

COLLECTORS

STORY
PAPER

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NOVEMBER

1988



H.H.

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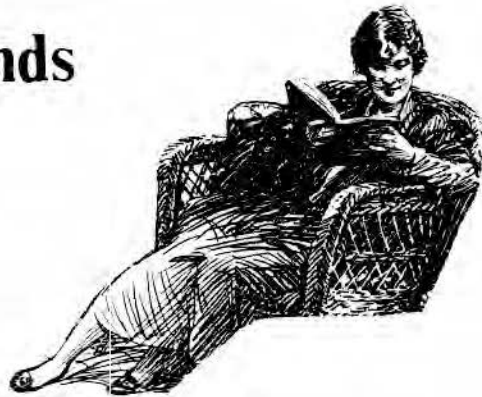
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Between Friends



CARRYING THE TORCH....

When writing about books that hark back to childhood reading, present-day reviewers often refer to fictional delights of their own lives that had to be sampled illicitly, by torchlight beneath the bedclothes. Many children of my generation suffered parental bans upon comics and, indeed, story-papers, which adults tended to slot into the same category. Looking at the stream of books appearing now in the run-up to Christmas, it is interesting to observe the potency of nostalgia for much of this once condemned reading matter.

Recently issued books look back with warm affection to childhood reading ranging from nursery picture books through school stories to detective fiction. And nostalgists seem like policemen, teachers, doctors, etc., to be getting younger all the time! Michael Bond's appealingly shaggy and mischievous Paddington Bear, for example, who seems a recent arrival on the scene to many of us, has just had his thirtieth birthday. This has been celebrated by grown-up fans from all over the world, as well as by his child admirers. (A fitting tribute to his popularity is THE LIFE AND TIMES OF PADDINGTON BEAR, a beautifully produced volume by Russell Ash and Michael Bond, published by Pavilion books.) The exploits of characters such as Pooh, Mary Plain, Rupert and many other furry bear friends now comprise a genre of their own, of course.

Another character who sturdily stands the test of time is Richmal Crompton's William, who has received a great deal of favourable attention in the press recently, and who crops up in this issue of the C.D. in Henry Webb's cover and J.R. Murtagh's note from 'Down Under'.

THE ANNUAL

The C.D. Annual continues to take shape and, by the time you read this editorial, will be pretty nearly ready for binding. Orders can still be accepted, if received in the next week or so (£6.95 per copy for readers in the U.K. and £8.55 for those living abroad). Last month I listed some of the Annual's attractions. Here are a few more: we shall be including a school story by Frank Richards which has never been commercially published; that doyen of Blake stories, J.E.M., has provided a fascinating illustrated article on Sexton Blake as seen through the eyes of various artists; Bob Whiter writes about Christmas editions of the Magnet and other papers; Dennis Bird focuses on Noel Raymond, the 'young and famous detective' of the Girls' Crystal'; C.H. Churchill, Jim Sutcliffe and others have dipped into the Nelson Lee Library for our delight, while Edward Baldock has contributed some more of his much admired Greyfriars vignettes. And there are plenty of other interesting items!

Happy reading!

MARY CADOGAN



Further Reflections on the Cads of St. Franks.

by E.B. Grant-McPherson

I expect a great number of C.D. readers after reading my good friend Mr. Churchill's excellent article on the CADS of ST. FRANKS wondered what did happen to Bernard Forrest?

Bernard Forrest came to St. Frank's at the same time as the old school was being enlarged; it was rebuilt with 4 houses instead of the original 2, and Forrest was admitted to the East House, one of the new ones. This was at the same time as Fullwood was going through his reformation period. His action so upsets the other occupants of study A, Gulliver and Bell, that they cause him to leave the study. Meanwhile Forrest has made friends with the two cads of Study A, and arranges a transfer to the Ancient House and into their study. Forrest being a much more forceful character soon becomes the leader of study A.

He does not take a really leading part in the stories, however, until early in the First New Series when an American "Crank", for want of a better word, persuades the Head to adopt his Honour System for a trial period. In this all the boys are placed on their honour to obey the school rules with no fear of punishment, the theory being that the boys would consider themselves honour bound not to break them. Of course this works quite well with a number of the boys, but the weaker characters and the goers in particular are in their element.

At about this time in one of the big houses in the area a gaming club is set up where roulette and many other forms of gambling are carried out, much to the delight of the young bloods in the district and of course the gay dogs of St. Frank's who can now break bounds with impunity. Forrest becomes a leading light in these activities and tries to lure Fullwood back into the meshes by concocting a story and getting Fullwood to break bounds and attend the club; Fullwood,

on being surrounded by all the glitter and the click of the wheels, weakens temporarily but manages to withstand the temptation, due in no small part to his girl friend, Winnie Pitt, of the Moor View School.

Not long afterwards a feud develops between the remove and the fourth, the two forms forming secret societies, the remove dressing up in monk-like habits and calling themselves the New Avengers, and the fourth adopting the title of the New Klu Klux Klan, and a costume to suit. At first the japes are comparatively harmless, but Forrest sees a way to cause trouble and with the aid of the cads of the River House school gets hold of both types of disguise. By carrying out dirty tricks against both sides he inflames the whole thing to such an extent that the leaders Nipper and Boots both get expelled.

Willy Handforth discovers the plotters and tells his major who confronts them and, finding out that Forrest is behind the whole thing, gives him a thorough thrashing until he agrees to confess to the Head. This he does and is duly expelled. Of course Nipper and Boots are exonerated, and Gulliver and Bell are given floggings for their part. The River House boys were not reported, it being left to the juniors to mete out justice. Forrest however was not allowed to depart in peace; there is quite a ceremony, all the school cadets forming two lines and the band actually drumming him to the gates.

Some time later Forrest returns to St. Frank's as a new boy named Percy Woodhouse. At the opening of the story Claude Gore-Pearce is the leader of study A, then for no apparent Gulliver and Bell pick a quarrel with him and throw him out of the study. He then joins Hubbard in study B next door.

When Forrest turns up at the school his appearance has been changed. His hair has been waved and dyed, he wears glasses and talks with a lisp but of course there is still a strong resemblance. Handforth in his usual manner declares that it is Forrest. Forrest, however, admits the likeness by saying that he is Forrest's cousin, which satisfies most of the remove and of course gives Gulliver and Bell the reason for inviting him into their study.

Handy does not believe him, Nipper is doubtful and Gore-Pearce smells a rat and rigs up a telephone set between the two studies, which are next door to each other. He hears enough to convince him of the true identity of Percy Woodhouse, and tells Nipper who comes and listens too. They then accuse Forrest, who eventually admits who he really is.

Nelson Lee was not conned, however, and has told the Head, who is now one Dr. Morrison Nichols who had never met Forrest.

Forrest is taken before the Head and confesses all and pleads to be allowed to stay. But Dr. Nichols is adamant and rings Mr. Forrest who is staying in Bannington and asks him to come and collect his son. Mr. Forrest asks the Head to come to Bannington to meet him there, and after an argument the Head agrees.

Bernard leaves the school on his motorcycle with the Head following in his car. Halfway to Bannington, Forrest suddenly stops his motorcycle and leaps over the hedge and runs across the field. The Head, wondering what has happened, follows him just in time to see him dive into the river. By the time the Head reaches the riverbank Forrest has just got to a girl who was being swept away in the current. He gets her to the bank where the Head and the driver are able to pull the girl out of the water, just before Forrest slips under. The driver is able to rescue Forrest who is just about all in.

Dr. Nichols reinstates Forrest for his heroic deed, not realising that it was all a put-up job, Bernard and his father had realised from the first that the disguise and deception would soon be seen through and had arranged the rescue to get him back into the school.

The Nelson Lees from which these stories are taken are numbers 537 and 8 Old Series and numbers 26 to 30, 68 to 71 and 179 to 183 First New Series.)

* * * * *



Sexton Blake in Other Disguises

by W.O.G. Lofts

Sexton Blake appeared in many disguises in the shape of other characters during his long reign from 1893 to about 1970, when the last original story was written. Such was his popularity that he was rated only just below Sherlock Holmes as the most popular and best known private detective in England. By disguises, I don't of course mean his expertise in using greasepaint to alter his appearance, but the number of times his advantages have been reprinted, with other detectives names replacing Sexton Blake and Tinker.

Probably the best known cases were in the thirties, when original Sexton Blake stories, sometimes slightly altered, were published by Wright and Brown Ltd., with all sorts of new names of sleuths inserted. This reprinting has had many explanations in the past in Collectors' Digest, the main one thing that it was done in arrangement with the old Amalgamated Press Ltd. In my opinion, however, it was done more by the authors (such as Gerald Verner and John G. Brandon amongst others) who simply rehashed their old tales, carefully changing the copyright characters of Amalgamated Press to those with different names.

But probably even more startling was the changing of original Sexton Blake Library stories in the early days to those of Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake for the Boys Friend Library (see The Boys Friend Library Catalogue). Whilst in the famous Nelson Lee Library some pure detective yarns (not St. Frank's) feature the famous Grays Inn Road detective and his assistant Nipper, that likewise have been proved to be original yarns featuring Sexton Blake. There have been other instances of the detective changing identity, some, I believe, in the old Answers or Penny Pictorial short Blake stories.

Picture strips of Sexton Blake started in The Knockout Comic early in 1939, and were by all accounts very popular indeed with readers as these serials went on for about 25 years, ending with the rather extraordinary main title of 'Sexton Blake' of Scotland Yard', with two page strips of the 'Who Dunnit' type.

Curiously, Eric Parker the doyen of all the Sexton Blake artists had really little to do with these strips, only drawing one series, 'Sexton Blake and Tinker in the Secret of Monte Christo', in early 1949, plus an odd two page strip in The Knockout Annual. Most of the strips were drawn by Alfred Taylor and Roland Davies with many others contributing from time to time. Personally I don't think that Eric was all that keen on picture strips. "Too much hard work" was one comment made to me, similar to the response of C.H. Chapman, the Magnet illustrator, to the Billy Bunter strips he initially drew in The Knockout. When one has been a single illustrator all one's working life, it is difficult to adapt to a much smaller size illustrations in panels. However, the little work that Parker did on the Blake strips was of his usual extremely high standard.

Recently looking for something else in Odhams "Wonder Book of Colour", which ran for three issues in the early 1950's, I came across a two page detective who-dunnit strip featuring 'Ted Mason and his assistant Jack' written by S. Giasford and illustrated by Eric Parker. There is no mistaking the Mr. Mason and assistant, as these

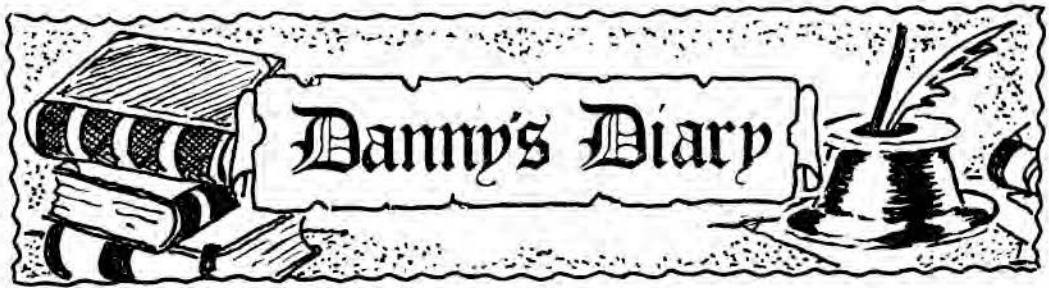
are our old friends Sexton Blake and Tinker! It could be that Eric, who was so used to drawing Blake, simply drew the same features, or else a strip he originally drew for Knockout (maybe never published) was simply used for a new detective.

It could on the other hand be a reprint from either the weekly Knockout or yearly Annual, but this would have to be before 1954 when the Odhams feature was printed. One should also add that Odhams Press at that date was an entirely different firm, and it was some years before Fleetway Publications (the old Amalgamated Press Ltd.) bought them out.

Another highly interesting case of changing Sexton Blake to another detective came in the new but short lived (now I.P.C.) boys' picture paper 'Tornado' in 1979. What was unusual about this was that originally the strip was about Blake, Tinker, and Pedro, but, before it was published the editor thought that Blake was 'old hat and should have a more modern image' Consequently the series was about Victor Drago and his assistant 'Spencer', with poor old Pedro becoming 'Brutus'!

Another remarkable thing about this strip was that it featured two Butlers named Lofts and Adley, drawn almost exactly to size as well! I have long had a feeling that the script writer might have known us. Adley was unfortunately killed off, but Lofts lived to fight another day, and to write this article.





NOVEMBER 1988

It hasn't been a very great month in the fourpenny Libraries. In the School-boys' Own Library we started off with the Greyfriars one, "The Boot-Boy's Lucky Break". Eric Carlow for years has been a boot-boy in a boarding-house. Now, owing to a bit of luck, he is able to fulfil his great ambition to get into a school like Greyfriars. But he has a rough passage for a time. Also included in this S.O.L. is a November the Fifth episode which is great fun.

The second S.O.L. this month is a tale of Oakshott School called "The Schoolboy 'Tec". I remember it as a series in Modern Boy only about two years ago. A criminal, the "Sussex Man", cracks cribs without leaving a trace, and Scotland Yard can't nab him. But Len Lex of the Oakshott Fifth takes a hand. Pretty good stuff.

The St. Frank's S.O.L. is "Tyrant and Sport". The good old Head of St. Frank's suddenly has strange change of character. One moment he is his normal kind self; the next moment he is an old brute. Nelson Lee is determined to solve the mystery.

I only had one Boys' Friend Library this month, and this is "Will Hay at Bendover". A bit too farcical for me, but I expect some chaps like it. I also had one Sexton Blake Library and this is "The Mystery of Dead Man's Wallet" by John G. Brandon. Along with Blake and Tinker it introduces R.S.V. Purvale, the aristocrat and tough guy. Not so bad.

Weatherwise, it has been a very, very mild month. More like summer than late autumn. Dad says it suits him. Maybe to celebrate the mild weather, Doug took me to the theatre in London and we saw a thrilling new play called "Brighton Rock", about a juvenile gangster, Brighton fashion. I enjoyed it a lot. When we came out we had an egg on toast for a shilling and a banana split for ninepence in a Lyons teashop. Gorgeous!

The main attraction in Modern Boy at the moment is the new Captain Justice series. Justice has found Volke Schliegle's amazing headquarters at the bottom of the Sargossa Sea. To the surprise of the friends of Captain Justice he agrees to join the band of outlaws, but there is a reason for it. This month's Justice tales are "The Ocean-Bed Monster", "Peril Deep Down", "Battle of the Sargosso" and the last of the present series "Flazzy's Flash of Genius".

The Biggles serial is "Biggles' Rescue Flight". A series called "Told in the Tuckshop" has its moments, and one of that series this month, "The Boy Who

Hoodwinked Hitler" is good fun. I wonder what old Adolf will think of it.

There has been a terrible air crash. A plane had only just taken off from St. Helier airport in Jersey, bound for Southampton, when it crashed, killing all 33 occupants and also killing a man on the ground.

In the Magnet, all the month, the new series has gone on about Gilbert Tracy who is at Greyfriars when he would rather be elsewhere. Mr. Quelch, who is an old friend of Tracy's father, has made himself responsible for Gilbert, but Gilbert isn't a bit grateful. Quite the reverse. This month's first story, "The Mystery of Mr. Quelch", is an exceptionally good one. Someone in cap and gown is playing mad pranks at Greyfriars, and suspicion falls on the Remove master. It is rumoured that Quelch has gone nuts. This tale is set against a background of November the Fifth activities. A very unusual tale, and a rattling good one.

Next came "He Let the Side Down!" Tracy is a fine footballer, and, with such a player in his team. Wharton feels sure of licking Highcliffe on the field. But Tracy is a traitor. Next "Saved by his Enemy". The rascal reforms. He has played many dirty tricks on Wharton, but now Tracy does his enemy a really good turn. And last of the month brought "Tracy Takes the Blame". This time Tracy takes the blame to save Hazeldene, and as the month ends Tracy is certain to have to face the music the next morning. An excellent series which continues next month.

A good month at the Regal, the Super, the Plaza, and the Majestic. A film I much enjoyed was "The Boy from Barnado's", starring Freddie Bartholomew and Mickey Rooney. Just like Tom Merry & Co. from St. Jim's. Fairly good was "Blockade" with Henry Fonda, billed as the first film on the Spanish Civil War, but it was a job to see which side we were on, and there was no mention of old Franco and his fascists. "Gold is Where You Find It" was a nice western in technicolour, with George Brent, about the men who went to California to hunt gold and stayed on as farmers. Then Gary Cooper was in "The Adventures of Marco Polo", about the explorer discovering China and fireworks a long time ago. And Gracie Fields sang lustily in "We're Going to be Rich". Very exciting was Freddie Bartholomew in "Kidnapped" although it wandered a long way from the book which we read in school. I liked Humphrey Bogart and the Dead End Kids in "Crime School" about the worries of a warden in a reformatory for bad boys. And perhaps the best of the lot was Clark Gable and Spencer Tracey in "Test Pilot", a great flying film. Finally, really magical, was the Crazy Gang in "Alf's Button Afloat".

And so I come to the gorgeous Gem which is really packed with delight just now, with St. Jim's, Cedar Creek, and the Benbow. First St. Jim's tale this month is "The Boy with a Bad Name". A letter in Clive's handwriting insults Gussy. But Clive didn't write it, so they all suspect Levison who is known for his skill in forging other people's writing. But Talbot takes a hand and shows up the real culprit - Racke. Next, "A Cool Customer". This one tells of the arrival at St. Jim's of Ralph Reckness Cardew. He has the nerve to be smoking a cigarette when he first meets his Housemaster. But in the next tale some of Cardew's cheek is damped, when an awful "cousin" arrives. Actually he is Lowther in disguise. This tale is entitled "Cardew Makes Amends" and he shows that one minute he is a snob and the next minute he is ready to take a flogging

to save Redfern from expulsion. And Redfern would have lost his scholarship. Then another Cardew tale, "Tom Merry's Secret Enemy". I don't really care a lot for Cardew, but these tales about his arrival are tip-top.

This month's Cedar Creek stories form a series. The first one "Rogue's Revenge" tells of Gunten seeking revenge on Miss Meadows for punishing him. She has handed a letter to Frank Richards which she asks him to deliver to Mr. Penrose, the editor of the local paper. Frank is waylaid on the trail by Gunten and Keller who bag the letter and open it. It contains a small ad for a handyman to work at the school. Gunten changed the ad to one of a spinster lady, Miss Meadows, advertising for a husband. Later, not knowing that the letter has been tampered with, Frank delivers it to Mr. Penrose. Second tale is "A Victim of Vengeance", with Miss Meadows pestered by all sorts of men wanting her for a wife. Next "Under Suspicion", Frank Richards is suspected of playing the shocking trick with the ad., but Sergeant Lasale visits the school, and finds out Gunten as the real culprit. Finally, in "The Outcast of Cedar Creek", Gunten is expelled for his foul trick, and his father, Old Man Gunten, is furious at the sentence.

This month's Benbow stories also make a series. Daubeny wrecks the study of Drake, Rodney, and Toodles, destroying their furniture, and provides himself with an alibi to try to prove that he didn't do it. Tuckey Toodles re-furnishes the study, but he has got all the new fittings on the never-never system, from the firm of Goggs, and all is well till the time comes for him to start paying for it all. The stories are entitled respectively "The Perfect Alibi", "Tuckey's Furnishing Fund", "Easy Terms", and "Tuckey in Trouble".

The Gem is really the goods just now. Long may it continue.

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

S.O.L. No. 352, "The Boot-Boy's Luck", comprised 3 consecutive Magnet stories from November 1931. These included the November the Fifth tale (probably put in to make up the required length) and the pair which followed concerning the ex-bootboy, Carlow, who fell foul of Nugent who took a dislike to him. Excellent volume. S.O.L. No. 353 "The Schoolboy 'Tec" comprised the opening 5 stories of the Len Lex at Oakshott series which had appeared in Modern Boy in the late autumn of 1936.

The November 1938 St. Jim's stories in the Gem all came from the early weeks of the year 1917. "The Boy With a Bad Name" had been "Hard Lines for Levison"; "A Cool Customer" had been "Cardew of the Fourth", a red-letter issue for the many admirers of this whimsical character; "Cardew Makes Amends" had been "A Puzzle for St. Jim's"; and "Tom Merry's Secret Enemy" was originally "Facing the Music".

Now for the Gem's 1938 Cedar Creek Tales. 2 stories were now omitted (Christmas tales which, I think, we shall find were picked up later). The 4 which Danny read in 1938 had all run consecutively in the Boy's Friend from late December 1917. "A Rogue's Revenge" had been "Gunten's Little Game"; "A Victim of Vengeance" had been "A Peculiar Persecution" in 1917; "Under Suspicion" had been "Saved by the Sergeant"; while "The Outcast of Cedar Creek" bore the same title in both appearances.

The Benbow tales were 4 which ran consecutively in the Greyfriars Herald from

Mid-February 1920. "The Perfect Alibi" had been "The Study Ragers" in 1920; "Tuckey's Furnishing Fund" had the same title on both occasions; "Easy Terms" of 1938 had been "Easy Payments" in 1920; and "Tuckey in Trouble" had been "The Study Ragers" in 1920; "Tuckey's Furnishing Fund" had the same title on both occasions; "Easy Terms" of 1938 had been "Easy Payments" in 1920; and "Tuckey in Trouble" had been "The Young Man from Gogg's" in 1920.

The film "The Boy From Barnado's" (I recall it was popular when we played it in the Small Cinema of which I wrote long ago) had been entitled "Lord Jeff" in the United States. It is difficult to see, in this case, why they changed the title for Britain. You will have noticed when the old American films are shown on TV now it is always under their original American titles.

Cliff House Corner

by Margery Woods



How Much Do We Really Know About Them....?

Millions of words were written about the Cliff House girls, from their inception in the early years of the MAGNET through to their last adventure in the SCHOOLGIRL in the spring of 1940. At least five major writers, possibly more, contributed to the forming of their characters and left a huge legacy of material into which the researcher may endlessly delve. Portraits in colour were painted of them, beautiful little cards that are works of art in their own right, successive illustrators kept these Peter Pan creations eternally youthful in the mode of the moment down through three decades, and a comprehensive "bible" of their background, family history, appearance and nature--not even their pets were forgotten--was set down for the record, first in the SCHOOL FRIEND of the twenties and later in the SCHOOLGIRL by John Wheway. In view of this it might seem that not another word could be found to say about these schoolgirls, who, in the way that brings joy to any writer of fiction, came to life on the page.

And yet, the characters of a few of them remain somewhat elusive.

Clara Trevlyn is (arguably!) one of the easiest characters to analyse. Her nature is so totally honest it is virtually impossible for Clara to dissemble, deceive or deviate from the girl who became the epitome of frank, sturdy school-girl pluck for countless young would-be emulators.

Bessie, bless her, is an open book---one entitled Food! (the second edition could be retitled Postal Order).

Jemima, one of the most brilliant schoolgirl creations in the history of the genre, may also be analysed quite easily, despite her being Cliff House's greatest enigma. We know she is good, clever, honest and trustworthy, which gives a resounding lie to the myth that a character as worthy as this must be pretty dull company. Her little sorties into intrigue may puzzle, surprise or bewilder us but they never fail to entertain and leave us with that sense of satisfaction all good stories should leave---Jemima has pulled it off again!

Diana is almost as easily defined as Bessie---the flip side, in that Diana is completely unpredictable. Vain, stubborn, ruthless, Diana is all the adjectives a good schoolgirl shouldn't be, yet we love her. As Paul Daniels might say: she's magic.

Marjorie Hazeldene is sometimes dismissed as a bit of a dull lass, too quiet and colourless for a schoolgirl, whose principle use is to provide contrast for her boisterous chum, Tomboy Clara, thus playing safe with the old adage that opposites attract. But a closer study of Marjorie may surprise. Her upbringing, that of the tradition hang-over from Victorian days kind, has superimposed a timid, well-behaved waste-not-want-not facade on a girl who in truth has a will of her own and a steely determination to back it when a time of real crisis arrives. Anyone who doubts this should read the Secret City of Shest series (SCHOOLGIRL sometime in mid thirties) and may then revise their opinion of gentle Marjorie. (I have often imagined her in adulthood finally shaking off the years of conditioning and surprising everyone.)

Mabs is another difficult one. She does not always come over as a strong character and at times seems less than assertive. Her turns to star in a series usually include one of the make-up masquerades at which she excels but sometimes there is the impression that Mabs, because of her character-acting skills, tends to reflect the personalities of those around her, making it difficult to discern the real girl behind it all. Do we see of Mabs that which she wants us to see?

And lastly, Babs, the leader, the central figure of the Fourth, around whom are interwoven the diverse threads of their school life. Babs, for me, has always held an air of mystery. We take it as read that Babs is one of the best, a girl eminently suitable to captain the Lower School, and possessed of all the qualities essential to the successful role of leadership. Indeed, when in the full throes of what she believes is right, Babs has all the makings of a first rate martyr. Despite this, what do we really know about Babs? I've read many stories featuring her, by the successive Hilda Richards, yet still find it difficult to pin down this character so that I feel I really know her. Of course she will always champion the underdog, is fiercely loyal to her family and chums, will risk peril to save someone in danger, is a good all-rounder at lessons and sport, and will never count the cost to herself of whatever action she takes on behalf of someone she believes is being victimised.

But what of the Babs behind this paragon of a schoolgirl? What of her dreams, her desires, her doubts and her fears? We rarely glimpse Babs' human side, her failings are born of her virtues, leaving an impression that there is a part of Babs' character that none of her authors has ever plumbed. Is it because Babs is never allowed to break out and do something wild, wilful or outrageous as do all the most exciting characters? Babs is condemned always to set a good example.

So---is Babs just a bit too perfect to be true...?



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WILLIAM - STILL DOWN UNDER - by J. R. Murtagh

I enjoyed the most interesting articles by Jack Hughes and Darrell Swift in the 1987 Annual about the William Books and can add some more information about the Dymocks copies which were also on sale in New Zealand. 31 titles as listed in copy of an advertisement on the back of a dust cover shown here.

I have never seen any numbers of these books later than No. 31 so assume this is all that were issued by Dymocks.

(Dymock list of William Books over the page)

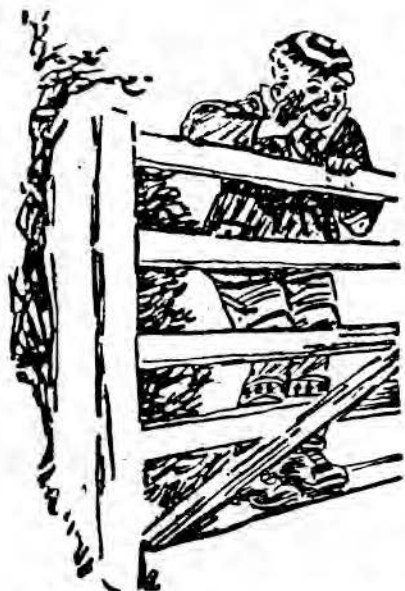
WANTED: Crompton's, William the Lawless, Elsie Oxenham, E.M. Brent Dyer Books, Bunter Hardbacks; D.W.s. D.F. Bruce's Nancy In Sixth. Captain Vols. 7, 24. Chums, Vols. 1908-09; 1909-10. Thriller Picture Libraries.

FOR SALE: Original Greyfriars Holiday Annuals, most years. James Gall, 49 Anderson Avenue, Aberdeen, Scotland, AB9 2LR. Tel. 0224-491716.

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21. William and A.R.P.
22. William and the Evacuees
23. William Does His Bit
24. William Carries On
25. William and the Brains Trust
26. William—The Bold
27. Just William's Luck
28. William and the Tramp
29. William and the Moon Rocket
30. William and the Space Animal
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A CHAMPION PAPER

by Alan Pratt

What a grand old paper The Champion was!

My collection only spans the latter years, 1951 - 1955, but the stories reflect a boyish enthusiasm and innocence that is typical of a much earlier period.

The Champion was, of course, a very "sporty" paper; indeed, very few of its heroes were lacking in some kind of athletic prowess. In some yarns the sport was the man attraction whereas in others it played an underlying role. Hence we have "sporting" bucanears who are just as keen on deck games and trials of strength as they are on looting, secret service agents who are also soccer stars and even a cut-price Tarzan (Kalgan, the Jungle Wonder) who roams through Africa challenging natives to tests of physical strength and skill.

Possibly the best known Champion character is Rockfist Rogan, the air ace. His creator, Hal Wilton, took him from place to place (South Seas, Frozen North etc.) in an assortment of adventures that generally contained a certain amount of flying, a fair portion of boxing (Rogan's sport) and an abundance of good humour. These are well constructed and pacy tales.



The Skyways K.O. King
in an Amazing Jungle
Treasure-hunt

By
Hal Wilton

Most of the issues in my collection also feature a soccer or cricket serial by John Marshall, a writer with the ability to create a fair amount of suspense and excitement. In *The Secret Service Six Hitter*, Steve Drew is a government agent trying to recover the DXY formula stolen from an Australian power station. He is also a "six hitting batsman" for Angleshire. He is also (would you believe?) a cricketer known as Rubberface who somehow manages to elude the entire British police force, despite the paucity of his disguise (illustrated as a tiny black mask about the size of the average pair of spectacles!). Outrageous? Certainly, but this is for me one of the most attractive features of such stories. They were written with what might be called uninhibited gusto and little regard for the trappings of conventional behaviour.

I could write at some length about other *Champion* "stars"; Ginger Nutt, the Boy who takes the Biscuit, Jet Jaxon, Whirlwind on Wheels, Buster O'Brian, Holiday Camp Sports Leader etc. etc. but space prevents me.

A few comments, however, about a character who was not "sporty" in the conventional sense and whose adventures might even be considered out of place amongst the likes of Rogan, Jaxon etc. Colwyn Dane was a "great detective" in the Sexton Blake mould, complete with boy assistant, Slick Chester, a "super" sports car and an ex-crook servant. The weekly Dane adventures were each complete in themselves and written (by Mark Grimshaw) in a sombre and somewhat "hard-boiled" style. Typically, Dane and Slick stumble across a dead body in mysterious circumstances, perhaps dressed as a caveman or daubed with green paint etc. Clues are generally littered around in great profusion and the detectives are eventually led to a master criminal's hideout. Furious fist fights are an essential part of Dane adventures. He and his adversaries are frequently fighting "like tigers" or "like a pair of wildcats". Dane also employs gadgets (a forerunner of James Bond?) like "egg-shaped pellets" which release gas and are thus convenient for bringing the action to a swift halt when lack of column space dictates! Wonderful stuff.

I would be the first to admit that the stories in *The Champion* were not written with the polish of a Frank Richards or an Edwy Searles Brooks. Many characters, it is true, were "two dimensional", but then the story was everything. For those who liked their action fast and physical, *The Champion* was the paper to buy. May the likes of Rogan and Dane not be forgotten.

MORCOVE MINIATURES



AUDREY BLAIN
By TOMMY KEEN



Just as Greyfriars, St. Jim's and our other famous schools for boys had their share (or even more than their share) of cads and bounders, so did Cliff House and Morcove, at various times, shelter wayward and vengeful girls. Quite the most outstanding (in my humble opinion) was a certain Miss Audrey Blain, who arrived at Morcove during the second year run of the SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN. At that time, Cora Grandways was the black sheep of the Fourth Form and the avowed enemy of Betty Barton, but Cora paled into insignificance against Audrey Blain. Audrey arrived, very beautiful, very rich, with golden hair which had the girls sighing with envy, and the possessor of a motor-cycle, complete with side-car. (Were girls of fourteen allowed to drive motor-cycles in 1922?)

Audrey had arrived with a mission - to try and arrange the downfall and, hopefully, expulsion, of Cora Grandways and her sister Judith. Evidently in far off days Cora's mother had been the cause of Audrey's mother being expelled from school. Cora, flattered by Audrey's charming ways, soon became her dupe, but Audrey found she had other fish to fry. She took an immediate dislike to Betty Barton (most of the horrible girls did), but was greatly attracted to some of Betty's closest chums - Madge Minden, Tess Trelawney, and Paula Creel. In time, and helped by Betty having to leave Morcove for a while, all the Study 12 coterie (with the exception of Polly Linton) became enamoured with the new arrival. Audrey soon managed to bring disgrace upon Cora and Judith, and Polly found that most of her friends had deserted her. However, all difficulties are solved and cleared, before Betty returns to the school. Madge and the other girls have discovered Audrey's true character, and although Audrey remains at Morcove, for several months she is almost a loner.

Her time at Morcove, however, was to run out. The Morcove girls (the Fourth naturally) were due to enter for a singing contest in London, which of course they won, the prize being a silver shield. The series leading up to this contest had featured two new girls to Morcove, Jess Lingaird and Stella Munro (cousins), and Audrey Blain desperately wanted Jess out of the way. The chance arose, as the three girls remained in London at Stella's home, and were to bring the shield back to Morcove when it had been appropriately inscribed. Jess was to be in charge! Audrey's chance arrived. During the train journey back to Morcove, whilst Stella and Jess were in the corridor, out of the window Audrey threw the shield. (This, as they travelled through a tunnel!)

Disgrace for Jess on her arrival at Morcove, but all comes well, and Audrey is exposed as the culprit. There were so many other schemes in which Audrey was involved, trying to discredit Betty Barton, that at last this schemer is

expelled. Even then Betty offers her hand in friendship, but no, vindictive to the last, Audrey's parting words are "If I ever get the chance Betty Barton, I'll be even with you yet. If it is in ten years hence, it will make no difference to me".

Actually she is back again on the scene within a few months, too striking a character (like Vernon-Smith) to be dismissed for ever. At Stormwood School, some ten miles from Morcove, Betty and Co. are sent to try and bring good behaviour and sportsmanship to a rather slack establishment taken over by the Morcove authorities. They have heard that the captain of the Fourth Form is a certain Anna Blair, but on their arrival, to Betty and Co's amazement, they come face to face with Audrey Blain. It was not explained why she was using a false name.

Now for another vendetta against Betty and her loyal chums. Audrey arranges with one of her cronies that the girl, Maud Langley, should fall in the river, and that Audrey would save her, making a heroine of the fair Audrey. But the scheme went wrong, and they both had to be saved from drowning. Delirious, the girl Maud reveals the plot, and again Audrey is sent packing. Two expulsions within six months, and no repentance. More dramatic final words to Betty Barton - "Leave me to go my way, as I leave you to go yours, but if ever our ways cross, Betty Barton, you'll find me unchanged". So Audrey leaves Stormwood School, and Betty and Co. return to Morcove.

However, it is not quite the end of Audrey! Three years later she turns up at Morcove as a maid, dressed in cap and apron, her only disguise being short dark hair, instead of long golden hair. Not even recognised, although one of the girls says "Her walk seems familiar"! Not a very interesting series though, Audrey is not even at war with Betty, and is known by the girls as Florrie Blair. (Blair again.) It transpires that Audrey's father is in league with smugglers, and Audrey is at the school to send lamp signals to people on Gull Island. Her stay this time is brief, with at least not quite an expulsion, but a sudden exit. More could be told, but this should really only be a miniature. Audrey Blain came back no more. Rather a pity!



THEIR ENEMY AGAIN! The year is the Morcove girls returned full upon the handsome face of Audrey Blain - her first name from the name of Betty Barton and Co.

OUR BOOKSHELVES

Reviews by Mary Cadogan

CRIME AT CHRISTMAS: A Seasonal Box of Murderous Delights. Edited by Jack Adrian. (Equation, £14.95).

Just two years ago Jack Adrian gave many of us tremendous pleasure with his compilation SEXTON BLAKES WINS: now he has come up with another fine, atmospheric anthology. This time many authors are featured, including several of the most celebrated crime-puzzle creators, and the the stories, in the main, are now appearing for the first time in book form. The indefatigable editor has ferreted out from old papers and magazines Christmassy tales of 'murder, mystery and mayhem' from the turn of the century to our own time. There are two crackling Herlock Sholmes exploits - Herlock Sholmes's Christmas Case and The Secret in the Pudding Bag - the first by Charles Hamilton (as Peter Todd) and the second by an A.P. author whose identity is uncertain. The titles themselves are truly appetite-whetters: Edgar Wallace's contribution is called Stuffing; Margery Allingham is represented by Murder Under the Mistletoe, which features her super-sleuth Albert Campion; the masterly Cyril Hare in Sister Bessie enmeshes us in a blackmail intrigue, while Nicholas Blake (real name, of course, C. Day Lewis) invites us to find our own solution to A Problem in White (although his solution to this very knotty puzzle is thoughtfully provided at the end of the book). And there are many other riches, including Biggles' Apple Snowballs (a recipe from Captain W.E. Johns). CRIME AT CHRISTMAS is perfect reading for winter evenings, satisfying suspenseful, and well illustrated too.



Moving from sleuthing to spooky stories, Jack Adrian turns up trumps again with two paper-back selections, each priced at £3.50, in the Equation Chillers series. THE FLINT KNIFE is a collection of ghostly adventures by E.F. Benson, a far cry from the 'sunlit social intrigues' of the Mapp and Lucia books. WARNING WHISPERS features supernatural tales by A.M. Burrage, which are by turns horrific and hilarious, and always highly inventive.

An atmospheric book of a very different nature is WORLD WAR I IN POSTCARDS by John Laffin (Alan Sutton £12.95). The author, who is a military historian, skilfully uses his vast collection of picture postcards of the Great War (built up over thirty years) to convey the varying moods of the time. These amazingly evocative cards, presumably intended for ephemeral use, have become lasting reminders of the humour and heroism, the anguish and waste, the idealism and romance of British (and occasionally French) life between 1914 and 1918. And it is far more than just a picture-book, for John Laffin provides a compelling and informative text too. A persuasive and unforgettable book.

CHARLES LAUGHTON: A DIFFICULT ACTOR by Simon Callow (Methuen paperback £5.95) focuses on the actor who, despite physical disadvantages, became one of the major stars of so many films that thrilled, chilled, moved and entertained us during the 1930s, the period of the Second World War and the decade and a half that followed. As this biography points out, he repeatedly broke the Hollywood mould. Written by an actor, the book is full of insights into Laughton's powerful portrayals of Henry VIII, Captain Bligh, Quasimodo and other long remembered roles. His theatre work is also well covered and assessed, and twenty four pages of photographs are provided.



MIDLAND O.B.B.C.

Only seven members attended the September meeting, which was the opening of our new term, for we had no meetings in July and August. The disappointingly small attendance was partly due to illness.

We got off to a quiz provided by your correspondent, with questions on the old papers. Christine Brettell, as usual, was the winner. Refreshments followed, provided by Christine Brettell and Ivan Webster, whose generosity is much appreciated by us all. Geoff Iardner, our acting Chairman, provided a quiz based on the fat boys of the Hamilton schools. This was difficult, and even Christine, who won, achieved only 5 out of a possible 7 correct answers.

Next came a game of several rounds, 'Take a Letter', with the solutions being titles of Howard Baker volumes. Stephen Gridley and Christine were winners. Ivan Webster then gave an excellent reading from Magnet 1518, chapter 2, showing Billy Bunter trying to deceive Quelch but finishing at the receiving end of a six! Greyfriars Bingo followed, a game invented by Tom Porter, our absent chairman, who is still regrettably unable to attend.

All best wishes to O.B.B.C. members everywhere.

JACK BELLFIELD

LONDON O.B.B.C.

Our Chairman, Phil Griffiths, welcomed sixteen members to the October meeting held at the Ealing Liberal Centre on Sunday, 9th October, 1988.

Official business being quickly transacted we paid attention to Mark Taha's Quiz on the non-Hamilton schools. This was won by Chris Harper, with Mary Cadogan,

Don Webster, Brian Doyle and Roger Jenkins as runners up. In lighter vein, there followed a reading of an article on Just William by Deborah Moggach in the "Independent" colour magazine, to which Phil added an extract from "William and the Triplets". There was an earnest discussion on Richmal Crompton afterward.

Bill Bradford next invited us to spot the names of authors concealed in a short, specially constructed passage. Champion spotter was Eric Lawrence, with Chris Harper second and Mary Cadogan third. Bill also gave us a reading from the Club's Newsletter No. 222 of May 1971. The intervening years have certainly seen a change in the Club's membership. Mary brought us back to the present with her talk giving the background to her latest book (on Frank Richards) for which there have already been many encouraging murmurs from the media, in advance of publication.

Phil brought the meeting to a close with the usual votes of thanks to those who contributed items and to Bill for arranging the use of the hall and providing the tea.

Next Meeting at Walthamstow on Sunday, 13th November.

LESLIE ROWLEY

CAMBRIDGE CLUB

Our October meeting took place at the Lode village home of Malcolm Pratt. Bill Lofts presented his recently researched talk on Advertising in the Juvenile Magazines of our hobby. It was most interesting to learn of the merchandising of the popular creations of the 'comics', both the various periods and the U.S./U.K. outputs being compared.

Malcolm then gave an illustrated talk on the work of Laurel and Hardy, perhaps the finest double-act humour ever seen.

ADRIAN PERKINS

NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

Chairman David Bradley welcomed members to the October meeting. He mentioned that our A.G.M. would be held in November with all posts coming up for election. Geoffrey Good indicated that he would like to relinquish the post of Treasurer, so we need to look for someone else.

One member had brought along a copy of that day's INDEPENDENT newspaper magazine, in which was featured an article on William. Harry Blowers had a copy of the EVERGREEN magazine in which had appeared an item on Frank Richards. Geoffrey showed us some special acid-free boxes he had had specially made to accommodate his Magnet collection - and even some boxes specially prepared to hold copies of the C.D.!

Anthony Buckeridge, the author of the JENNINGS books, had kindly sent us a cassette tape of answers to our questions. We were all enlightened by his answers, and were grateful that he had taken the time to prepare the tape for us. After refreshments, Darrell presented his item on THE SCHOOL CAP, a story paper that came out in the '50 and ran to just ten issues. Charles Buchan, the sportsman, published the magazine and Basil Storey wrote the stories. (Much of the information available on this paper was obtained from works by Lofts and

Adley.) There was an attempt to copy the style of Frank Richards, but no-one could beat our favourite author. Geoffrey Good illustrated this by a splendid reading.

An excellent meeting, enjoyed by all. Our next, in November, will be the A.G.M. when Keith Smith will talk on Toytown.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

**W.E. JOHNS MEETING AT THE ROYAL MOAT HOUSE HOTEL,
NOTTINGHAM ON OCTOBER 22ND.**

The third W.E. Johns meeting arranged by Paul Galvin, David Bradley and Darrell Swift was very well attended. Part of this interesting and enjoyable day was set aside for informal chat and time for examination of the wonderful range of Johns' books and memorabilia which people had brought to the meeting. There were also books and magazines for sale and exchange. The formal programme was as follows: William Hurst spoke on Von Stalhein, R. Whittle on The Pitfalls of Recognising Biggles First Editions, Mary Cadogan on Worrals, Piers Williams (co-author of the biography of W.E. Johns) on the background to the writing of the book. There was also a quiz by C.D. Martin, and a talk by Bert van Vondel on the International Biggles Association and the Biggles News magazine, both of which are organised in Holland. Other Dutch enthusiasts had accompanied him, and arranged a display of Biggles News, and various items of Johns material in Dutch. There was a great deal of lively discussion throughout this most successful day.

(C.D. Readers may like to know that they can join the International Biggles Association on payment of a subscription of £6 per annum. This enables them to receive Biggles News every two months. For more information contact the Great Britain Secretary, Paul Galvin, 2 The Lindales, Pogmoor, Barnsley, S. Yorkshire S75 2DT.)

EAGLE ENTHUSIASTS SOCIETY

Over the weekend of October 8/9th, a party of enthusiasts of Eagle, the 1950s' coloured strip cartoon weekly, visited its birthplace in Southport to get a flavour of the environment that motivated Birkdale vicar Marcus Morris and Churchtown artist Frank Hampson into convincing the London publisher Hulton Press to take up their project. Throughout the 1950s Morris was Editor and Hampson chief artist of Eagle, one of Britain's leading juvenile publications. The visit was organised by the co-editor of 'Eagle Times', John Wortan, in association with Howard Corn (Cambridge Club).

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COKER KICKS A GOAL!

by

Les Rowley



"Intolerable!" Really, Mr. Prout had ample excuse for making that observation to Hacker of the Fifth. The two masters had met at the foot of the main staircase where they had been mutually drawn by the unseemly din emanating from the hidden regions above.

"Intolerable", repeated Prout, in case Hacker had not heard him the first time. "Unparalleled", he added, for this seemed an excellent opportunity for him to use one of his favourite words!

"Quelch's boys"! remarked Hacker, bitterly. "I am bound to agree with you, Prout, this uproar is intolerable. Perhaps you will accompany me to Quelch, so that we can lay a joint complaint before him. This is not the first time that his form has caused such a disturbance-----"

"I fear that there is little point to be gained in approaching Quelch in matters affecting his form", replied Prout. "As a senior colleague - a master of a senior form - I have been only too willing to offer advice on previous occasions to the master of the Remove. Willing only to lay the value of a long scholastic experience at the disposal of a junior master, I have met with rebuff after rebuff. You would not credit it, my dear Hacker, but on the last occasion Quelch actually told me to mind my own business. Such ingratitude is beneath contempt, I repeat, beneath contempt!"

There had been many occasions when Hacker himself had felt like telling Prout to mind his own business, but he contented himself with a brief nod.

Snorting indignantly, Prout led the way up the staircase with Hacker close at his heels. Perhaps, Prout reasoned to himself as he made the ascent, perhaps those young rascals would be so overwhelmed with the enormity of having disturbed such an eminent personage as himself that their uproar would be immediately quelled. Prout was wrathful. Like the gentleman in the poem 'his brow was set, his eye beneath flashed like the falchion from its sheath'. All majesty and dignity, Prout managed to negotiate the first four stairs when the thunderbolt struck him, or rather, it seemed that a thunderbolt had struck him! In reality it was a football - merely that and nothing more, but, to the portly Prout, it had all the effect of a thunderbolt. Except for the presence of Hacker behind him, Prout would have been felled to the ground. Fortunately for Prout, if not for Hacker, the Shell master was there to cushion the blow of the falling Prout, and both masters found themselves prostrate at the foot of the staircase that they had so recently essayed to climb.

"Yurrg! Groogh!" came in agonised tones from the hapless Hacker from beneath the extensive avoirdupois of Prout. "Groogh! Urghh!"

Doubtless Prout was gratified that Hacker had been there to cushion that fall but, in the many and varied utterances of the master of the Shell, there was no indication of gratitude whatever! Long after both masters had resumed the perpendicular, he continued to gasp and moan.

"This is too much, Hacker," proclaimed Prout when he had recovered his breath. "Let us proceed to Dr. Locke and acquaint him of the facts concerning this outrage. I shall insist on the most condign punishment for its perpetrators. A flogging, a severe flogging, a most severe flogging for those immediately involved, and nothing short of expulsion for the ringleader!"

Hacker made no reply but, had he been capable of lucid comment at that moment, it was possible that he would have elected a more lingering punishment for the offenders, like boiling in oil! All he could manage now was an indecipherable grunt, as he followed Prout's podgy back to the headmaster's study.

Dr. Locke looked up as the two masters entered his sanctum. With him was Mr. Quelch, and he and his old friend had been about to improve the shining hour by embarking on an interesting discussion of the classics with the Head elucidating the more complicated passages in his own manner and Quelch elucidating them in his. Both gentlemen had been looking forward to this happy excursion into the realms of gold: both looked up irritably at the unexpected and unwelcome intrusion of Prout and Hacker.

"We have come, Dr. Locke, to acquaint you with the outrage, the most unprecedented outrage taking place in the Remove corridor. Hacker and I were about to intervene in this unseemly uproar when we were felled to the ground by a football, a football, sir ---"

"Which caused Mr. Prout to stagger and fall upon me," Hacker took up the story, having recovered sufficient wind to do so. "We have called upon you for your intervention, sir and, since Mr. Quelch is with you, it is as well that this unpardonable state of affairs for which his form is responsible should be brought to his notice also."

"Hacker and I will be satisfied with nothing less than the most severe punishment for those responsible," Prout chimed in, lest Hacker might commander the rest of the conversation. "We insist that examples be made of the guilty boys so that others may be dissuaded from following this atrocious example. An expulsion for the leader, with severe - very severe - floggings for the others-----"

Dr. Locke sighed. "Certainly, if things are as you say, the culprits will receive exemplary punishment. Perhaps you had better accompany us, my dear Quelch, as it appears that your form is involved."

Mr. Quelch nodded, but he nodded reluctantly as he saw that possibility of the golden hour of discussion with his chief slip quietly away. With a rustle of scholastic gowns, the four left the study and, within a few moments, had reached the foot of the staircase down which sounds of tumult and affright still descended. This time their ascent was unimpeded. On the Remove landing and in the Remove corridor full-blooded combat was in progress.

"You see, Headmaster, a state of affairs that Hacker and I feel should not be endured," boomed the fruity voice of Prout, at the sound of which a sudden

silence, deep as that of a country churchyard, descended. "You will not adjudge Hacker and myself as unreasonable in demanding the direst of penalties for those responsible. These boys, these young rascals of the Remove, these young reprobates of Quelch's form-----"

"I quite agree with Prout and Hacker that punishment of the offenders should be both severe and exemplary," said Mr. Quelch. His gimlet eye had scanned the seething mob before him, and he had observed something that the others had so far missed. "But Hobson, Hoskins and Stewart are members of Hacker's form, and unless I am mistaken," he nodded in the direction of a dishevelled object that was managing to struggle to its feet gouging ink and glue from its eyes, "unless I am mistaken, that is Coker of the Fifth."

Dr. Locke, Mr. Prout, and a still gasping Hacker followed the direction of the Remove master's gaze. Vials of Olympian wrath gathered on the podgy brow of Prout as he recognised that promising member of his form. Hacker's expression was worth a guinea a box, as Vernon-Smith whispered to Redwing.

"Coker, what are you doing here where you have no business, engaging in horseplay with junior boys? Answer me at once!"

Coker gazed at his form-master indignantly. It was just like Prout to accuse him of horseplay with a lot of noisy fags over whom he had decided to exercise his authority. Hadn't he taken their footer away from then and kicked it down the staircase where it could do no harm! Perhaps, if he tried to explain to Prout, all would be well. As he stuttered out his words of explanation, he could see from Prout's face that all would not be well - far from it!

Hobby & Co. did not need to look at Hacker to see if he was in a receptive mood. The master of the Shell looked almost wolfish as he shepherded that unfortunate trio to his study. Prout turned to follow him, when Henry Samuel Quelch turned on the charm, so to speak.

"I feel sure, headmaster," came his incisive tones which carried a parody of Prout's own words, "that you will not adjudge me as unreasonable in demanding the direst of penalties for those responsible!" Prout had to take that as best he could, as he led the unfortunate Coker away.

Mr. Quelch looked at the members of his form. "I will deal with you later," was all he said as he left with the Head, no doubt to resume that happy excursion into the classics with his Chief.

A little later there was the sound of weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth in the Shell passage, whilst in the study of Horace James Coker, the fool of the Fifth sat down to an imposition that was likely to keep him from the Remove passage for a considerable time.

Harry Wharton and the others awaited the judgement of their form-master with some trepidation. Quelch had said that he would deal with them later, but time passed and he never did, and they were left to wonder why!

ALWAYS WANTED: Rupert Annuals pre-1970 and one shilling adventure series. William Books in dustwrappers. Please offer to John Beck, 29 Mill Road, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 2RU.

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FRANK RICHARDS - THE CHAP BEHIND THE CHUMS

By Mary Cadogan (Viking 0-670-81946-8. £14.95.)

Reviewed by GEOFFREY GOOD.

'As a boy he would wander by the hour through the open fields around Gunnersbury. When he had grown up, the restlessness of his nature - in surprising contrast to his scholarly, sedentary life - was never quite appeased. He looked to more distant horizons, and would have loved to have gone to sea . . . '

FRANK RICHARDS' autobiography, delightful as it is, is nonetheless intriguing in that it ignores so much of what we, his avid readers, have always wanted to know. We close his book, feeling that the lid is still on the box! Mary, like Pandora of old, opens the box for us, but, unlike Pandora, without the tragic consequences. There emerge refreshing insights into the life of the young Frank. He was 'Charlie the peacemaker' - and the family story-spinner. His experiences in those (until now) mysterious years of his early life are shown to have influenced his writing and his characterizations.

Mary's emphasis on Greyfriars is to be commended. Yes, Frank Richards created many schools, most popular among them being Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood. Each has its aficionados, but no other school has quite the magic of Greyfriars. Hamilton had many pen-names, but happily and rightly Mary has chosen Frank Richards, the name by which the literary world knows him, the name linked inevitably with the immortal Greyfriars.

Unlike many who have written on 'the Hobby' Mary has familiarized herself with the Greyfriars saga. And not only to produce this book - she herself for many years has been an enthusiastic reader of the Magnet. She writes:

'The quality of his Magnet stories reached a high peak during the mid-1920s, and many have dubbed these years, together with the early 1930s, the golden age of Frank Richards' writing. Some of the innocence of the early adventures had disappeared along the way, but so too had the occasionally rag-bag episodic structure, the cartoon-like quality of the characterization and the few quirky inconsistencies.'

It is a meticulously-researched book. She knows the facts. She is aware of other people's work. Professor Robert Roberts, for example, who remarked (in 'The Classic Slum') on the influence of Frank Richards on the early generations of this century:

'The public school ethos, distorted into myth and sold among us weekly in penny numbers, for good or ill, set ideals and standards. This our own tutors, religious and secular, had signally failed to do. In the final estimate it may well be found that Frank Richards during the first quarter of the twentieth century had more influence on the mind and outlook of young working-class England than any other single person, not excluding Baden Powell.'

Mary acknowledges the debt she owes to the many others who have done 'Hobby' research, notably Roger Jenkins, Eric Payne, W.O.G. Lofts and Derek Adley.

The quotations the author uses indicate what we in the Hobby have sought to proclaim for years - that Frank Richards was not only writing for boys. He was also writing for us. Few boys, if any, could have grasped the finer nuances of his writing, the profound philosophical concepts and the barbed witticisms that lay subtly enshrined in his narration.

She illustrates the ways in which Frank Richards could teach, without his readers knowing he was doing just that! Bunter's ridiculous howlers in Latin translation could make that ancient language 'fun' - at any rate, to readers of *The Magnet*, who would, unwittingly, learn to master some elusive translation or difficult grammatical construction.

I am not so sure as the author that 'Frank Richards was a truthful man ...' The human mind itself plays tricks, and perhaps sometimes it did with Frank. Mary comments on Frank's dissociating himself from Tom Hopperton's suggestion that he might have peripherally registered the Bunter name from Philpott Wright's Blackminster stories in the *Vanguard*. And Mary accepts his 'rather Olympian disclaimer'.

But it must be remembered that Frank Richards disclaimed other things and also could be, at any rate in later life, a little unfair in his assessment of people - the *Magnet* sub-writers, for example! And those writers and illustrators who had become considerably more wealthy than he, doubtless because they had not sought to 'try systems' in the casino (as Frank had done and on which Mary remarks!) One might also doubt his claim (which Mary quotes) that the *Magnet* stories all had new and original plots! Reading *The Magnet* does show that the same plots were used over and over again with the various roles played by different characters (and the later Bunter Books consisted largely of reconstructions of plots which had been used in *The Magnet*).

Mary quotes the ridiculous case of the banning of the 'Bunter Books' by the chief librarian of Ipswich, who thought them 'unfair to fatties and a bad influence'. So she 'had the Fat Owl of the Remove whisked off the public shelves and placed in a reserve category along with sex books'. The admirable cartoon by Giles, illustrating the absurdity of the situation, is reproduced in the book.

No study of Frank Richards would be complete without a reference to Orwell. Mary remarks that 'Greyfriars seemed to George Orwell a sham and unreal world'. Those of us who are familiar with Orwell's essay ('Boys' Weeklies') will see what she means. But it is pleasing to note that the author is aware of the whole Orwell/Richards correspondence and quotes Orwell's recantation in the *Manchester Evening News*. One thing I find myself regretting very much, and that is that Orwell is not alive today. I would have suggested to Mary that she send him a copy of her book - replete, of course, with the author's signature!

This is a beautifully-illustrated book, rich in photographs as well as line-drawings from the pages of *The Magnet* and other publications. Viking are to be congratulated on a superb production - a well-cased and properly stitched book. They have happily avoided that (unfortunately named) perfect binding.

For *Magnet* readers Frank Richards' literary style needs no commendation. One reads and keeps on reading. It is a style captivating and inimitable. For those unfortunate enough never to have experienced the delights of *The Magnet*

Mary's quotations provide excellent examples of the style and content of Frank Richards' writing. But Mary herself is to be congratulated on her own literary style which shows a mastery of vocabulary and prose writing of which I myself fall far short.

'In some ways,' writes Mary, 'Frank Richards has always been an enigma.' And she refers to 'the strange opposites in his nature.' He was the gambler who condemned gambling. The most prolific (and some would say stimulating) author of all time who yet 'was unsure of which profession to follow,' and, according to his niece, Una Hamilton Wright, he 'always hoped to be able to break away from writing.' The same man who, asked why he had not done 'something better than writing for boys,' replied, 'You see, there isn't anything better.'

Mary brings out the versatility of Richards, himself no mean artist, composer, poet and a man who could have been a classic scholar. If he had chosen any other profession, of course, we would never have known him or his works. We would live in a world without Greyfriars and this book would never have been written.

Congratulations, Mary, on presenting us with a book which will be a joy for ever for all aficionados of Greyfriars.

The Magnet is dead. Long Live The Magnet!
Frank Richards is dead. Long may he reign!
Thank you Mary!





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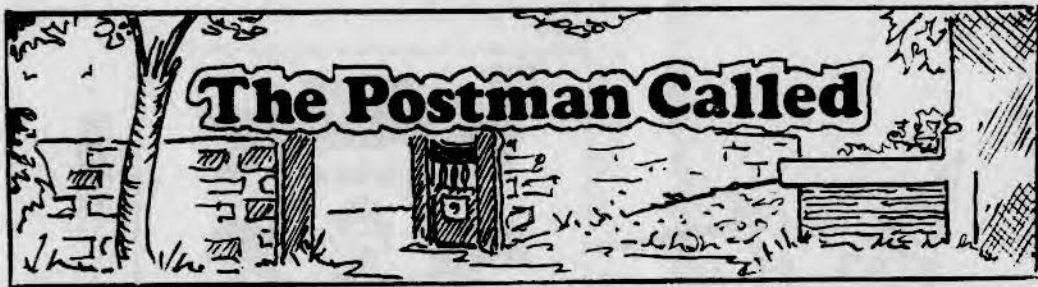
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LEN HAWKEY (Leigh-on-Sea): To comment on just a couple of points from the October issue, as no doubt 99 other readers will already have told you, "Poison", the Sexton Blake story outlined in Mr. Cure's entertaining article, was by Gwyn Evans. The cover to that issue of the "U.J." must rank as one of Eric R. Parker's best, both in imagination and in execution - the sleepy village of Saxenham seen panoramatically through a beaker of (presumably) poison! This story, slightly abridged, was reprinted in a 1939 issue of "Detective Weekly" (No. 319), but without the excellent ERP cover, tho' several of his 1928 inside illustrations were reproduced. For some strange reason the title was altered to "The Poisoner"

Regarding Mr. Fayne's poser about changing "Boot Leg" to "Bandog" in the reprint of a Cedar Creek story in 1938. It occurs to me that when Prohibition was introduced into the U.S.A. in the early 1920's, the term "bootleg" acquired an unsavory connotation. It may be that some earnest A.P. "sub" - maybe the same one who changed "Poison" to "The Poisoner" - thought the term "Boot Leg" might make the wrong impression on the "Gem's" young readers in 1938. "Bootlegging" was certainly a part of all the violence and gangsterism that Prohibition had engendered. Just a thought!

* * * * *

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