE IN BELGIUM) into the ground, wanted to smash Christine's Swiss watch, did smash Forrest's American camera - 'There was no moderation with him' - snatched Church's French made belt from his waist, ripped Glenthorne's Austrian made singlet from off his back and wanted to scalp Clapson for having foreign brilliantine on his hair. Handforth went on like this until he was CHAINED UP.

No Constant Reader is surprised when a thing like that happens in an Edwy Searles Brooks' story.

Handforth's school-fellows tethered him to a post in the middle of the arena like a Christian martyr in the days of the Romans.

He stayed there until he promised to lift his heavy-handed trade sanctions. In the end he was convinced that Britons had to buy some products from non-Empire countries.

Nowadays we import a lot of things which we once made for ourselves. This article was typed on a Bulgarian typewriter. It's a good, solid machine and reliable - apart from a tendency to break into Cyrillic when over-excited.

Why buy Bulgarian?

Well, I thought Bulgaria was a bit nearer home than Japan and the man in the shop told me that typewriters aren't made in the U.K. anymore.

Handforth might have had a point after all.

EDWY SEARLES BROOKS -
WITH A HINT OF CHRISTMAS

by William Lister

From my earliest years I have been an avid reader, as soon as I got the knack of reading, I was off on the greatest adventure of my life. To this day I never regret one word that I have read.

Now, here is a contradiction of terms. I have travelled very little, yet I have travelled the world many times. I have met few famous people, yet I have met people who are outstanding names in the world. That is the magic of reading!

Charlie Chaplin, Mae West, David Niven and a host of film stars who through their autobiographies have shared their lives with me. Famous men and women in all walks of life have shared the quiet hours of the night with me - while others slept, I read. People in the political world of all shades of opinion, people in the religious world 'C of E', Baptist, Methodist, Salvation Army or Spiritualist, all have a tale to tell.

However, I never forget my early favourites especially Edwy Searles Brooks, probably because he caught my youthful imagination and catered for my pocket. At 2d a copy the 'Nelson Lee' was a gift. So many words for so little money, words strung together in such a way that kept my interest from first word to last. Words that gripped me, words that thrilled and excited me. Character studies that were to be fixed in my mind till I was well over seventy, though I knew it not at the time.

St. Franks and the boys of St. Franks, the masters of St. Franks, the villains that sometimes appeared in the history of St.

Franks. The long adventurous holidays, in strange places and stranger lands.

I never met Edwy Searles Brooks; when I was around 50 I wrote to him just once and was surprised to receive a reply by return post, I have that letter to this day.

I don't know if it was the atmosphere of winter and my surrounding circumstances, that caused me to thrill to the winter tales rather than the summer ones.

The summer of those days seemed to be long and hot, but winter, well that was different. We lived in a caravan in those days, on a plot of land that was then the outskirts of Blackpool.

What better, on a cold winter's night, sometimes when snow was gently falling, than to sit around the old pot-bellied iron stove and by the flickering light of an oil lamp peruse the pages of the 'Nelson Lee'.

At that time of the year strange people, such as Ezra Quirk, stalked across the pages of the 'Nelson Lee', a few weeks later snow would fall covering the grand old school, as with a blanket. Maybe, by today's youth, I lived in cramped, poor circumstances. Don't you believe it! I lived under the thrill of the pen of E.S.B. he transformed my outward surroundings into a veritable paradise of Christmas joys, of games and skating on ice and enjoying the company of the Moor View School girls. Only to be broken when Dad said "Don't you think it's time for bed?" I would then retire, perchance to dream that I was also a St. Frank's boy.

My Grandchildren used to say "What on earth did you do Grandad living in a small wooden caravan with no running water, no electric light and (greatest tragedy of all), no wireless or T.V.?"

I couldn't begin to explain they wouldn't understand if I tried to. It's a happiness and comfort within that has nothing to do with outward circumstances whatever. It is to be found in the imagination of a good writer stimulating the imagination of an avid reader.

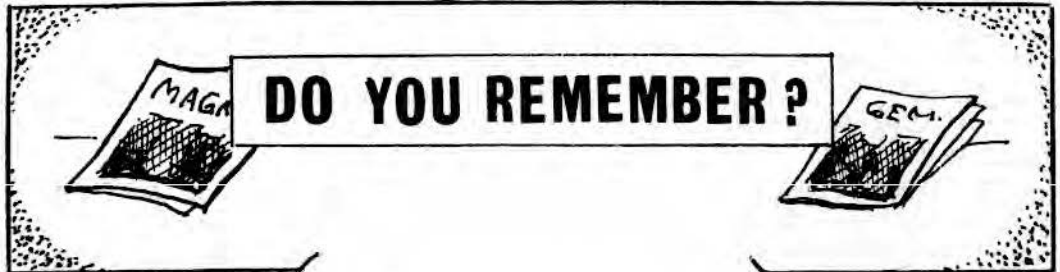
And so to Christmas. For me, and I speak for myself alone. Edwy Searles Brooks made my Christmas. Not, mind you, that I neglected the Christmas numbers of such favourites as the 'Magnet' or the 'Union Jack', but it was to 'Nelson Lee' and the family of St. Franks and to E.S.B. their creator, that I gave first place.

It was all there, the snow, the holly and the mistletoe, the Christmas fare, the ghosts and, of course, the underlying story theme, that holds all these goodies together.

Don't ask me to explain, I am well aware that to some, their

Christmas is to be found in the company of Charles Hamilton. All I know is that when it comes to the old books, Edwy Searles Brooks is my man. I have been young (in the company of St. Franks) I am old (but still in the company of St. Franks). I will not lift my glass, as I am almost tea-total, let me raise a copy of the 'Nelson Lee' and the 'Monster' and wish our readers - be they 'Nelson Lee', 'Gem' or 'Magnet' fans -

A Very Merry Christmas, when it comes.



No. 209 - Gem No. 1166 - "A Knock-Out for Knox"

by Roger M. Jenkins

In 1930 the Gem was at a low ebb in its fortunes, with only four stories by the original author, three of these were reprinted in subsequent Schoolboys' Owns, but "A Knock-Out for Knox" seemed to have been overlooked by the Amalgamated Press when they were arranging reprints. This is surprising, especially when the quality of this story is considered - indeed, it is astonishing how Charles Hamilton was able to pick up the threads of St. Jim's so skilfully once again, after some years of comparative neglect.

Monty Lowther instigated the trouble when he leaned out of the window of Study No. 6 in order to play a trick on Knox. By the time the infuriated prefect arrived in the study, Lowther had gone and Knox accused Blake & Co. of having played the trick. A mark of a good Hamiltonian story is the intriguing marginal comment, such as:

Knox had a doubting nature, and his own ways were not the ways of veracity. And it has been well said that a liar's punishment is not that he cannot be believed, but that he can never believe others.

Equally, Mr. Railton remarked "It is more necessary to give attention to character than evidence", though it was a maxim he was unable to sustain throughout the story.

In a mere fourteen chapters, Knox made four separate attempts to prove D'Arcy guilty of various misdeeds, some episodes being hilarious, others not so amusing. To have achieved four climaxes in a single story of this length is a noteworthy achievement, and in more spacious days Charles Hamilton would no doubt have expanded the theme into a series. Presumably the sporadic nature of his contributions to the Gem at this time rendered this impossible, and so we have a series in miniature, as it were.

Why did Charles Hamilton virtually abandon the Gem for several years? Rookwood ended in 1926, and though the Rio Kid might be thought to have taken its place, there was little doubt that the author could have managed a weekly St. Jim's story as well when he was still in his prime. There are some grounds for accepting the version of events that claims he was so upset about the number of substitute stories in the Gem that he refused to write for it any more, but if that is correct why did he allow the substitute authors such opportunity in the first place? Again, having decided to give up the Gem altogether, why did he return to St. Jim's from time to time? Whatever the true explanation, we can at least feel happy that we possess such minor masterpieces as "A Knock-Out for Knox".

* * * * *

PEACE ON EARTH... AT WHARTON LODGE

by Tommy Keen

The wind was very keen, and snowflakes were beginning to fall, and it was that time of a late December afternoon when it was not quite dusk, a most meloncholy time for the lonely schoolboy who walked the deserted country road, with his coat collar turned up, scarf wound tightly around his neck, and cap pulled down. His head was bent to the wind, and maybe it was the wind which made his eyes sting as if with tears... and maybe tears were not too far away from the dark eyes of Harry Wharton of Greyfriars. Christmas almost here, and for once the leader of the Famous Five of the Remove was without his true and trusted friends.

The past term had seemed endless, and bitter events had taken place, with bitter words spoken, and now the lonely schoolboy sadly realised that much of the term's bitterness had been caused by his own rebellious nature, and stubborn pride. The upsets with Mr. Quelch, with Lord Mauleverer, and his own special chums, could

have been so easily rectified, had he shown more consideration.

The roofs of the few houses he passed were already lightly covered with snow, but now he would soon be home at Wharton Lodge, to his uncle, Col. Wharton, to his Aunt Amy, and to a roaring fire, by which to have tea. But where were Bob Cherry and Hurree Singh, Frank Nugent and Johnny Bull? His heart ached as he thought of his parted friends.

The sound of a car behind him, and in the gathering dusk the boy stepped on to the verge at the side of the road... and the car passed. Harry glanced disinterestedly at the passing vehicle, and then his eyes lit up as he recognised a fat face adorned by large spectacles, and four other Greyfriars juniors. Bunter... Billy Bunter, and surely the others were Bob and Franky, Johnny Bull and Inky. Even as Wharton began to run after the car, he saw it pass through the open gateway of Wharton Lodge.

And of course it was the rest of the famous Co., together with the fatuous Bunter. What greetings there were as Harry arrived on the scene as his chums bundled from the car. Why they had arrived, he did not know... and did not care. They were here, and the bitterness of the past had already vanished, and for Christmas they would all be together.

But explanations were inevitable, and in the warmth and comfort of Harry Wharton's 'den', the reason emerged. Five cheery face sitting close to the roaring fire, logs occasionally being tossed on to the fire, chestnuts merrily roasting (if chestnuts could roast merrily!), and Billy Bunter's face as cheery as the rest, sitting contentedly in the background, munching a fruit cake. Snowflakes lashed against the window, carol singers could be heard, Harry Wharton was ecstatically happy, and then it all came out. Bob Cherry had been invited over the telephone at Greyfriars to come to Wharton Lodge for Christmas and as well as bringing the rest of the Co., was to be sure and bring Bunter. The phone call was supposedly from Wharton, but of course the voice over the phone, had not been Wharton's, but Billy Bunter with his ventriloquism. A few hot tempered words by Johnny Bull, a few worried glances at Harry by Frank Nugent, but Wharton is undismayed. To Bunter's amazement, his hand is shaken warmly by Harry Wharton, "You've brought us together old fat bean, you've more sense than any of us."

Bunter swells with pride, "It was my tact you know", another log is hurled on to the fire, the holly decorations sparkle in the firelight, and through the late evening's stillness comes the strains

of that loveliest of all carols, "Silent Night, Holy Night", and thanks to Bunter, a jolly Christmas was had by all.

Peace and Goodwill had come (at long last) to Harry Wharton and Co.

* * * * *

REVIEW

HOLIDAY ANNUAL FOR 1986

(Howard Baker Press): £9.95

Here is the latest addition to the delightful series of Howard Baker Holiday Annuals. It contains plenty of superb reading for everyone, and is along in time to ensure lots of Merry Christmas reading matter. You lucky people!

The piece-de-resistance must surely be the 3-story South Seas series of the Gem of the Spring of 1934. Restrained in length, and full of plot and incident, the series was originally published in the blue Gem of 1911. The author was at the top of his form in what was his first South Seas series and one of his very first overseas adventures for his world-famous St. Jim's schoolboys.

In this 1934 reprinting, the series only suffered very minor abridgment, and the only fly in the ointment is that Levison's name is changed to Snipe in the opening story. But that is a small detail set against the magnificence of the series.

A novelty is found in the fine Rookwood series entitled "The Fifth Form Rebellion" contained in a 1934 Schoolboys' Own Library, which is printed across the page, giving two of the S.O.L. pages on one page of the Annual. It takes a few minutes to get accustomed to it, but the printing is clear, and it strikes one as an excellent idea.

An eerie and tip-top Nelson Lee Library is blown up to Magnet size, resulting in larger print which is a solace to aged eyes. The story is "The Phantom of the Grange" and it is a delight for all St. Frank's fans and admirers of E. S. Brooks.

There are three Greyfriars tales, all of them sub stories, from early in the year 1922, with Chapman giving a glow to the whole thing. While opinions vary as to the worth of sub stories as schoolliterature, there is no doubt that the subs played an indispensable part in Magnet history, and these are interesting specimens to read and speculate upon. Two linked tales "The Footballers' Feud" and "Wibley the Wonder" carry the unmistakable stamp of Pentelow, and are the concoction wherein a weird Dr. Armstrong, with quaint ideas, became the ruler of Greyfriars for a time.

A book, packed with nostalgic charm, to give you plent of unalloyed joy, plus a good deal to muse over, this Christmas season. Get it ordered while stocks last.

* * * * *

COMING VERY SOON -

THE 1985 C.D. ANNUAL



NEWS OF THE OLD BOYS BOOK CLUBS

MIDLAND

At our October meeting there were only 7 present, but the return of our popular Chairman, Tom Porter, was gratifying.

With Tom present we had on display our feature Anniversary No. and Collectors' Item. The A.N. was Nelson Lee No. 334 "£10,000 for a Shilling", published in October 1921. The C.I. was No. 17 "The Prisoners of the Mountains". There were only 19, sold at a shilling, but in 1921 a shilling was a lot of money for a schoolboy.

Refreshments were provided by Joan Golen; eatables and tea or coffee by Keith Normington. The usual high standard was maintained.

Tom Porter introduced a word game in which one had to find as many names of places and persons as possible, using letters only from the statement "Located at Greyfriars, Kent". Geoff Lardner was the winner.

There followed a discussion on the topic "Will the Hobby eventually fade out?" Nothing lasts for ever, but reports from Norman Shaw and Howard Baker and other booksellers indicate that they are all doing a roaring trade. The hardbacked durable form of book has done much to infuse new life into the hobby.

A quiz by your correspondent was won by Ivan Webster. Tom Porter followed this by asking questions with oral answers. The speed of the answers showed that our members are well informed on the Magnet and Gem.

Our Christmas Party, to which all OBBC members and friends are invited, will be on the 17th December.

JACK BELLFIELD (Correspondent)

CAMBRIDGE

A meeting was held on Sunday, 3rd November, 1985, at the home of Edward Witten. The members were particularly pleased

to welcome Mary Cadogan, who was accompanied by her husband Alex.

Mary Cadogan gave a talk entitled "Ramblings and Reprints". This was in the form of book review, covering in some detail recently published works on a range of subjects including two books on Billy Bunter, "But For Bunter" by David Hughes, "Bunter Sahib" by Daniel Green and an anthology of Christmas stories called "The Christmas Reader" by Godfrey Smith.

The members enjoyed a well prepared and delicious tea served by Edward Witten.

Tony Cowley then presented a short quiz entitled "Guess the Star", designed to high-light the number of comedians and personalities who subsequently went on to bigger and better things, following their appearances in the fifties radio show "Educating Archie". Some thirteen artists were featured including Julie Andrews, Dick Emery and Warren Mitchell with example recordings of each being played before their identities were revealed.

The meeting closed at 5.45 p.m. with thanks to Edward Witten for his hospitality and efforts that had produced another enjoyable meeting.

LONDON

There was a good attendance at the Walthamstow meeting and all enjoyed Mary Cadogan's discourse about the 50 years of the Girls' Crystal. Then a tape recording of Mary being interviewed on the Radio 2 programme of John Dunn's series was emphasised that the Girls' Crystal had all reading stories and no strips. Mary had brought along a copy of Godfrey Smith's book "Christmas Reader" that was a publication by Viking. Ray Hopkins was called upon to read the Greyfriars chapter from the book.

Don Webster was the winner of a quiz conducted by Ben Whiter. Mark Jarvis read chapter one from the Armada paperback, "Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School".

Leslie Rowley read another chapter from his version of the Hacker versus Quelch feud.

The Memory Lane reading came from Newsletter number 211, June 1970. Bill Bradford read the first chapter of the Embankment Murder story Gerald Verner. Then Bill asked questions about the reading and it was Chris Harper who had the most correct answers.

Suzanne Harper and her lady helpers were thanked for making

the Tea.

Next meeting will be the Christmas one and it will be held at the Liberal Hall, Ealing, on Sunday, 8th December.

BEN WHITER

NORTHERN

Meeting held: Saturday, 9th November, 1985

We had only nine members present: we were sorry to receive apologies from our oldest member Bill Williamson, to whom we sent condolences on the recent loss of his wife.

Favourable comment was made concerning new accommodation we were "trying out": we had a comfortable room, with an informal atmosphere. Everyone expressed delight and it was agreed that we should endeavour to obtain this accommodation on a regular basis.

Denis Gifford's new book THE COMPLETE CATALOGUE OF BRITISH COMICS was on view: at £16.95 this is not a cheap book, but it is beautifully produced.

Refreshments were taken in the cafeteria with splendid kitchen arrangements. Again, this was voted a hit with members.

Margaret Atkinson presented an excellent "Riddle-me-Ree" which created much thought-provoking. A great deal of work had been put into its compiling and was voted a hit.

"World's Elsewhere" had been the title of a programme broadcast on Radio 4 the week previously, and a recording of this was played. It was a most interesting programme, the various speakers telling us how they had begun to collect books and comics and story papers - and what their own collection consisted of.

Our next meeting is on 14th December, our Christmas Party commencing at 5.00 p.m. right through until 9.00 p.m. We should be delighted to welcome visitors - please contact our Secretary, Revd. G. Good at Thornes Vicarage, Wakefield, West Yorkshire. Our new venue is Holy Trinity Church, Boar Lane, Leeds 1. Three minutes' walk from the railway station: we use the entrance signposted S.P.C.K. Bookshop, adjacent to "C & A".

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

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SEXTON BLAKE enthusiast seeks to purchase S.B.L. Books of 1st and 2nd series. Must be in good condition. Very best prices paid.

TERRY BEENHAM, 20 LONGSHOTS CLOSE, BROOMFIELD,
CHELMSFORD, ESSEX, CM1 5DX. Tel. No. 0245 443059 (evenings).



BERT HOLMES (Barrow-in-Furness):

The C.D. gets better and better over the years. There is "something in it for everyone".

I noticed the character name N. ELLIOTT cropping up in a 1948 Bunter book. I can't understand this, because when I was about 12 I wrote personally to our dear Frank Richards requesting a story by him featuring Ninian Elliott. He typed a nice letter back, and said he would think about it. He never did write one. Shortly afterwards the said Elliott was sent abroad to his parents, and so ended a very vague character from Frank Richards. He must surely have left Greyfriars around 1917, so I can't understand the articles about him which crop up occasionally nowadays.

LEN HAWKEY (Leigh-on-Sea):

I fully endorse Mary Cadogan's review of "Sixpenny Wonderfals" - a must for any lovers of the illustrative work lavished on books and periodicals in the first half of this century. The most famous artists are, I suppose, Byam Shaw, and Gordon Browne; also H. L. Bacon and B. Lawson. The greatest number of Chatto and Windus covers are by our old Champion/Union Jack friend J. H. Valda. I had long puzzled over what work he did between 1905, when he disappeared from the pages of magazines like "Ladies Realm" and re-appeared circa 1919 as a leading artist in boys' fiction - e.g. Boys' Magazine, Champion, Rocket, etc.

I imagine that as publishers reduced the number of artists they employed and used photography more, Valda decided to switch to a more reliable source of regular work. Only those who have studied his earlier work will realise how successful he was - his colour work was always splendid - witness his covers for the Monster Library and the 1920's Champion Annual. From pre-1918 half-tone he moved mainly to effective line illustration, and for two decades remained in the top rank of Amalgamated Press artists. Thanks to "Six-penny Wonderfals" I can now map his entire career fairly accurately. Would I could do the same with J. Louis Smythe - but 'hope springs eternal'!

LESLIE ROWLEY (Chingford):

What, pray, of Greyfriars?

After perusing the November 'Digest' I came away feeling much the same as

the Egyptians (it was the Egyptians, wasn't it?) felt in the lean years.

Except of passing references, I searched in vain for a piece on my (and surely legions of others) favourite school. I turned anxiously to the "Do You Remember?" pages only to find that my good friend Roger was dwelling (temporarily, I hope) in the world of Sexton Blake. "Et tu, Brute!" I echoed in my anguish, at this sad transgression. Turning to your editorial, I waded vainly through, ample wordage on hard back classics, and epics of the silver screen. Danny only partly retrieved my good opinion with a brief couple of paragraphs, and somebody was kind enough to do a review of the latest Howard Baker Greyfriars 'Special'. But your postman with his 'bulging letter bag' wasn't overloaded with Greyfriars correspondence, though it was some relief to see that Messrs Truscott, Jarman, and Galvin were still with us.

It wasn't a case of shortage of Blake material; it was a vast desert void of, surely, the most favourite subject of them all. I await, hopefully, a Greyfriars rescue operation and pray that the wait won't be a long one.

LARRY MORLEY (Hanwell):

In Danny's Diary he mentions the Royal Variety Show at the Palladium in 1935. It may interest readers to know that an LP record was issued some years ago, including part of that show. I have a mint copy in my collection. The record is called "The Silver Jubilee 1935" and it was made by World Records in their Retrospect series - SH244. Side one has the Thanksgiving Service from St. Paul's Cathedral, and Side 2 has part of the Royal Command Show, called Veterans of Variety, i.e. Arthur Reece, Kate Carney, Gus Elen, Harry Champion, Florrie Ford, and Alice Lemar, singing such songs as "Sons of the Sea", "Are we to part like this, Bill?", "Boiled Beef and Carrots", and "Down at the Old Bull and Bush".

In the report of the Cambridge Club, Bill Lofts seems to have stated that Arthur Askey was very upset when demoted from the front to the back page of Film Fun. As far as I know, Arthur Askey never appeared in Film Fun, but in Radio Fun.

Bill was stating the obvious when he said the decline of Film Fun came when they dropped Laurel & Hardy. The paper was in an emaciated state in the 1940's; indeed Laurel & Hardy appeared on the front pages long after both partners had died. In the 50's and early 60's, the paper changed its format from black and white to a bluey-green, and featured the likes of Bruce Forsyth and Harry Secombe, who could hardly be described as film comedians. Soon after that the paper sank into oblivion - a sad end to such a lovely paper.

DENIS GIFFORD (Sydenham):

I'm not surprised that Arthur Askey was upset when, according to your Cambridge Club report, he was demoted from the front page of Film Fun to the back - he was in Radio Fun at the time! I can't think Bill Lofts made this 'orrible error, he must have been misreported. Oddly enough, I have suffered from the same confusion of the same comics. Alastair Crompton, in his book about Frank Hampson, THE MAN WHO DREW TOMORROW, makes such of the fact that Film Fun was my favourite comic. It never was! I told him, Radio Fun! Now these title transfers might seem trivial to the average person, but to a comics buff they are all important. The difference between Radio Fun and Film Fun was huge. Film Fun was a

good comic, but totally stereotyped, with editorial decree making all its artists draw like George Wakefield. Radio Fun was far freer, with a range of artists beginning at the very tip top with the brothers Reg and George Parlett, plus Roy Wilson, and, in its early years, brilliant and witty editing by Dennis Castle.

ESMOND KADISH (Hendon):

The colour sequence in the Eddie Cantor film, "Kid Millions", referred to by Danny, was "Ice Cream Fantasy", in which millionaire Eddie opens a free ice cream factory for boys and girls. It's still a delightful sequence.

I much enjoyed the piece on Arthur Augustus, by Edward Baldock. Gussy was my favourite St. Jim's character when I became a new boy at the school in 1932, and I haven't changed my opinion since. As Mr. Baldock says, there is a "refined toughness" in his make-up, in spite of his gentle and courteous exterior; he's not afraid to swim against the tide, once he's convinced that he's in the right. Bunter - once described as an "anti-hero" - is, I, suppose, more in tune with today than Gussy, but I'd rather have Gussy, however out-of-date and anachronistic he might seem to present-day youthful readers

J.E.M. (Brighton):

Your November editorial was, as ever, a delight. On the subject of Wodehouse's school stories, hobbyists might like to know that Tales of St. Austin's was published in paper-back (Puffin) only a few years ago and, indeed, may still be in print. A delightful collection, written by a very youthful 'Plum', most of the stories had originally appeared in The Captain. At least one was reprinted in The Holiday Annual (circa 1928) under the title "Out of Bounds" (original title, "The Manouvres of Charteris") and was a tale I much enjoyed.

Danny's reference to the end of trams in York, back in 1935, also awoke recollections. A schoolboy in the city at that time, I have happy memories of those lovely old vehicles - though less happy ones of the hazard the tramlines presented to cyclists!

My continuing gratitude for the monthly miracle of C.D.

* * * * *

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