

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

JUNE
1988

Vol. 42
No. 498



RECENTLY PURCHASED: THOMSONS 1939 - 43 Hotspur, Wizard, Adventure, Rover, Skipper, Beano, Dandy, Magic, etc.

Also, of course post-war as usual.

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STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by
W. H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Founded in 1946 by
HERBERT LECKENBY

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From Your Editor—To You!



FINDING AN OLD FRIEND.

Recently, through the good offices of C.D. reader and contributor George Sewell, I acquired a fine copy of a hardback school story called A Hit for Six by T.H. Scott. It has taken a long time to locate this long lost book which I first encountered in unusual circumstances. When I was learning shorthand at the Lewisham branch of Pitmans in 1945, our enlightened teacher used to read this story aloud as dictation for our speed practice. It was the high spot of my days there, but I suffered the frustration of never hearing the end of the tale because I left Pitman's a week or two

before the end of my course in order to take up an attractive job. I often wondered how the mystery of murky goings-on in the countryside around this typically English boarding-school would be resolved. Dusky strangers were performing strange rituals involving camp-fires and hypnotic spells; at the centre of things was an exotic charm, and an Eastern 'idol', while a satisfying cricket theme ran throughout the story. I remembered an Indian (actually Burmese) junior called Ram Dass, who in the the tradition of Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh was a great cricketer. It took me some years to discover the author of A Hit for Six; this information came to light only last year, when, at the home of Keith Smith of the Northern O.B.B.C., I found a review of the book in a glossy magazine of the nineteen thirties. Then I advertised for it in C.D., and Mr. Sewell obtained it for me. So, over forty years on, I have been able to enjoy the unfolding of this gripping tale - as well as to be reminded of my youthful, pre-working days! I've never read any other stories by T.H. Scott, although I see from the book's fly-leaf that he has written at least four more. One of these - Wireless Watson - sounds particularly interesting!

OUR FORTHCOMING FIVE HUNDREDTH NUMBER.

Still on the forty-years-on theme, we shall be publishing No. 500 of the C.D. in August. This, as I am sure you will all agree, is something to celebrate, and I would welcome any short articles to mark this special event.

A SUMMER SPECIAL?

I am in the happy position of having received so many excellent features and pictures from contributors that I never have any problems about filling the pages of the C.D. In fact, I am wondering whether, in order to use more of this interesting material, we might bring out a Summer Special number. This would be an extra not affecting your regular C.D. subscriptions. It would probably take the form of a 50 page issue, with page sizes the same as the monthly C.D. I cannot price it until I have an idea how many readers might be interested - so please, if you would like to buy such a Summer Special, do drop me a line, as soon as possible, and I will see what can be done.

Happy browsing!

MARY CADOGAN



JUNE 1938

The Schoolboy's Own Library has been good this month, but there hasn't been anything to write home about in the other Fourpenny Libraries.

"The Worst Boy at Greyfriars" is the third spasm of the story with Wharton as a rebel, and it is just great.

The St. Jim's S.O.L., "The Price of Loyalty", is also out of the top drawer. Tickey Tapp, the old rogue comes back in this one. Levison takes the blame for a fault of Cardew's, and falls from the ivy while trying to run away from school. The story is slightly marred by having a Grundy tale tacked on to fill up space.

The St. Frank's S.O.L. is "The Terror of the Tagossa". The Tagossa is a dreaded secret society, but the boys of St. Frank's, cast away in Mordania, are not scared by the society.

In the B.F.L. I had "The Gold Raiders" which is a Captain Justice series from Modern Boy, and a Sexton Blake Library "The Tiger of Canton" by G.H. Teed is good, featuring George Marsden Plummer and Vali Mata Vali. This one is set in London, Paris, and North Africa. We readers travel around.

The Derby was won this year by Bois Roussel ridden by E.C. Elliott. But, not being a Bounder, I am not very interested in horse-racing.

In Wimbledon tennis finals, J.D. Rudge of the U.S.A. beat our



Once one of the best and most popular fellows at Greyfriars—now the worst boy in the school! Such is the unhappy fate to which Harry Wharton's feud with his Form-master leads him! You cannot fail to enjoy every word of this powerful book-length yarn. Don't miss it.

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home-grown H.W. Austin, while, in the women's singles, Mrs. Willis-Moody of the States beat Miss Jacobs, also of the States.

In the first Modern Boy of June we reached the end of the King of the Islands series about the pearl island of Kohu. The villain, Van Duck, made a last attempt to get the treasure. The story is called "Flaming Arrows".

Then a new series started with "Island of Silence". Ken is expecting to resume normal business after the pearl adventure, and he sets sail to do some trading on the busy island of Lalua. But he found the island empty; not a native in sight, not a sound to be heard. The problem continued next week with "Warned Off Lalua". Ken is determined to get to the bottom of the mystery, but he is greeted with a hail of bullets.

Last of the month is "It's Up To Koko". Koko, the Kanaka bosun, claims he is the brainiest Kanaka in the world, and this week he sets about proving it, by saving his boss, Ken King.

The Australians are over here playing cricket. The Third Test will be at Old Trafford, and everyone is expecting a draw. It is 33 years since there was a result in a match with Australian at Old Trafford. It was 1905 when there was last a result, and that time England beat the Aussies. But now the Aussies have Don Bradman, the bowlers' nightmare, so anything may happen - even at Old Trafford.

The Gem has not been right on top form this month. A bit like the curate's egg. All the stories have been by the real Martin Clifford, and he is always a good read, but there has been nothing particularly original in the plots. Some of it has been a wee bit hackneyed. May be the trouble is that there have been two Grundy Stories - and he is not a favourite of mine.

Opening story is "Grundy the Ventriloquist", so the title tells some of it. But Grundy rescued Tom Merry from the fast-flowing river, and, in return, he asked for a place in the cricket match with Greyfriars - and got it. And St. Jim's won in spite of the passenger. Not so bad, really.

Best tale of the month, possibly, is "His Black Sheep Brother". Cutts is out to be revenged on Harry Manners, and Cutts strikes at Manners through his rather racketty young brother. Very good, this one.

Then another Grundy tale "Forbidden to Fight". Grundy, under the penalty of a flogging, is barred from fighting. So all the chaps he has bullied in the past set out to get their own back on Grundy.

Finally, a good one, even though the main plot is a bit familiar. This was "Betrayed by his Cousin". Gerald Crooke hates his cousin Talbot, and Crooke plans a cunning scheme to bring disgrace on the cousin he hates. And Talbot is saved by an unlikely person - Levison. So the path is prepared for Talbot and Levison to be more friendly in the days to come.

The story of early Greyfriars at the back of the Gem this month has been "Barred by the Remove". Someone has sent an insulting anonymous letter to Mr. Quelch and various people are suspected. At the end, Wun Lung unmasks the real culprit - Snoop.

There has been a big fire at Blackpool, which must be awkward now the holiday season is starting. The Pier Pavilion was entirely destroyed.

A mixed bag of tricks at the Pictures this month. Errol Flynn and Joan Blondell were in "The Perfect Specimen" about a grandmother of a rich young man

who brought him up unspoiled by the world until a lively girl crashed her car into him. Rather dull, this one. Another one I found dull was Ramon Novaro in "The Sheik Steps Out" about a modern sheik who had a riot of a time in a big city. This was a skit and a take-off of the old myth about Valentino and how women swooned about him.

While on the subject of sheiks, I should note that two very famous old Valentino films of silent days, "The Sheik" and "The Son of the Sheik", have been revived this month and are showing at a big London theatre. They have had a mixed reception, some critics drooling over them and others slamming them unmercifully.

Judy Garland was pretty good in "Everybody Sing" and Fred Astaire had Burns and Allen with him in "A Damsel in Distress". There are some good songs in it, but one missed Ginger Rogers. They say she wanted a holiday from musicals, and she was replaced by the coy Joan Fontaine.

Finally the one I liked the best, though I had seen it before - Laurel and Hardy in "Fraternally Yours". Charlie Chase and Mae Busch were also in this one which was just lovely.

And so, last but not least, I come to *Magnetico Magnifico* - which is double-dutch for the *Magnificent Magnet*. The series about the Greyfriars pals in Texas has ended, and, though I have enjoyed it in many ways, I'm glad to see the boys back at school.

Opening tale this month is "The Trail Thief's Secret". There is a big reward offered for the capture of the man who, with a flour-bag over his head, murdered and robbed a bank messenger from Prairie Bend. All in Packsaddle believe that the Rio Kid is the hold-up man, but the Greyfriars pals know otherwise, and, thanks to Bunter, they are able to prove it.

Then the last of the series, "The Trail-Thief's Last Ride". And, carry me home to die, it is the Bounder whose eyes flash over his six-gun as he says "Hands up, Jad Blake, rancher of the Circle O".

And so, good-bye to Texas - and home to Greyfriars. So the next yarn is "Bunter the Hypnotist", and our favourite old fat man takes up another "ism", without any success. Good fun.

Final of the month is "Walker on the Warpath". The prefect throws his weight about, but he meets his match when he tries it on with Tom Brown of New Zealand.

Gee, it's nice to have the Greyfriars chums back at the old school.

ERIC FAYNE Comments on This Month's "DANNY'S DIARY".

S.O.L. No. 337 "The Worst Boy at Greyfriars" was the continuation of the Magnet's Rebel Series of late in the year 1932.

S.O.L. No. 338 "The Price of Loyalty" comprised two excellent connected stories from the Gem of the early summer of 1927. The final third of the book included "Brainy Grundy" from the midsummer of 1930, 3 years later. It unbalanced the book, but, to the editor's credit, it was a genuine story picked out from a year in which genuine stories were a rarity in the Gem.

Danny's June 1938 Gem story "Grundy the Ventriloquist" was a reprint of

the story of the same name in the Gem of early summer 1916. "His Black Sheep Brother" of 1938 had been an excellent tale "In Spite of Himself" in the following week in 1916.

The 1938 story "Forbidden to Fight" had been "On His Honour" at the end of 1916. The 1938 tale "Betrayed by his Cousin" had been "Friends or Foes" a few weeks earlier in 1916.

The Laurel & Hardy film "Fraternally Yours" was entitled "Sons of the Desert" in the United States.



A SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT SEXTON BLAKE

by J.E.M.

Like many other faithful Blakians, I always preferred the Union Jack and Detective Weekly to the monthly offerings of the Sexton Blake Library. Having said this, I must admit to a special enthusiasm for certain SBL tales which appeared at the end of World War Two and the years immediately after. I am indebted to Blakian expert Jack Adrian for introducing me to the stories of Lewis Jackson from that period and some of these I have already discussed in previous issues of the Digest. However, after recently reading for the first time The Woman With A 'Record' (SBL No. 129, 3rd Series), I make no excuse for again returning to Jackson and his work.

The story in question is well up to the level of The Trail of The Five Red Herrings, The Case Of The Night Lorry Driver and Down East, with Blake at his most sophisticated: wordly-wise in the very best sense. But first, a quick glance at the setting and characters of The Woman With A 'Record'. Here we are some way from those old East End alleys and their humble inhabitants much favoured by Lewis Jackson at this time. Principal characters include the wealthy and distinguished Commander Sir Jack Hamilton, his lovely wife Lady Christine, and Admiral Sir Courtney Blunt, a Blimp-ish but endearing figure. The "lower deck" is represented by the loyal and lovable ex-Chief Petty Officer Joe Crump, while the criminal element appears in the very nasty form of one Tony Bianci.

Blake and Tinker become professionally involved in the lives of these people through the theft of a society woman's necklace and it rapidly becomes clear that relationships and events are not quite what they seem. Blackmail and murder soon follow and to elaborate further on the plot would be to spoil it. Enough to say that, after a slightly leisurely opening, the story develops great tension, excitement and, for our two sleuths, surprise.

As always with Jackson's SBL work at this time, something like eighty per cent of the tale is in the form of dialogue - a most effective device (if Jackson never wrote for the radio he missed a marvellous opportunity and he would surely have made a new name for himself in the age of television). But, for me, the story impresses most by its exploration of character and how this can be changed by experience. Blake himself is depicted not only at his shrewdest but at his most human - a somewhat different Blake, in fact, from the one we usually meet. Though he quickly recognises the true nature of the murderer - "a pathological type, egocentric and conscious of no emotion but self-pity" - he makes it clear that psychopaths can be made as well as born and he is even reluctant to hand the culprit over to the police, though of course justice is finally satisfied.

The human angle is strongly played throughout and it is this which gives the story its strength, since all the characters have believable motives for their actions. Crime stories don't always carry that kind of conviction. The Blakian saga itself is full of baddies who are all black and goodies who are all white and even Blake himself is sometimes just a bit too good to be true. For the most part, of course, that is how we liked - and still like - our detective fiction. But Jackson brought something a little richer to the great case-book. He is, therefore, well worth reading and the story under review is as good a place to start as any.

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In Reply to Yours

by C.H. Churchill

I was very interested to read Mr. Holman's article in May C.D. in which he referred to Ms. Thorn's article in the January 1960 Story Paper Collector. In this she discussed various St. Frank's characters and Mr. Holman ended by saying "What do you think, chums".

My first reaction was in the vernacular of the St. Frank's Remove form - What a load of rubbish!! However, on re-reading I did find one or two points of interest.

Re. Nipper, I never realised that he was rarely in the lime-light in the early Lees which were "Related by Nipper". How I read the stories he was ringleader of all that went on, be it Cricket, Football, Rebellions or mysteries concerning new boys. Hardly in the background as a passive figure, as she says. I know our late friend Bob Blythe did not take to Nipper, largely because of the stories being written in the first person. But what Bob and presumably Ms. Thorne overlooked was that, for several years prior to St. Frank's, Nipper was assistant to Nelson Lee and therefore had a greater experience of life than the other boys. As far as his becoming unpleasant in the later Lees, I do not know where this took place. He and N. Lee gradually became less prominent in the stories. A number of us used to say the Lee should have been renamed "Handforth's Weekly". As for E.S.B., like Frankenstein, being unable to control his creation, it is news to me that E.S.B. created Nipper. I always thought he was created by Maxwell Scott, penname for Dr. Staniforth.

As to Handy, I know he treated his chums pretty roughly at times but of course he was a very overdrawn character. Most characters were overdrawn. If they were not, and were shewn as ordinary boys, the stories about them would have been as dry as dust. No excitement at all. The same applies to Archie and Browne, both rather unbelievable but tremendous fun to read about. Maybe

NELSON LEE 2^a

No. 352

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

March 4, 1922



THE COMING OF ARCHIE

Then I observed a pair of legs protruding towards the fireplace from the depths of a big armchair.

Mr. Brooks got the idea of them from Wodehouse but, if so, what does it matter? The same could be said of Gussy of St. Jim's, another unbelievable character but fine to read about.

As to Fullwood's reformation, it probably was an idea put up by readers. I mentioned in an article in the Annual for 1987 that I never liked this idea, and did not think it rang true.

Travers, yes he was a good character but as for being the best ever invented by E.S.B. hardly, I think. What about De Valerie? We had a number of stories about him over the years, showing his various moods. In his time he was Remove Captain when Nipper was expelled in June 1919. This was a great change from when he first arrived when he became known as "The Rotter" He was starred in the Dr. Karnak series of early 1924 when he became a victim of the evil Doctor's activities.

I am afraid Ms. Thorne seemed to like very few St. Frank's characters. I am glad she liked one - Dr. Stafford. She reckoned he was the best of all Headmasters, but few others served in that position for very long periods to be fairly judged. Also I see she did not think much of Nelson Lee himself. Well, really!! How did she ever manage to read any of the stories if she disliked the characters so much? I am sure of one thing. She never read any great number of the hundreds of tales published in the Nelson Lee Library. If other readers thought like her why did the Lee last all those seventeen years?

HANDFORTH - DETECTIVE

by William Lister

It is common knowledge that the Nelson Lee was born when the lure of detective fiction was strong, only later devoting its pages to the journals of St. Frank's, which in their time have featured in the world of detection too. Therefore it is no surprise to find a story in a St. Frank's series called 'Handforth - Detective'.

There is, no doubt, a law of averages; there has always been a law of averages, and there always will be a law of averages: to put it plainly, every now and again the unusual turns up - in business life, amongst the gambling fraternity, among the astrologists. Therefore, no matter how often things go wrong, no matter how many times they fail, sooner or later, if only once in a lifetime, something will work out just the way one hoped it would. So it is no surprise that Handforth the detective turned up trumps (in the tradition of the blundering French film detective made famous by Peter Sellers). Always a detective fan, Handforth was bound, at least once, to make the grade.

The curtain goes up on our tale amid scenes of consternation among the boys of St. Frank's, as it appears that during the previous night a thief had run amok through the study rooms, absconding with articles of value. As in most of Edwy Searles Brooks stories, the original misdemeanour, though not very serious, develops into a major crime in which Nelson Lee with the aid of Handforth ... correction ... in which Handforth with the help of Nelson Lee, will bring the matter to a successful conclusion.

You cannot blame Handforth for trying. This detective business gets you sooner or later. Sherlock Holmes and Sexton Blake gave it a big lift, although there had been several capable sleuths before them. Dorothy Sayers, Agatha Christie, G.K. Chesterton - some mighty fine detectives sprang from their pens. Today stage, screen, radio and T.V. are churning out detectives with the speed in which the butcher makes sausages on his machine; to say nothing of the publishing world.

Here may I mention a 'modern' detective, featured in thirteen books, who has captured my imagination, the Chronicles of Bro. Cadfael, a monk of 1113 A.D. Ellis Peters gives us a new dimension of sleuthing tale as we follow the monk through such titles as Virgin on Ice, Sanctuary Sparrow, Monkshood, etc. The whole series is bathed in the appropriate twelfth century atmosphere, with the bonus that the Abbey Church at Shrewsbury still stands, and walks can be taken in that district covered by these adventures published in Futura paperbacks.

Years ago at an International Scout Jamboree at Liverpool, as a wee scout, I saw Baden-Powell, the Founder. So I got his book Scouting for Boys. He should have called it 'How to Be a Detective'. I hit the Handforth trail, looking for broken twigs and footmarks of small animals. I kept quiet and tried to hear as many sounds as possible at one time, and lots more. I have come a long way in my reading since the days of the Nelson Lee, but I owe a lot to the little paper which combined school-tales with adventure, with detection, with travel and sometimes with brilliant fantasy, as the boys travelled the known world, and beyond. Whenever I see the name Edwy Searles Brooks, I find myself saying THANKS FOR THE MEMORY.

The Passing of William Ernest J. Pike.

by W.O.G. Lofts.

News has just reached me via my good friend Terry Wakefield of the death far back in 1982 of William Ernest J. Pike, a former editor of so many, many papers we loved in pre-war days.

Bill Pike whom I met several times when he was editing The Ace Library in the sixties at Fleetway House, was born at Lambeth in 1898. As a boy he was avidly interested in the running of amateur magazines - one he called "The Red Crusaders" after the famous Arthur S. Hardy football team in The Boys Realm. He joined the Amalgamated Press in 1915 and was appointed sub-editor on The Magnet. After War service he returned to the Companion Papers Office and wrote a Greyfriars Story in 1922 that was published in Magnet No. 736 ("Billy Bunter - Film Star"), written in great haste to ensure that the Magnet would continue its weekly run.

A few years later he was appointed editor of the large green Boys' Friend where he was involved with the Rookwood stories, in fact writing No. 1205, "The South African Match" and No. 1294, "The Rookwood Boat Race". Terry Wakefield recalls sending all his Father's illustrations of Jimmy Silver & Co. to "W. Pike Esq." long before he ever met him. When the Boys' Friend ended in 1926, according to Bill Pike, Rookwood had simply lost its appeal to readers, with seemingly Charles Hamilton (Owen Conquest) also losing interest to some extent, and Rookwood copy, like Billy Bunter's Postal Order, taking its time to turn up! Bill Pike was then transferred to Langton Townley's department, where through the years he edited Boys Cinema/Chicks Own/Crackers/Chips/Funny Wonder/Merry & Bright/Comic Cuts/Sunbeam/Tiny Tots/Merry Magazine, and, in post-war years, Thriller Picture Library, and War Picture Library. In his early days he also edited Chuckles/Fun and Fiction, and Merry Magazine. He used the pen-name of "Ernest James" to write stories in Gem, Boys' Cinema, and Boys' Friend Weekly (second series).

I always greatly enjoyed my chats with Bill, who retired from Fleetway in 1963. Residing in Surrey, he died at Chalfont St. Peter in Buckinghamshire around June 1982, aged 84.

FOR SALE: Items for the collecting connoisseur; rare early Hamilton stories, individually canvas-bound: "The Fourth Form at Northcote" (Vanguard No. 19, year 1907); "The Boys of Beechwood" (characters later introduced into early Red Magnet series: Marvel, year 1908); "Comrades of the Fourth" (under Frank Drake pen-name, Vanguard 1908); "The Prefect's Secret" (Vanguard 1908); "Rivals of St. Winifred's" (Marvel 1905); "Master of the Fifth" (Pluck 1906; Mysterious Mosscoo" (early Hurree Singh, Marvel 1907): the last two bound in blue boards: £3.50 each. S.O.L. 181 The Gipsy Schoolboy" (Greyfriars) S.O.L. No. 190 "Boy from the Bootleg Ranch" (St. Jim's); nice copies £2.00 each, P. & P. extra on all items.
Write: Eric Fayne, Excelsior House, 113 Crookham Road, Church Crookham, Hants. GU13 0NH.

WANTED: Sexton Blake Catalogue, (J & L, Packman). Phil Griffiths, 21 Harcourt Field, Wallington, SM6 8BA.

WHEN JOHNNY CAME 'MARCHING' HOME.

by Tommy Keen

When I avidly devoured the stories of Harry Wharton and Co. during my schooldays, I remember not being over-fond of the Famous Five, with the possible exception of Inky. Time after time it was implied that Bob Cherry was probably the most popular boy in the Remove, but to me, his constant "Hello, hello, hello" was rather irritating, and although always liking the stories featuring Vernon-Smith and Tom Redwing, I tended to be drawn to the characters who seldom featured prominently - Mark Linley, Peter Todd, Dick Russell, Ogilvy, and Penfold.

However, since my return to Greyfriars in the 1970s, after an absence of several decades, I realise what an excellent character Harry Wharton is, and, of that very select group of five, not only does Wharton appeal more but so does Johnny Bull. Stolid, obstinate, and at times, rather heavy going, I find I now have rather a soft spot for the outspoken Johnny; so much so that after reading that Johnny left Greyfriars for a while, to go to Australia during the World War I period, I decided I would read the story of his departure in Magnet No. 368. (For a very brief time during Bull's absence, Squiff took his place as a member of the Famous Five.)

There was a sad farewell at Friardale Station, as Johnny left his special chums, wondering if they would ever see him again. But the parting was not to be for long. Within a few weeks, cheering news was heard in Magnet No. 376, the story title of which must have thrilled the readers of 1915, "When Johnny Comes Marching Home". (I have an idea that there was a song of the same title during that terrible war period.)

Now a little about that story. Wharton receives a letter from Johnny Bull, to say he is returning to Greyfriars from Port Said to Cherbourg by boat, and from there to England by steamer. A cheque for £10 is enclosed, payable to Harry Wharton, to cover the cost of a celebration on Johnny's return. Mr. Quelch cashes the cheque with two £5 notes, which are then locked in Wharton's desk. In the letter Johnny had jokingly written, "You can expect me when you see me, if I don't get blown up by a German submarine in the Channel".

Enter Peter Hazeldene. Hazel is in one of his numerous scrapes and badly needs money to settle up debts with Ponsonby at Highcliffe. Hearing that Wharton has £10, Hazeldene, as so often before is tempted to steal the cash. He does so by using a key belonging

to Tom Brown that conveniently fits the lock of Wharton's desk.

Over to Highcliffe, where he is again drawn into card-playing with the evil Pon. The Caterpillar decides to play too, being suspicious of Hazel's new found wealth, and he has evidently heard of the loss of Wharton's cash, for which Billy Bunter has been suspected. The Caterpillar wins, then cycles to Greyfriars to see Wharton, who has made a note of the numbers of the two stolen £5 notes. When confronted by Wharton, Hazel breaks down and confesses, but, during the evening, with his guilt hanging heavily on his conscience, Hazel decides to quit. He really should have waited for better weather! He rushes out into blinding rain, and as Wharton and Nugent are doing their prep in Study 1, Tom Brown rushes in to say there had been a wreck nearby, a steamer on the rocks. All the boys tear away to the coast.

Now for drama! The last chapter of the story is called 'From the Jaws of Death'. The boat has been torpedoed by a German submarine, several people have lost their lives, but old Mr. Trumper's lifeboat has helped to save many. Amidst the crowd on the beach, Wharton notices Hazel, but his attention is drawn to a dark form floundering in the sea. Without a second thought, Harry wades in and rescues this person from the ranging sea. To his amazement, he is helped to the shore by Peter Hazeldene. The person rescued is rushed off to the nearest inn, Hazel being made quite a fuss of by the boys (evidently Wharton, although drenched, isn't noticed). However, off to the inn go the boys to see the rescued person. And who do you think it is? Johnny Bull, of course.

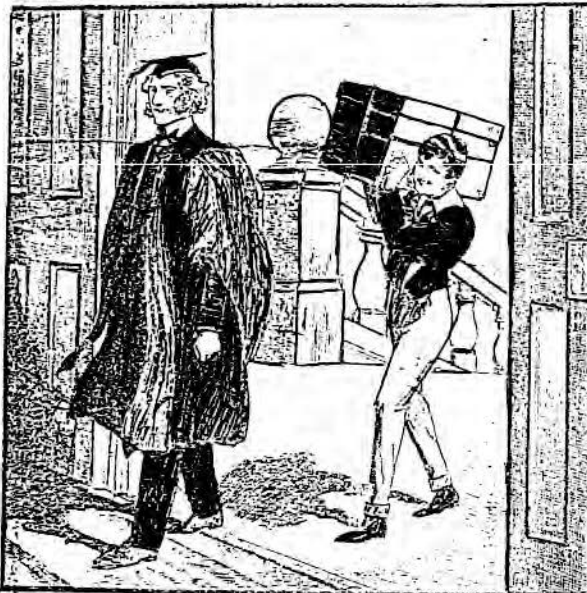
But the object of this article, is the cover of the MAGNET. Through the years, there were many slip-ups with the illustrations, but this one, I think, is too funny. Johnny arriving at Greyfriars, impeccably dressed, his cap (which surely would have floated away in the raging seas), firmly on his head, and, more incredible, his trunk of belongings perched jauntily on his shoulder (Wharton certainly didn't save this).

However, C.H. Chapman, the artist, is forgiven (like the wretched Hazel). Even if it does not fit the story, it is a delight, and Johnny is back where he belongs...still stolid, still obstinate, but a very valued member of the Famous Five.

* * *

WHEN JOHNNY COMES MARCHING HOME!

A Magnificent Long Complete Tale of the Chums of Grayfriars. By Frank Richards.



JOHNNY BULL'S JOYFUL RETURN

(A Grand Scene in the Magnificent Complete Serial Tale in this Issue.)

WANTED TO PURCHASE: Biggles, Bunter, William, Brent-Dyer hardbacks. Howard Baker volumes. Comics Annuals: Tiger Tim, Rainbow, Film Fun, Radio Fun, Knockout, Champion, Wizard, Rover, Adventure, Hotspur, Magnet, G.H.A.'s, S.O.L.s, Beano, Dandy. Some duplicates for Sale. Please state titles wanted. Contact: Colin Crewe, 12B Westwood Road, Canvey Island, Essex. Tel: 0268 693735 after 7.30 p.m.



The Postman Called

BILL LOFTS (London). I greatly enjoyed Norman Wright's piece on the comic 'Sun'. It brought happy memories back of when I used to meet its editor, the likeable Alfred Wallace, in Fleet Street in the late fifties and sixties. Actually the comic had a mysterious start, originally up North being titled 'Fitness and Sun' - maybe the original intention was for it to cater for the health and beauty market. Its first issue says 'new series', yet no record can be found of an earlier run. Alf used to tell me how he had to rewrite the original Gem stories, and they brought not the slightest reaction from his readers who did not seem interested in them. All he got was a few letters from adults pointing out where they had been altered; that made him wonder what they were doing in reading a comic aimed at the 7 to 12 year old market! The 'Sun's companion was 'The Comet' (same editor) that had a lot of Greyfriars short stories penned by the creator in its early A.P. takeover days. 'Comet' went into 'Tiger' picture paper at the same time as 'Sun'.

ESMOND KADISH (London). The references to Amelia Earhart and Amy Johnson recall to mind Ida Melbourne's (L.E. Ransome's) serial "The Flying Sisters" in the SCHOOLGIRL (1933-4). As in all such adventure serials, the tendency is to spin out the story - set in the African jungle - with some contrived situations, but the chapters with the girls actually in the plane, the Sky Queen, seem well done, and convinced me that the author really knew something about flying "her" own plane, when I first read the story as a youngster. I wonder if Mr. Ransome had really had any actual experience?

(Editor's Note: I loved "The Flying Sisters" too. I know that Mr. Ransome served in the R.A.F. during the last war; he worked with "Bomber" Harris, and would certainly have had flying experience. The subject of women with wings has aroused a lot of interest amongst C.D. readers. Next month more light will be thrown on Amelia Earhart's disappearance.)

IN PURSUIT OF "MOSSY FACE"

by Jack Adrian

Some time ago I had a minor run-in with a character called Clinton K. Stacey, who styled himself the 'authenticator' of W.E. Johns 1st Editions, and published a checklist of Johns' works, (containing much woefully wrong information) at the gruesomely high price of £10 a copy. In a review in these pages I mildly pointed out a few of the more glaring errors, but received a letter from the work's author, who refused to acknowledge he'd made one mistake, let alone three score and ten. Or more. Actually, many more.

This, under the circumstances, seemed a bit cheeky, so I typed up a couple of A4 pages of further errors, and also asked one or two pertinent bibliographical questions which he, as the 'authenticator' of W.E. Johns 1st Editions, ought to have been able to answer in, as they say, the twinkling of an eye. One of the questions was "Who was the publisher of the 1st Edition of Mossyface?" Alas, Clinton K. Stacey answered none of them. Possibly, in the case of Mossyface query, so obvious was the answer that he suspected it was a trick-question. Which in a sense it was, although since he'd made so much of his research expertise one might have thought he'd have known the answer.

Still, enough of Clinton K. Stacey and on to Mossyface itself, W.E. Johns' first extended work of fiction, published under the pseudonym 'William Earle' by Mellifont in 1932 and preceding the first Biggles book, The Camels Are Coming, by some months. It's an odd book, and up until a couple of years ago had always been, for me, something of a mystery. It tells of the adventures of James Margerson, an ex-World War One pilot, who aids an Egyptologist and his beautiful daughter in rescuing a bundle of valuable papyrus rolls from a lost temple in the Nubian desert. As a cheap thriller it gallops along quite successfully, and yet there's no denying it's crude: crude in conception and crude in the telling. There are longueurs, Johns at times has difficulty getting characters from A to B, dialogue is stilted, and it's clear the ending caused him problems. In short, it's a first book by a tyro writer.

Yet shortly after it was issued by Mellifont -- a firm that specialised in publishing cheap fiction, both reprint and original, in paperback format -- Johns launched into two books, The Spy Flyers and The Cruise of the Condor, which (although the former book has its faults) are far more sophisticated in both tone and technique. And the mystery was, how on earth had Johns smoothed out his style and developed his narrative techniques to such a pitch in six months flat?

The answer is, he hadn't. The Mellifont edition of Mossyface is merely a reprint, the true 1st Edition having already appeared as No. 121 of the Weekly Telegraph Novels series, published by John Leng. And by an enormous stroke of luck -- the kind of luck that really ought to strike a collector only once in a lifetime -- I stumbled across a copy of the WT Novels issue back in 1985, only weeks after buying a copy of what I then believed was the true 1st: that is, the mellifont paperback. John Leng was a large provincial publisher with an HQ in Sheffield whose flagship was the Weekly Telegraph. Leng also had links with the Dundee firm of D.C. Thomson (they were later to merge, becoming for many years Thomson & Leng). Thomson too had a weekly paper, the famous Weekly

Post (still running), and like the Post Leng's Weekly Telegraph had a nationwide distribution. Leng started their WT Novels series back in the late-1890s, mainly reprinting popular novels -- detective and sensational fiction, as well as Romance, domestic comedies, and weepies -- although there was a sprinkling of original work as well: mostly serials written for the Weekly Telegraph, then issued as separate paperbacks in the WT Novels series.

One particularly juicy item in the original series of WT Novels (Mossyface, incidentally, appeared in the New Series, which started just before the First World War) is No. 120, Edgar Wallace's famous thriller The Four Just Men. The true 1st Edition of the book was published by Wallace's own Tallis Press in 1905 as a puzzle-story with no solution, consisting of eleven chapters and a tear-out competition-slip Appendix. In 1906 the book was reissued with a twelfth chapter in the form of a letter from one of the Four giving the solution to the mystery. The WT Novels version, issued in December, 1908, was not only the first edition to print the revised and extended Chapter 12 (still used today), but also contained four original short stories by Wallace which were never subsequently reprinted. This is the rarest Wallace First Edition of them all, making much-vaunted 'rarities' like The Tomb of Ts'in and Smithy and the Hun seem like million-sellers. Just as the WT Novels edition of Mossyface is undoubtedly the rarest Johns item -- although, astonishingly, another copy actually turned up on a bookseller's list only a couple of months back, the lucky collector only shelling out four quid for it. Well spotted, that man!

The biggest problem concerning the WT Novels Mossyface was dating it. When I picked my copy up it was at once clear -- from the style of the adverts on the wrappers alone -- that it preceded the Mellifont edition by some years. But how many? I rough-dated it as mid- to late-1920s, probably 1927/1928. That was surprising enough, since although my colleague Peter Ellis (Johns' co-biographer with Piers Williams) and I knew that Johns was writing fiction long before he started working for Modern Boy and Popular Flying (bundles of old manuscripts held by the family testified to that), we hadn't realised he was actually getting it published.

One clue was an advertisement for the famous Iron Jelloids tonic pills, but this didn't make sense since it showed two women dressed in the garb of the early-1920s. And for a number of fairly cogent reasons it didn't seem likely that Johns had written his first novel that early. However, I recently picked up another novel in the WT Novels series: No. 136, Wicked by Arthur Applin. In it, as in Mossyface, there appeared the usual ad for the ubiquitous Dr. John Collis Browne's Chlorodyne (terribly good for colic, neuralgia, toothache, etc., mainly because you were so zonked out with all the opium in it that you forgot about the pain), which stated that the medicine had been an "unvarying success for over 70 years". But that sentence struck me as being not quite how I remembered it.

I checked Mossyface. There the Chlorodyne ad states "unvarying success for nearly 70 years". Well, yes. That figured, because the WT Novels schedule was, I knew, one novel per month, and Wicked, as No. 136, had clearly been issued 15 months after No. 121 Mossyface. Hence the difference in the wording. This was crucial because, although it didn't give me a time-frame, it did tell me that the good Dr. John periodically updated his ads. What I needed was something with

a Chlorodyne advert in it for which I had a precise dating, and from which I could work either backwards or forwards. I suddenly remembered I had just that: a series of paperback 1st Editions by Edgar Wallace published by Newnes in May, 1929, which also had the Chlorodyne ads on them. There the legend ran "World-wide reputation for over 75 years".

This gave me the somewhat sensational information that W.E. Johns' first novel Mossyface was actually published, not in 1932 (the generally accepted date for decades), not even in 1927/1928 (which I'd originally plumped for), but sometime around 1923: certainly no later than 1924, possibly as early as 1922. And of course this dating explained the dresses pictured in the Iron Jelloids ad which had so puzzled me. It also explained the dramatic change in Johns' own writing style, for when he started writing The Cruise of the Condor in 1932 it wasn't just six months after finishing Mossyface, but nearly a decade.

This discovery has entirely transformed our view of W.E. Johns. Previously we believed that he'd started writing seriously only after his career in the RAF had ended and he'd become a successful illustrator. Now it's clear that he was writing -- and, more to the point, earning money from his writings -- while he was still in the RAF. I suspect that Mossyface was originally written as a serial for the Weekly Telegraph and that, when I start researching the newspaper itself, I'll find a good deal more fiction by Johns in its pages. The prospects are, to say the least, tantalising.

LETTERS FROM THE GREYFRIARS ARCHIVES (V)

Selected by Les Rowley

From Henry Samuel Quelch, Esq., to Colonel James Wharton, Wharton Lodge, Wimford.

My Dear Colonel,

In an earlier letter I mentioned that your nephew's behaviour this term had been far from satisfactory, and that improvement in his conduct was essential if his future at Greyfriars was to continue.

It is as an unwelcome and unpleasant duty that I have to inform you that the hoped for improvement has not materialised and that Wharton will not be allowed to return next term. Indeed, it has been a matter of serious discussion between Dr. Locke and myself as to whether the boy should be sent home without waiting for the present term to end. It is only out of consideration for the feelings of Miss Wharton and yourself that he has been allowed to stay for the few remaining days.

The Headmaster and I had previously held high hopes for your nephew. He has shewn great promise both in form and at games,

and his conduct had hitherto proved exemplary. This term, however, he has shown an increasing tendency to hold the School regulations in contempt, culminating with visits to licensed premises of ill repute and attendance at a race meeting at Wapshot. He has broken bounds at night and detention by day, and appears to have forfeited the regard of his closest friends.

Impositions and canings having proved of little avail, the Headmaster duly administered a flogging only to have the boy laugh contemptuously in his face. At the time of writing Wharton is incarcerated in the School punishment room and there he will remain until he gives some assurance that he will behave.

In due course the Headmaster will send you formal notification that Wharton will not be able to return next term, but I thought that I should send you warning in advance. Perhaps, at some other school, or in some other sphere, your nephew may again find himself and regain the good opinion you once had of him.

Please convey my sympathy and my regards to Miss Wharton.

Yours &c.

H.S. Quelch

From Colonel James Wharton, Wharton Lodge, Wimford, to
to Mr. H.S. Quelch.

My Dear Quelch,

Thank you for your letter. I need hardly say how disappointing the contents were to my sister and myself. Both of us had shared your high hopes for my brother's son, and we certainly share your disappointment that these hopes have not been fulfilled.

Harry has had a chance that many less fortunate lads would have envied, an education at the finest of schools and under the direction of the finest of masters. If he has chosen to cast this opportunity to the winds he cannot complain of what must follow.

It still falls to me to make provision for him when he leaves School and I shall make arrangements accordingly, but he will not be returning to my house.

I shall be writing to Dr. Locke in due course but, in the meantime I shall be grateful if you will let him know of my appreciation of that consideration which both of you have shown to me on every occasion.

Yours &c.

James Wharton

From Miss Amy Wharton, Wharton Lodge, Wimford, to Dr. H. Locke.

Dear Doctor Locke,

I am writing to you about my nephew, Harry, who appears to have been in trouble at School this term. I use the word 'appears' advisedly, for appearances too often have proved to be deceptive.

Appearances were deceptive not so long ago when another relation named Stacey was at the School with Harry. The reason given then was that both boys bore a resemblance to each other and that Ralph (that is, Stacey) had been responsible for all the terrible things laid at Harry's door. Now I realise that Harry may not resemble another boy at present at the School, but - on the occasion I have mentioned - Mr. Quelch's judgement was at fault. Is it not just possible that history has repeated itself? There have been other occasions when Mr. Quelch has been deluded into thinking Harry the wicked person he is now considered. But then he is only a man, and men are so easily deluded!

I believe in my nephew, Dr. Locke. Whatever the outcome of the present troubles he will need that belief in him. Once that belief was shared by my brother and, indeed, by yourself and Mr. Quelch. I am sure that there is hope that you will all share in that belief once again. I do, for that reason, entreat you to examine once again the reasons you have for sending Harry away from the School.

Perhaps I should have asked my brother to have written this letter but he is just a little bit angry at present and, since anger blinds the judgement, I am writing it myself.

My warmest wishes to Mrs. Locke, and my thanks to you for the further consideration I am sure you will give to my nephew's present trouble.

I am &c.

Amy Wharton

From Dr. H. Locke to Miss Amy Wharton, Wharton Lodge, Wimford.

My Dear Miss Wharton,

Your brother will have told you by now how fully vindicated your belief in your nephew has been proved. I am sure that you are overjoyed to learn that Wharton will be taking his old place in the Remove here next term.

Much of the unfortunate chain of events that involved your

nephew is the responsibility of a senior boy and former prefect who was motivated, I fear, by reasons of malice rather than those of justice. Nevertheless, a proportion of blame must be attached to Wharton himself and I would ask you to use your undoubted influence in persuading him to curb a sometimes ungovernable temper when he returns to Greyfriars. That there has been much to excuse his behaviour this term, Mr. Quelch and I readily acknowledge, but the boy must exercise self-control in the future.

With your wise counsel and advice I am sure that Wharton will resolve to do his utmost in the new term to regain the good opinion of him that was formerly held by his form master and myself. More important, however, is the opportunity he has of redeeming himself with his uncle and of justifying your own implicit faith in him.

I am &c.

H.H. Locke (Headmaster)

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Cliff House Corner

by Margery Woods



RELATIVE TROUBLES

One of the favourite afflictions bestowed by the story paper authors upon their long-suffering heroines was that of the awful relation. Counterfeit uncles, black-sheep cousins, feckless fathers and wicked stepmothers would turn up to cloud their schooldays, to say nothing of the selfish sisters, impecunious brothers and scheming guardians whose advent usually spelled out one word: trouble.

Certainly the Cliff House girls had their share.

Babs had problems with her wayward young sister, Doris, and with her waster boy-cousin, Keith. Once Uncle Robin turned up to need her help, but all these faded to minor problems when compared to Babs' sufferings at the hands of her cousin Faith Ashton, who was the subject of a major series ---and made the most of every minute of it!

Gwen Cook had a cousin Arthur from Australia, who was an Olympic champion. Gwen thought he was going to do great things for sport at Cliff House. Unfortunately he nearly ran over Clara's beloved Alsatian, Pluto, an action guaranteed to bring about his downfall if the Tomboy had the least suspicion of his integrity, especially as the wise and shrewd Jemima's verdict on the great Arthur was: "...a distinct hunch that he is not an egg of the new-laid variety". He wasn't, but poor Gwen didn't have a very nice time until he was unmasked.

June Merrett dreamed of musical fame, which Rosa Rodworth was going to help bring true. But June's long-lost mother turned up at Cliff House as a cook, whereupon Rosa's reactions were not of the kindest, and for a while it seemed that June would have to choose between her mother and her future career.

Mistresses were not allowed to escape lightly, either. Miss Bullivant had a niece called Lorna, who was bad enough, but she also had a brother called Grant, who was serving a six-month prison sentence for forgery and who managed to escape. Grim though she can be at times, one can't help feeling a pang for the Bull when it is Nancy Bell, of all girls, who finds out.... And the Fourth's adored young mistress, Valerie Charmant, had a cousin by adoption, the unspeakable Shaw Dennis. It took the concerted, determined efforts of the Fourth to rid Cliff House and free Miss Charmant of this unpleasant rotter.

Clara has a racing driver cousin whom she admires tremendously. Then speed star Mary begs Clara to hide a girl stowaway at Cliff House for a while, and endless complications---with a lot of trouble for Clara---ensue.

But perhaps the most maligned girl at Cliff House was the one least equipped with enough aggression to combat trouble: Marjorie Hazeldene. Her particular bête-noire was cousins.

First there was Leatrice Storm, a real little horror, whose doting mother spoiled her rotten and whose wealthy father paid Marjorie's school fees, thus putting her under an obligation---there is always an Obligation!---to look after Leatrice. Alas, being looked



Leatrice Storm came to Cliff House thinking she was going to do just as she pleased, but she was very soon to learn how mistaken she was.

Marjorie's Mischievous Cousin!

By HILDA RICHARDS.

after by Marjorie is the last thing Leatrice wants. In her younger days Leatrice must have had quite an affinity with Violet Elizabeth Bott, who would "thcream an' thcream an' thcream" till she "wath sick", but unfortunately Leatrice had not grown out of this distressing trait at the age of twelve.

This series, S.F. 185-188, 1928, was especially interesting for its superb depiction of Jemima, who played her brilliant role of deploying an apparently neutral policy but not one of non-intervention, allied to Ransome's inimitable style of blending humour and pathos with an essentially dramatic theme.

Another cousin of Marjorie's was Ralph Lawrence, who appeared several times, usually in the same plot of his being blamed for the misdeeds of another boy who always managed to fool everyone into believing he was nothing less than an angel. In MARJORIE'S BLACK SHEEP COUSIN Ralph's adversary was Paul Mostyn, who maliciously plays Iago between Marjorie and her cousin throughout this series, and, if this is not enough to betray his true nature, all that need be added is that he thrashes little dogs. But Clara takes him on (shades of her long ago challenge to Bullstrode of Greyfriars) and actually lams Mostyn before smashing his stick in two. There is a glorious row, then:

Mostyn, stung at last, looked dangerous. "Here, draw it mild,

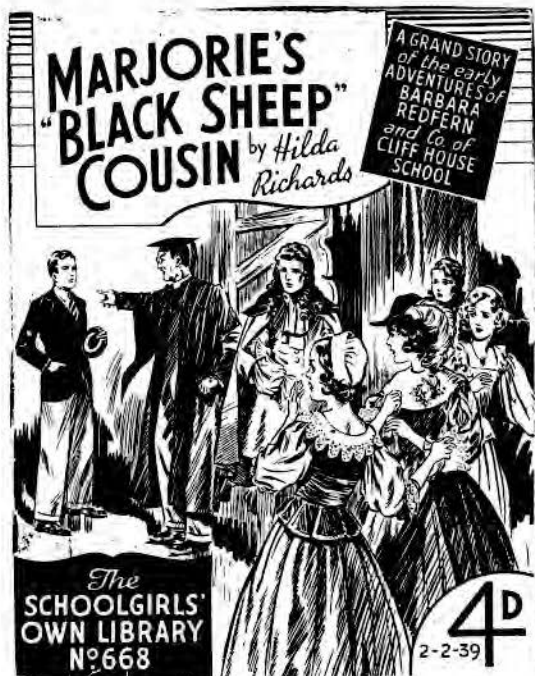
Clara".

"Yes?" Clara asked challengingly.

"If you don't---"

"If I don't?" Clara threw him a withering glance. "If I don't I suppose you'll lam into me?" she asked bitingly. "You would! You'd go for a girl with just as little thought as you'd go for a dumb animal, wouldn't you? Well you try it on, that's all!"

Mostyn has second thoughts, and soon afterwards is satisfyingly discredited. With the stalwart Clara as well as Majorie on his side, Ralph's character is cleared of all suspicion. Clara, however, seems to have a lapse of memory regarding Ralph in two later stories, both based on the same plot. CHAMPIONED BY MARJORIE in SGL 462 and then, only a month before SCHOOLGIRL ended in 1940, MARJORIE ALONE UNDERSTOOD HIM. Lady Patricia Northanson of the Sixth closes this last tale of Ralph by blushing rosily during a rather meaning conversation with him. Sadly, we shall never know if that tender hint of romance ever blossomed. Hitler put the blight on that!



Poor Marjorie had brother trouble too!

In JUST LIKE JEMIMA the chums go with Marjorie to meet her brother, Philip Hazeldene, who had just returned from five years of series illness in Madagascar. However the young man who steps off the train looks fit, athletic and handsome---and greets Babs as Marjorie. He passes of this mistake with easy nonchalance, and sets off with the girls for a double birthday celebration aboard the GLORIANA, the yacht owned by Celeste Margesson's grandfather. It is Celeste's birthday, and Philip's. But Jemima looks thoughtful. By the time she has caught Philip playing ghost in a cave she is suspicious of Marjorie's handsome brother.

Meanwhile, Marjorie can't understand why her brother and one of her dearest friends are not hitting it off at all. Nor does she find it easy to believe that Jemima has stolen a valuable paper from Philip.

Then Clara blunders into things by suggesting that Jemima had better go back to Cliff House. Jemima responds by ordering the launch. She goes below to collect her things, and Marjorie, distressed, follows her, puzzled as to why Jemima is descending far below the level of the yacht's cabin deck. Marjorie is even more startled when Jemima apparently attacks her. Later, Marjorie is discovered unconscious, imprisoned in a coal bunker. When the girls revive her she names Jemima as her assailant.

After that, Jemima has to go. But it is not long before she returns, in spectacular fashion, creating a fake fire on the yacht and then drawing together the threads of mystery as she denounces Philip as an imposter and the son of a jewel thief who had robbed the Margessons recently. The thief had met Philip and decided this was a prime opportunity to take his place and get abroad the yacht to retrieve a diamond necklace his father had been forced to leave behind. It was he who attacked Marjorie from behind while Jemima tried to ward him off, only to be blamed herself. The paper she had annexed was the plan showing where the necklace had been hidden. In her unassuming way Jemima produces the necklace and the real Philip, who looks much more like the pale convalescent they'd expected. So once again Jemima does her Sherlock Holmes act with stunning success. But how could Marjorie not know her own brother, even after five years...?

But the most tragic of all the relation stories was that of plump, lovable Bessie Bunter. Bessie had a rich Aunt Annie, who decided to run her own test on Bessie's character by sending her a large

sum of money and sitting back to see how her niece handled this unexpected windfall. Sadly, one thing led to another and the outcome was poor Bessie actually going blind. This, of course, could not be allowed and the great surgeon was found who could perform the miracle operation ---but probably not before a few readers' tears had trickled down the pages of their SCHOOLGIRL.



MIDLAND SECTION O.B.B.C.

The April meeting was very lively and entertaining, with an attendance of 10 members, the best yet in 1988. Several apologies for absence were received, including one from our Chairman, who is still indisposed. Correspondence consisted of the monthly letter from Bill Lofts. Eric Fayne's award of the Silver Cross of St. George from This England magazine was noted with satisfaction.

Geoff Lardner then conducted a brain-taxing Puzzle Corner, which was difficult but very interesting. Betty and Johnny Hopton, Christine Brettell, Win Brown and Ivan Webster did us proud with refreshments. Then Ivan Webster read a chapter about Bunter being missing from Magnet 875. This was Charles Hamilton at his very best. Your correspondent gave one of his quizzes with Bold Bad Bunter as the prize. Two other quizzes followed. Next meeting: May 24th. All good wishes to O.B.B.C. enthusiasts everywhere.

JACK BELLFIELD

LONDON O.B.B.C.

Twenty two members gathered at the Loughton home of Chris and Suzanne Harper on 8th May. Chairman Phil Griffiths welcomed one and all, especially Robert Kay (from the Northern Club) and Mark Jarvis (returning after a long absence). Official business

included a report of the Charles Hamilton plaque unveiling, the article in the following day's Observer, and Mary Cadogan's spirited reply to the patronizing tone and inaccuracies therein. Possible venues for the Club Annual Luncheon were mentioned, which the Secretary was requested to explore. Bob Whiter wrote that he had been in touch with the daughter of George E. Rochester, and hopes to gather information on that writer for a future article.

Norman Wright read an article about trade cards (the cigarette card look-alikes that were given free with magazines and confectionery). Don Webster's 'Entrance Examination' Quiz had us back in the Schoolroom, and Jim Sutcliffe's fascinating selection of Desert Island Books was much enjoyed.

After a hearty vote of thanks to Suzanne and Chris, we were on our way. Next meeting: 12th June, at the home of Eric and Betty Lawrence, 2 Blagrove Lane, Wokingham, Berks. RG11 4BE (tel. 0734 784925). Tea will be provided, but please bring your own food, and notify our hosts if you are attending, so that sufficient seating may be arranged.

LESLIE ROWLEY

NORTHERN O.B.C.

On 14th May, Michael and Janet Bentley welcomed the club to their home at Calverley, Leeds for a very entertaining evening. Nineteen members were present, with some absences, through holidays or illness. As so many were to be on holiday during June, it was decided that our Annual Club Dinner would not be held during that month, but discussed at the next meeting.

Members visited Michael's wide-ranging library, in which Biggles books and Howard Baker facsimiles were prominent, and enjoyed seeing his collection of tins, model cars and vintage cameras. The evening's highlight was our visit to the loft, to Michael's own 23-seat cinema, which is complete with 'tip-up' seats! We saw some old advertisements which had been in the cinema circuit years ago, and two full length feature films from the late 1930's. 'Soft Lights and Sweet Music' and 'Calling All Stars' were more a variety show than a story, featuring many of the old stars, several of whom had at some time appeared in the early story papers and comics: Harry Tate, Billy Bennett, Max Bacon, Elizabeth Welch, Wilson, Keppel and Betty Ambrose, and his Orchestra, Arthur Askey, Ethel Revnell and Gracie West, Larry Adler, The Western Brothers, Flotsam and Jetsam, and others.

Next meeting: 11th June at our usual venue, S.P.C.K./Holy Trinity Church Café, Boar Lane, Leeds 1.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

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PUBLICITY - or - NO PUBLICITY

by W.O.G. Lofts

Let there be no mistake about it. The right kind of publicity can only do the hobby some good. For example, it introduces fresh people to the clubs, where they may be a stimulus to activities. Others may become subscribers or contributors to our collecting magazines, and those of the younger generation will ensure the continuance of our hobby long after the pioneers have left us. One finds fresh ideas and great enthusiasm in new people who may only find out about the world of collecting through publicity.

On the other hand, bad publicity causes tremendous irritation, with its distorted facts and sensational reporting. Unfortunately the 'bad' outweighs the 'good' so much that, many years ago, one club introduced a rule that no mention of the club should be made in publicity unless the details had been vetted by the Committee first. (There was, of course, no objection to any individual member having publicity, as long as the club in question was not quoted.)

Some members do not wish for publicity in any shape or form. In some ways I agree with them, for it is so easy for non-collecting people, who after all are in the enormous majority, to assume that it is odd for grown-ups to indulge in the collecting, discussion and reading of boys' papers and comics which they should have left behind when they were in their teens' Unfortunately all papers are often classed as 'comics' simply because, since the 'fifties, children's weeklies have been in picture-strip form. Younger editors and media people do not recall the old story-papers, but only those of the Dandy, Beano and Knockout type. I recently saw a copy of the last-named from the 'fifties which carried the sub-title 'Knockout and The Magnet Comic'.

Bad publicity usually stems from the same formula. At intervals, when some editor is short of a feature article, he hears of a local man with the unusual hobby of collecting old boys' papers and comics, and a reporter is sent to interview him. The collector might well be honest about the fun and fascination of collecting. If he is lucky enough to have No. 1 Beano or even Magnet in his collection, he might point out that these are now quite valuable, probably worth £100 at least. He might also mention that Frank Richards's stories of Greyfriars and Billy Bunter are so well written that they can be enjoyed by adults today.

When the article is eventually published he is horrified to find it under a headline like 'Local Man Adores Billy Bunter' (when like some others, he may actually dislike the Fat Owl of the Remove'), and other pieces of editorial tarting-up, such as the value of the two number-one issues being increased to £1,000. Quite rightly, the collector feels that not only has he been misrepresented but held up to ridicule. A letter to the editor requesting corrections generally falls on deaf ears. To go to a solicitor for redress would cost a

lot of money, so consequently what should have been a good write-up about the hobby has turned sour.

Television publicity usually stems from a newspaper report or article. Local T.V. station researchers go through national and local papers every day for items which might be of interest in their programmes. Eventually some collector is contacted, and he may soon find himself on the small screen. The results of a T.V. or radio interview are rarely so sensationalised or mis-reported as those in the press, simply because one can deal directly with the interviewer's questions and comments. But even this has its problems. Sometimes very awkward questions are asked which take time to be answered fully, but a reply is demanded straight away! If one is not used to being interviewed under the hot lights there can be difficulties, and, worst of all, there can be cutting of recorded programmes to fit the time allowed, so that remarks can be taken completely out of context to convey a different meaning from that originally intended.

Unfortunately there are a few collectors, outside of our circle, who thrive on any publicity, good or bad. One apparently even offered his cottage in exchange for a complete set of Magnets many years ago, while, believe it or not, several have dressed up as Billy Bunter, probably not realising what ridiculous figures they looked. Some give a highly exaggerated figure of how much their collections are worth, and false values for papers that can be bought cheaply anywhere.

I can well remember a Fleet Street reporter questioning me on how the Old Boys Book Clubs operate, and my telling him to contact the Secretary in question. However, he still wrote about elderly men dressed in traditional school uniform, with satchels of 'comics' to swop at the club, and all talking in jargon like 'I say you chaps, these pork pies are prime'; 'Let's have a feast in the dorm tonight', etc. He also wrote about their scoffing jam tarts and guzzling ginger beer at the meeting, and then going home to dress soberly the next morning and, as doctors, teachers, lawyers, bank-managers and civil servants to resume their sedate occupations - until the next club meeting was due!

Personally these days I shun publicity like the plague, simply because I do a lot of research that is strictly confidential. It is preferable for achievements to speak for themselves through mention in books and other serious publications. I did have an awful experience in my early days of the hobby, when my interview with a local paper reporter was headlined 'His hero is Sexton Blake', and otherwise grossly distorted, to say the least.

All in all, however, good publicity can only benefit our excellent hobby, whilst bad write-ups bring ridicule and embarrassment to it.

Your Editor says—



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