

HAPPY

XMAS

STORY PAPER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

DECEMBER
1988

VOL 42
No 504



59p

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STORY PAPER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR

Founded in 1941 by
W. H. GANDER

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Founded in 1946 by
HERBERT LECKENBY

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When you read this editorial, the Christmas season will be upon us, and I take this opportunity of wishing all C.D. readers a wonderfully Merry Christmas and a Happy and Peaceful New Year. I shall think of you all, as I delve into my collection of Christmas numbers of the papers, and I hope that this issue of the C.D., with our Annual, will enhance your festive reading. The first C.D. which I ever read was a December issue of nearly twenty years ago and I must say that discovering it, and the Clubs and the Hobby, helped to make my Christmas very bright indeed.

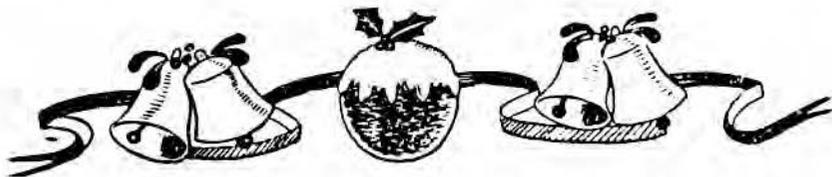
I must thank you for the many Christmas cards which are arriving here, and also for your kind letters of appreciation for my Frank Richards book. This is the season for thanks, and I would like to voice my tremendous appreciation of the work of our

contributors, who never fail or flag, and of all our loyally supportive readers.

Striking a serious note, Christmas is also a time for remembering absent friends, and, of course, over the years, we have seen some sad gaps appear in our hobby circle. We remember the founders of this magazine and of the Clubs, and many other kindred spirits of the collecting world, with gratitude and affection. As we go to press, I have just heard of the passing of Norman Kadish, whose illustrative features have often appeared in the C.D. A tribute to him, written by Maurice Hall, appears in this issue, and we join Maurice in sending condolences to Norman's family. (A very attractive item from Norman's pen is included in this year's C.D. Annual, by the way.) I think it was in China, several centuries ago, that someone first said 'There is an end to the fingers that feed the flames, but the fire goes on for ever'. On that note, whether you are spending your Christmas at Wharton Lodge, Handforth Towers or Linton Hall, I wish you and yours good health, happiness and harmony, now and in the future.

Mary Cadogan

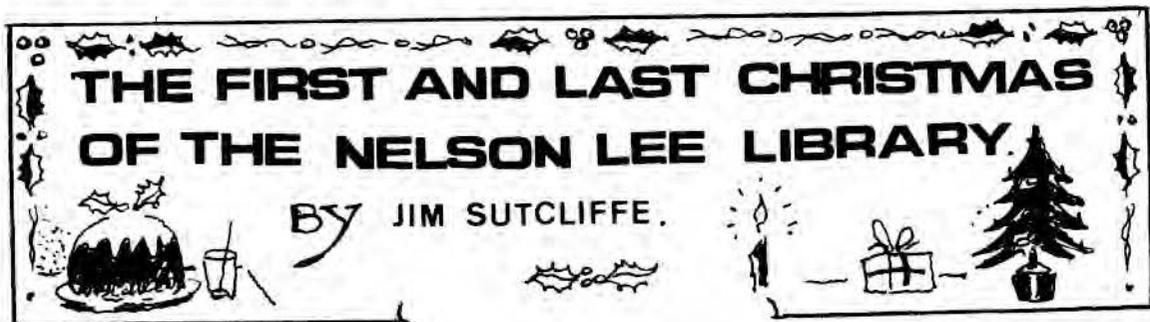
P.S. If you have not ordered your C.D. Annual, a few copies are still available (£6.95 inland, and £8.55 abroad, including postage and packing).



THE C.D. IN 1989: Our printers have informed us that for some time now they have been printing the C.D. almost at a loss. For example, the paper size which we have traditionally used is now no longer easily available and has to be specially cut; we are therefore, from the January 1989 issue, going to use the standard A4 size paper, so you will notice that our page size will be slightly smaller. Also we shall be experimenting with different printing methods in an effort to make the magazine as attractive as ever, but to keep production costs from rising too much. Even so, we are faced with higher printing bills for 1989 than those of 1988, and have had to increase the subscription, which is now as follows, including postage and packing, etc.:

For six months by first class post	£5.46p
For six months by second class post	£5.16p
For one year by first class post	£10.92p
For one year by second class post	£10.32p

(Overseas rates vary according to postage costs to different countries and are given on the reminder slips sent out as subs. become due.)



The first Christmas Number to appear in the Nelson Lee was No. 78 Old Series, under date December 2nd 1916. This was a special double length 64 page edition priced at 2d. It started with a party consisting of Nelson Lee, Nipper, Eileen Dare and her aunt Miss Esther Gilbey, all invited to spend Christmas with Douglas Clifford and his wife Vera (nee Zingrave). Some sinister characters intrude into the vicinity of Clifford's magnificent country house in Derbyshire, the most notable of these being Jim the Penman and Professor Cyrus Zingrave, who reappears from the dead. (In N.L.No.53 Nelson Lee and Nipper had seen him apparently perish in a torrent of lava from a volcano) This is a long story and, if you have not read it, an excellent article on it appeared in the C.D. Annual for 1965.

So much for the first, and now to the last (although we did not know it to be this at the time it appeared in the Second New series No. 152 under date December 17th 1932). Archie Glenthorne had an aunt, Lady Eustacia Bowers, a widow, immensely rich, who lived in a gloomy old mansion in the New Forest, called Forest House. Archie understood that his aunt was going a bit eccentric, and being her favourite nephew he decided that a party of St. Frank's juniors and Moor View girls for Christmas would bring her back to normal. His aunt's reply to his suggestion was favourable except for one snag - it all depended on a certain Professor Ivan Nerki, a necromancer who lived not far from his aunt,

Apparently his aunt had a weakness for getting herself involved in queer cults. If Nerki gave the go-ahead, which did not seem likely, the party could take place but Aunt Eustacia had to see the mystic first and take Archie along with her. So the story opens with Archie taking a chance with an advance party

No. 78.—OUR FIRST CHRISTMAS NUMBER. *Week ending Dec. 2, 1918*

THE NELSON LEE
LIBRARY.
MAGNIFICENT XMAS No. 2



A CHRISTMAS PERIL

A SPECIAL DOUBLE LENGTH TALE OF NELSON LEE & NIPPER
INTRODUCING EILEEN DARE, THE GIRL DETECTIVE; JIM THE PENMAN
PROFESSOR ZINGRAVE ETC. ETC. SPECIALLY WRITTEN FOR THIS ISSUE

of Handforth and Co., and himself in Handy's Morris Minor, making their way through the New Forest on a wild snowy night to find Nerki's house where he is to meet his aunt. Handy's car has to stop short of their destination because of a fallen tree, so they accept the hospitality of a woodcutter and his wife in their cottage, while Archie proceeds alone on foot despite the old man's warnings that Nerki is a worker of magic. Archie finds Nerki's house set amid gaunt yew trees and is struck by the desolation of the countryside and the sinister outline of the dwelling, added to which there is a flutter of wings. He beholds several bats and an owl flying between the trees and the house, and as he nears the house he hears a cackle of laughter from behind a hedge and the figure of a witch rises up, complete with conical hat and broomstick giving a wild screeching cackle before a black cloud obscures the moon!

He reaches the house and is shown into a large apartment, very dark, but with the signs of the Zodiac gleaming from the ceiling. He finds Nerki sitting in a corner in front of a brazier. Apparently Nerki had been expecting someone else and becomes angry that Archie has arrived that night, as he had changed the appointment for his Aunt to the following night. So Archie returns to Handy and Co, at the cottage but not without some further apparitions on the way back, Archie senses that, having found it was the wrong night, these manifestations had been for the benefit of another visitor. The boys then make their way to Forest House but get a rather frigid reception there. Archie's Aunt tells them that there can be no question of a Christmas party unless Nerki gives his approval and they are not even allowed to spend the night there, so Archie takes them to an excellent hotel at nearby Fordingbridge, where, taking a chance, he sends telegrams to all the intended guests telling them to meet at the hotel the next day.

After a good supper and a comfortable night their spirits rise somewhat, especially when in the afternoon the party of over two dozen juniors and girls arrives. The latter, however, are considerably dismayed to find that the party depends on Nerki's approval. However Archie, with considerable optimism, convinces them that everything will turn out alright after the meeting with his Aunt and the mystic the following evening. So until then they are Archie's guests at the hotel, Archie's cheque book having been opened wide!

That night Handforth sets off with Church and McClure to look around Nerki's house in Handy's car. It was a brilliant moonlit night and they park the car behind some trees and approach the house on foot. On the way they come across a grotesque dead tree with branches that stick out like arms and a great knot that resembles a face (these days such trees made of plastic are common place in the children's play areas of road-houses).

Suddenly a figure which they presume to be Nerki appears, apparently through the wall of the house, dressed in a strange robe, and approaches them in a ghostly fashion and asks what they are doing. "You're Professor Nerki, aren't you?" asks Handforth. "Professor Nerki sleep", the figure replies in a chilling voice. "I am not Nerki, but Nerki's Astral Self; go before Nerki awakens". At that moment a black cloud passes over the face of the moon... "Look!" screamed Church. "There's no shadow". This seems so impossible to Handforth & Co. that they run like mad back to the car. (At the age of 15 when I first read this

story this seemed quite exciting to me, but I suppose in those far off days we were more naive; the explanation was given in the last story when a cloak was found with a number of concealed electric lamps which blotted out the shadow.)

The three juniors return to the hotel but do not mention this episode for fear of being laughed at. They find the rest of the party in a merry mood, but Nipper, having been around a bit with Nelson Lee in the past, realises that when Archie and his Aunt meet Nerki that evening he will veto the party, as a lively Christmas would endanger the influence he has over his disciple, Aunt Eustacia. Nipper decides that to save the party some action must be taken. So, with Reggie Pitt and Handforth, Church and McClure they get to Nerki's house before the time of the meeting and lock Nerki in a shed while Nipper impersonates him, not difficult in the darkened room, while Handy & Co. keep guard outside. Nipper, as Nerki, gives the party his full approval.

Nerki is released and could hardly let Archie's Aunt know that in spite of his supposed magical powers he was unable to prevent them deceiving her. They return to the hotel where Nipper has to tell Archie the truth about the meeting, then it's off to Forest House for Christmas.

This is where the last actual Christmas Number ends, but the Christmas adventures continue in the following two issues with plenty of excitement told in Edwy Searles Brooks' own gripping way, with ghostly manifestations, elementals and black magic. Lord Dorrimore and Umlosi join the party and at the end Professor Ivan Nerki is unmasked by Nelson Lee as Rod Davenby from Illinois, America, with a prison record for seance frauds. Aunt Eustacia realises what a narrow escape she has had from parting with her wealth, for she was on the verge of paying £50,000 into Nerki's bank for the building of an institution for the furtherance of his spiritualistic work. It was the old story--within a couple of days Nerki would have drawn out the money and absconded. The remainder of that last Christmas of the Nelson Lee Library ended with much revelry.

FOR SALE: Lovely volume to grace the bookshelves of the Greyfriars connoisseur; 4 splendid SOLS covering the series, newly-bound in red, with "THE DA COSTA SERIES" in gold lettering on the spine: £18.00. And for the Sexton Blake connoisseur: 3 S.B.L.'s (year about the early twenties, guessed) bound in red, containing "Lady of Ravensedge" (Kestrel), "Terror Island", and "Motor Coach Mystery" (Kew and Carlac) with SEXTON BLAKE and the three titles in gold on front cover: £14.00. Also superb volume of coloured comic PUCK, Jan - June 1914, with Val Fox stories plus great reading and browsing items; bound in red with title of volume in gold on spine, bargain at £28.00. Also loose copies: S.O.L. 198 "The Rookwood Secret Society", and 229 "House of Terror" (Ravenspur Grange); plus S.B.L. 185 (guess about 1919) "The False Alibi" (Kestrel): £2.00 each. P. & P. extra on all items. Write to ERIC FAYNE, Excelsior House, 113 Crookham Road, Church Crookham, Nr. Aldershot, GU13 0NH.



"SEXTON BLAKE'S EARLY CASES"

by Laurence Elliott

Re-reading "Blakania" in the 500th issue, I find no mention of a book, which was published in 1976 by Arthur Barker, Ltd. This was a hard-back, red cloth, with a red dust-cover.

The front of the D.J. had a picture of "Sexton Blake" in the bowler hat of the first stories: the back cover, a full page illustration of one of the three stories.

The "blurb" on the D.J. made the usual error of attributing the first "Blake" yarn to the "U.J." instead of the "Marvel". There was no introduction in the book. The three stories are: "Witness for the Defence", U.J. No. 416, 1911, by E.J. Sannon: "The Clue of the Dead Eyes", U.J. No. 72, ½d. September 1895, by A. Grahame: "A Clue from the Deep", U.J. No. 62, ½d. 26th June 1895, by E. Treeton. "Witness" had 107 pages and Tinker. "A Clue" had 50 pages and no Tinker. "The Clue" had 51 pages and no Tinker.

There were small black and white illustrations from the "U.J.", and a full page illustration to each story. (Price £3.75.).

* * * * *

FOR SALE: Howard Baker Holiday Annuals 1928, 1975, 1976, 1978 without D/Js. Ditto 1973, 1979 with D/Js. H.B. Magnets No. 47 without D/J. No. 3, No. 8 with D/Js. "Thanks to Bunter", Cassells, without D/J: "Billy Bunter of Greyfriars", Skilton, with D/J. "Yaroo". "Best of Magnet and Gem". "B/Bunter Picture Book". "D'arcy's day off". "Letters of Frank Richards". Postage £3.00. £30 the lot. ELLIS, 13 ALBERT COLLEGE DRIVE, GLASNEVIN, DUBLIN 9, EIRE.

* * * * *

A TRIBUTE TO NORMAN MAURICE KADISH

It was with the deepest feeling of shock, that I heard that Norman Kadish had unexpectedly died, in the early hours of Friday, 28th October 1988.

Norman had been with the Old Boy's Book Club from its early days and any member who had had the pleasure of meeting this talented and erudite man was richer from the experience. His artistic skills born from youth were to continue through his life as a teacher of art. For much of the time, Norman kept a flow of fine paintings stemming from his brushes, many of which were exhibited in galleries in London.

Some years ago, I asked Norman to create some oil paintings from my original but poor density pictures I took of Charles Hamilton in May 1950, when I met him at "Roselawn". The pictures he created were absolutely marvellous in all senses. The first one he did was in the Dutch style, the second in his own careful and neat, precise delineation of a favourite subject. But it was in the third picture, which was larger than the previous two, that he excelled himself. He produced an almost photo-copy of Hamilton, seated in his favourite armchair, lighting his pipe. Charles Hamilton's cat Sammy, is in the foreground. This painting started a fashion in the club and Norman was commissioned to paint a number of Greyfriars and allied Hobby subjects for others, apart from myself. Each picture was deftly completed and nicely framed, ready to hang in the proud owner's home.

He was unassuming and one of the nicest people I have had the pleasure to meet in the hobby. Always ready to help or offer advice, I think he underestimated his own immense abilities and was happiest out of the spotlight. Norman leaves his wife and three daughters, and a host of happy memories. I shall treasure the time that I knew him and offer to the family, and his brother Esmond, the sincerest regrets for their loss.

MAURICE HALL

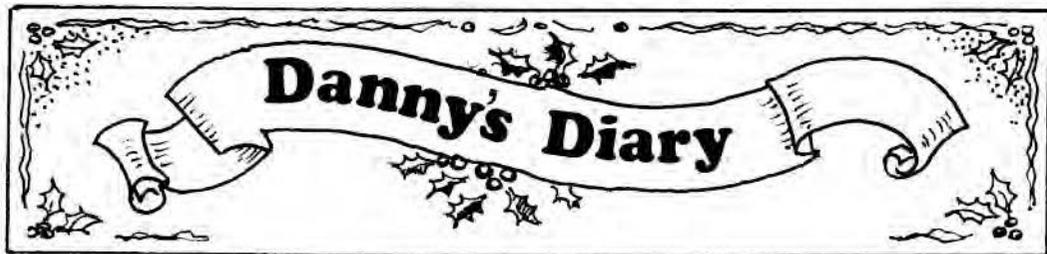
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Vintage Comics and Boys Story Paper List, stored on computer and continually updated, now available. Current items include late 1930s Gems and Magnets, First World War Penny Populars containing Sexton Blake, Greyfriars and St. Jim's stories, 1904/5 and 1914 Boys Friends, and 1920s Boys Own Papers. S.A.E. for list.

JACK WILSON, PROPRIETER.



Danny's Diary

December 1938

One of the joys of Christmas is the lovely Christmassy tales we get in our favourite papers. As usual, my brother Doug gave me the new Holiday Annual for a present. These aren't as good as the earlier ones which Doug has in his bedroom, and the thick cardboard paper they are printed on makes them wear out quicker. But there is plenty of good reading matter in the new one.

Two Greyfriars tales are "Bunter's Fearful Affliction", about Bunter apparently going blind, and "The Mystery of the Christmas Candles", which starts with Hurree Singh getting a mysterious present of 4 candles in a box. A long St. Jim's tale is "They Called Him a Funk", which is good, though it has a rather hackneyed plot about Gussy being accused of cowardice in a snowfight when he is really running to help a miller's son. The drawback of this offering is that some dreadful artist illustrates it instead of Macdonald. Quite a long Rookwood story: "Algy Silver's Pal", about Algy Silver getting into bad company with the arrival of a scamp from his former school. There is a Cedar Creek tale "The Cedar Creek Ventriloquist" with Chunky Todgers pretending to have a gift he hadn't really got.

For my part, I gave Doug the new Agatha Christie book which is entitled "Hercule Poirot's Christmas", which I read before I gave it to Doug. It is a tip-top tale.

The 4d Libraries have been pretty good this month. The Greyfriars S.O.L. is "Billy Bunter's Christmas" which is hilarious. Nobody seems to want Bunter as a Christmas guest, so he has to decide upon whom he is going to land himself. Another S.O.L. is "The Boy Who Walked by Night." There is a new boy at Rookwood named Dudley Vane. Weird outrages are being carried out at night in the school and there is a mystery until Vane is caught as the culprit. He is suffering from mental trouble, and at the end is sent off to a mental home for treatment.

The St. Frank's S.O.L. is "The Christmas Rebels". The rebels seize a school building and hold it over Christmas against all comers. Some more mystery here. The one Boys' Friend Library I had this month is a sequel to the Will Hay story of last month. It is "The Barring-Out at Bendover". So it's yet another barring-out and Will Hay leads this one. Nor really my cup of tea. I am not sure where the Will Hay tales originally appeared, but I think it was in a paper called the Pilot, which I don't take.

In the Sexton Blake Library I had "The Man on the Dole" by Paul Urquhart, which is fairish. I haven't previously come across this writer.

A real life murder seems to have occurred at Surbiton in Surrey. A man named Key was found dead in his jewellery and clock shop. This area has also been in the news with a fire at the generating house of Kingston-on-Thames, so large areas of Surrey were left without power for several hours on end.

Rather surprisingly a new series of Will Hay stories has started in Modern Boy. They are written by Hedley Owen. This time Will Hay is not a schoolmaster but is a stationmaster. It is, of course, a spin-off from the film "Oh! Mr. Porter!" which was a kind of comic version of "The Ghost Train." It was a marvellous film, but it seems a bit daft to have Will Hay in a series of tales about a railwayman. They are quite funny, but - well, a bit daft.

Also, throughout the month of December, there has been a Captain Justice series beginning with "Justice's Merry Christmas". Professor Flaznegel invents a robot Father Christmas, which they call "Christopher" but, as the weeks pass, Christopher takes control of affairs, and causes all sorts of fun and games all the month. This, too, is a bit daft, but it's quite exciting.

The first two issues of the Magnet this month have brought the conclusion of the series about Gilbert Tracy, the boy who didn't want to be at Greyfriars and who had a feud with Mr. Quelch. The two tales are "The Mysterious Night Raider" and "Tracking Down Tracy". It has been a good series with plenty of original episodes in it. Then came the Christmas series starting with "Harry Wharton's Christmas Guest", who is, naturally enough, Billy Bunter. The series continued with "The Mystery of Wharton Lodge" and "A Baffling Quest". The old character Soames comes into it now. There has been a robbery and £1200 has been stolen from a post-office. The secret of the hiding place of the loot is in Greek characters scratched on the inside of a cigarette case. Fishy becomes yet another guest at Wharton Lodge. All very good, and the series continues next year.

It has not been a particularly outstanding month in the local cinemas, but then, December never is. People are too busy shopping for Christmas to go to the pictures much. This month we had two old - but very good - films showing, in Eddie Cantor in "Whoopee" and Fredric March in "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." But some pretty good new films, all the same. Loretta Young and Richard Greene headed a big cast in "Four Men and a Prayer", in which four Englishmen set out to clear their father's name of a slur. And Max Miller was in a so-so little affair called "Thank Evans." Barbara Stanwyck in "Always Good-bye" was about a mother who gave up her baby and then wanted it back. It bored me, but Mum liked it. I enjoyed the technicolour film "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer". Tom was played by someone called Tom Kelly who is new to me. William Powell and Clark Gable were tip-top in "Manhattan Melodrama" about two slum boys who grew up - one became a gangster and the other a law officer. Good stuff. A good British film was "St. Martin's Lane". Charles Laughton was a street busker who fell in love with a splendid dancer, played by Vivienne Leigh. I also much enjoyed Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland in "Love Finds Andy Hardy", but "Three Blind Mice, with Loretta Young, about 3 girls on the look-out for rich husbands, was not my cup of tea at all.

So far as St. Jim's is concerned, the Gem has been a wee bit disappointing this month. The trouble is that two of the tales are not written by the real Martin Clifford. First of the month, "Out of Bounds", was genuine and good; a

Cardew tale showing that, though he is reckless, there is good in him. But the next tale, the Christmas story, was real counterfeit stale cheese. Called "Gussy's Christmas Party" it has Talbot, Marie Rivers, and Jim Dawlish in a tame affair at Gussy's home. Fancy some other writer taking over for Christmas! Next came "The Mystery of Cardew & Co". Why are Cardew & Co. visiting a lonely cottage? Good, original in plot, this one. Then yet another Cardew tale, "Cardew Comes a Cropper". When one of Gussy's fivers is lost, Cardew, out for revenge, accuses Mossco of theft. And then, to wind up the year, another drab story "Racke's Revenge", not written by the real Martin. Woe is me! What is the Gem a-coming to?

But the Gem still came up to scratch. This month's Cedar Creek tales are just great. In "The Lucky Rogue", Gunten, who has been expelled from Cedar Creek pays two rogues to waylay Miss Meadows on the trail, and Gunten makes a fake rescue. So Miss Meadows is grateful, and rescinds Gunten's expulsion. But the two rogues then blackmail Gunten, so he confesses to Miss Meadows with crocodile tears in his eyes, and all is well for him. Next, "The Chinese of Cedar Creek". He is Yen Chin, who is velly blave, me tinkee. He finds an enemy in Eben Hacke, and then the Chinese's courage saves Hacke from death. Next, the loveliest Christmas tale of all time. "Father Christmas Must Get Through" - and the chums dash 60 miles on Christmas Eve to play Father Christmas at White Pine. Splendid tale. Then "Frank Richards & Co's Gold-Mine", in which the chums buy a gold-mine, and then find that all is not gold that glitters. Final of the month, "The Trail of Frisco Joe" in which the chums set out on the track of the rascal who swindled them over the mine. Gorgeous month at Cedar Creek.

The Benbow tales, too, have been good, mainly concerning Daubeny's efforts to ruin Jack Drake who used to be his pal. These tales are "Captain's Cunning" and "Daubeny's Dark Secret". (There was no Benbow story in the third week, in order to leave room for the double-length tale about Father Christmas at White Pine.) The next Benbow tale "Drake's Last Chance" and the month closed with "The Hand of His Enemy", in which Daubeny tries to make sure that Drake will fail in the exam which he must pass if he is to remain at the floating school.

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

S.O.L. No. 355 "Billy Bunter's Christmas" comprised 3 Magnet stories which appeared over Christmas 1929. S.O.L. No. 356 "The Boy Who Walked by Night" comprised a series (not a serial) of about 11 Rookwood stories which ran in the Gem through the autumn of 1935. Way back in 1935, when the tales appeared, I had no doubt in my own mind that this was a sub-series and that the rather theatrical character, Dudley Vane, was a sub creation. Years later, after the war, when the C.D. and the clubs came into being, I found to my surprise that some knowledgeable Hamiltonians had always accepted the Dudley Vane series as genuine Hamilton. I wrote to Charles Hamilton and asked him whether or not he had written it. He replied that he did NOT write the Dudley Vane series and added: "In fact I wrote none of the Rookwood stories which appeared in the Gem."

This, in its own way, was a surprise. Though I had long known that nearly

all the Rookwood tales in the Gem were sub stuff, I had always believed that a series about Mr. Manders "on the spot" had come from the pen of the master. So there we are! You pays your money and makes your choice! I am still satisfied, personally, that Hamilton did not write Dudley Vane, but I also have the feeling that the Manders series came from his pen.

So, in December 1938, Danny had two helping of Will Hay as a story character. I don't know whether Danny is right in thinking that Will Hay at Bendover appeared originally in a paper named The Pilot (anybody know?) but Will Hay, as a stationmaster, began in Modern Boy early in the month. It was a surprise for some of some of us when Hamilton divulged that he was the writer of the Will Hay tales. I wonder whether he wrote the Bendover tales and also the railway tales? Or was it some other writer who wrote the Modern Boy Hay tales? Was Hedley Owen C.H.?

Four of the Cedar Creek tales in Danny's Gem in December 1938 had originally run consequently in the Boys' Friend (what a lovely paper the Boys' Friend was at that time!) from mid-January 1919. The double-length "Father Christmas Must Get Through" had appeared in the B.F. at Christmas 1917, under the rather flat title of "Frank Richards' Christmas". (In the early twenties it had been reprinted in a Holiday Annual under the attractive title "How Father Christmas Came to White Pine".) As Danny truly says, this is a superb story, perhaps the best Cedar Creek tale of all time. Of the others, "A Lucky Rogue" of 1938 had been "Gunten's Last Chance"; "The Chinee of Cedar Creek" had been "The Chow of Cedar Creek"; "Frank Richards & Co's Gold-Mine" had been "Chunky's Gold-Mine"; and "The TRail of 'Frisco Joe" had been "Three on a Trail".

The Benbow series in the December 1938 Gem had all run consequently in the Greyfriars Herald from mid-March 1920. "Captain's Cunning" had been "Daubeny's Little Game"; "Daubeny's Dark Secret" had been "Friends or Foes"; "Drake's Last Chance" had the same title in 1920; and "The Hand of His Enemy" had been "Hard Pressed".

Now to the St. Jim's tales in those Gems of late 1938. The Cardew tale "Out of Bounds" had been "Breakers of Bounds" in the Gem of the Spring of 1917. For the tale "Gussy's Christmas Party" they took a big leap forward and picked out a tale which had been entitled "A Christmas Adventure" in late 1919. This was from a long and dreary run of sub tales which appeared in the Gem at a time when a genuine tale was unknown for the best part of a year. For "The Mystery of Cardew & Co" they went back to 1917 for the tale originally entitled "The Chums of Number Nine", and "Cardew Comes a Cropper" had been "Looking for Trouble" a few weeks later in 1917. And, ominously enough, the next 1938 tale "Racke's Revenge" was another sub tale, "The Schemer of the Shell", from the beginning of 1918. This latter one was by Pentelow, whose style was always unmistakeable. I, personally, always found the Pentelow sub tales a grit-in-the-teeth. The other sub writers all made an effort to write like the creator of the school and characters. Pentelow never seemed to bother. His style was his own, and he kept it that way.

So 1938 ended on an ominous note. Clearly they had a problem at the Fleetway House. The remaining stories of the war years had a marked wartime flavour. The alternative was the long, long run of sub tales which followed in 1919 and 1920.

So! In January 1939 I wrote to Mr. Down. Many years earlier I had written him and suggested that the constant sub tales were killing off the Gem. I suggested that they should reprint the early tales, and they should entitle the first one "Tom Merry - New Boy". They did just that.

Now in 1939 I wrote to Mr. Down with understanding of their problem. "Isn't it time", I enquired, "that you approached the original writer of the tales for some brand new stories?" Very soon he replied. "We have taken your advice. Mr. Martin Clifford has agreed to write NEW tales for the Gem. Watch out for them."

So I was happy. And hoped for the best.

CHRISTMAS WITH VALERIE

by Esmond Kadish

I like my sleuths to have some individuality, even a touch of eccentricity. I'm less concerned with the twists and turns of the plot in a detective story than with the character of the detective, as he or she unravels the mystery.

Thus, Valerie Drew, the eighteen-year-old girl detective, was very much to my liking, as she regularly solved a baffling problem, and outwitted the plotters, in the pages of the SCHOOLGIRLS' WEEKLY. Perhaps Valerie's "cases" might have seemed rather tame to Sexton Blake or Nelson Lee, but the stories were just right for the school-girl readers who followed her adventures each week in the mid-thirties. With her red-gold hair, and violet eyes (which always "narrowed" shrewdly at a critical juncture), Valerie was supported by her devoted "canine assistant", the Alsatian, Flash, and proved herself an engaging and popular character. As is perhaps already known, Valerie had been created in 1933, by John Bobin, using the pen-name of "Adelie Ascott". When he died in 1935, other writers continued. Strangely, no-one is then credited with the authorship in the paper until 1937, when "Isobel Norton" took over. (Who this actually was I've no idea, although Messrs. Lofts and Adley refer to a "G.L. Dalton", who is said to have written for some of the boys' papers as "Victor Norton". Any connection?)

The Christmas season naturally offered Valerie the opportunities to solve an appropriately festive mystery. "In "The Whispering Monk," which was featured in the 1936 Christmas issue of the Weekly (no. 739), Valerie and Flash are spending Christmas Day at "Lamorna", the country home of an old friend, Gloria Grayston. A fancy-dress party is in progress, and Valerie is arrayed as Bo-peep, with Flash, presumably, as one of her sheep. Gloria has gone to the ruins of the nearby Ringholme Abbey--said to be haunted by the ghost of the Whispering Monk--to gather mistletoe to decorate the house. When the front door is opened to Gloria's knock, she falls in, and collapses,



"Stop him, boy!" Valerie ordered sharply. Immediately Flash sprang, but the mystery monk hurled the heavy vase full at him.

fainting, in the doorway. Lifting Gloria "in her strong arms", Valerie takes command in a manner which shows that she is no less decisive in an emergency than her male counterparts: "Warm water, hot-water bottles, restoratives - quick!" She snapped to the stricken guests."

It appears that the spectral Whispering Monk has a penchant for mistletoe, and had attacked Gloria, snatching the samples she had gathered in the abbey ruins. Gloria's sister, Mrs. Stewart, is unsympathetic, and accuses her of playing a practical joke, which she vehemently denies. Later, more mistletoe disappears from the guests' rooms. Valerie investigates the abbey ruins, and contrives to get herself hanging by her fingertips from a damaged landing. Flash comes to the rescue, and gives his support, while she drags herself to safety. Subsequently, when Valerie seeks to escape discovery by two villains, he demonstrates his incredible capacity for following instructions: "Trick them, Flash --you know, let them chase you!" Flash knows just what to do of course!

It was the butler who did it! Foskett had stolen Mrs. Stewart's pearl necklace, and hidden it by removing the berries from a sprig of mistletoe, and threading the pearls together in their place. Unfortunately for him, one of the servants had used this particular sprig to decorate the house, and Foskett had been frantically hunting for it, disguised as the Whispering Monk.

Not, perhaps, the best of the Valerie Drew yarns, but it was a seasonable one, and one of the last of the long eight-page tales featuring the girl detective. Early in the New Year, the final "long, complete" tale, "Seen in a Glass Screen", in which Miss Drew encounters the "modern miracle, Television", appeared. A new "seven-story programme" was announced for the following week. Although a Valerie Drew story continued to appear in subsequent issues, it was only one of seven, and less than half its previous length.

* * * * *

THE FAMOUS FIVE'S CHRISTMAS GOOD DEED!

by Les Rowley



"Coker! Where are your lines?"

It needed but a few days before the Christmas hols. Outside, the Quad lay covered in a blanket of white, except where a few adventurous spirits had managed to clear a way for a slide. Overhead, the clouds were grey with their burden of future snow destined to add a further covering to buttress and window ledge. From the stately trees in Elm Walk, intrepid robins contemplated a scene that was as traditional as themselves. It was, once more, the season of hope; the centuries-old occasion for peace and goodwill to all men.

It was a time when even the beaks could be expected to unbend, reckoned Coker, as his master's words fell on the largest ears in the Fifth

or anywhere else at Greyfriars. Yet, here was Prout bringing up the sordid question of the mammoth imposition that he had awarded the fathead of the form. Just like old Pompous to be awkward when a fellow's mind was occupied by more important considerations such as the forthcoming vacation.

"Answer me, Coker!" boomed Prout, in a voice that was totally bereft of either peace or goodwill! "Three days ago I gave you a book as punishment for felling your form master with a football. I considered then as I consider now, that I dealt with you too leniently. I warn you, Coker, not to try my patience further!"

Coker stood in his place, his

rugged features set in what he fondly believed to be an expression of dignified resolution. When he spoke he surprised even his pals, Potter and Green, who were long accustomed to their friend's crass stupidity.

"My time has been rather occupied", offered the burly Fifth-former, by way of explanation, "and I thought that, on reflection, you had realised how unfair your impot was in view of the fact that I was only trying to bring a mob of unruly fags to heel. I think, sir-----"

What further thoughts Coker was about to give speech to were destined to remain unknown. It has been said of old that the gentle answer turneth away wrath. Coker's answer did not seem to have that effect on Prout! It was rare - very rare indeed - that Paul Pontifex Prout was at a loss for words.

For a moment, brief though it was, it seemed that the master of the Fifth had been struck dumb; then the gift of speech returned and the vials of wrath descended!

"Listen to me, Coker," Prout almost gabbled, like an excited turkey cock who knew that the festive board approached. "If you are so lost to propriety as to defy me further, I shall take you to your headmaster and request your expulsion. In recognition of your boundless stupidity, I give you one final, I repeat final opportunity to come to what little sense you possess. Your lines will be brought to my study by tea-time. If they are not, you know what to expect!"

Lessons in the Fifth resumed in an atmosphere that was electric!

* * * *

"It's up to us, you chaps!" Thus Robert Cherry, as the Famous Five congregated in Study No. 1 to discuss the latest news regarding Coker of the Fifth. "After all, Coker can't help being a born idiot who thinks he has a right to interfere in the Remove, and it was our footer that he booted at Prout!"

"Well, a book is a rather large order," replied Harry Wharton, "but shared amongst us it doesn't amount to much and I feel that we should save that Fifth-form fathead from the sack. After all, I suppose it's worth Coker remaining at Greyfriars purely for the entertainment value. If you fellows agree with Bob's suggestion, I suggest that we get on with it. Here's a specimen of Coker's fist that I got from his study. Don't forget to write like a spider that's crawled out of the inkwell, and don't be stingy with blots and errors!"

A moment later five heads were bent over five piles of impot paper, and five pens could be heard as they scratched erratically on its surface.

* * * *

Mr. Prout entered his study, his brow corrugated with irritation and deep thought. He had just had tea in Master's Commons and had been on the receiving end of much unsolicited sympathy and advice - sympathy and advice that he much preferred to dole out himself! His baleful glare went immediately to his desk, and his plump heart was gladdened at the neat pile of paper that rested thereon. It was not often that Prout rejoiced at the sight of Coker's written work. But he rejoiced now, even though his rejoicing was misplaced! But then Prout knew nothing of Harry Wharton & Co's intervention.

Coker had come to heel. Once more Prout could hold his head up in Masters' Commons. The frown had completely disappeared from his portly brow. The troublesome matter was closed. In his jubilation he sat in his armchair, and fed the sheets of that impot into the study fire. The flames reached out with warmth to dispel the wintry chill, their glow reflected in the Proutilian countenance.

Prout felt at one with the poet who proclaimed that "all's right with the world". If he gave the writing on that impot a glance at all, it was probably with the passing thought that, for once, Coker's handwriting showed a gratifying improvement. That improvement was not likely to be maintained!

* * * *

Coker expected to be taken before his Headmaster. He also expected to convince Dr. Locke that Prout's judgement had been at fault; and he further expected his beak to accept his (Coker's) valued assessment of what was fair in the way of justice. It was, perhaps, fortunate that none of these things came to pass. It could only mean - in Coker's opinion - that Prout had come to

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Frank Richards material urgently wanted for regular catalogues - Skilton/Cassell Hardbacks, Howard Baker volumes, Goldhawk paperbacks, Mascot and Sparshott series, etc. Offers of other Boys' school fiction also welcomed.
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his senses. It could only mean - in Prout's opinion - that Coker had, belatedly, come to his!

It has been remarked that where ignorance is bliss 'tis a folly to be wise, and it came to pass that, when the School dispersed its staff and scholars to their several homes, that bliss would dwell with Coker as it would with his form-master. After all, they shared a lot of ignorance between them!

If the Famous Five felt any bliss, they wisely kept it to themselves until they reached Wharton Lodge where any accumulated bliss was quickly dispelled when they discovered that they were once more saddled with the distinguished company of William George Bunter. But, Bunter or no Bunter, Christmas was there to be celebrated, and the prospects of confrontations with Coker in the New Year in no way diminished the outcome of the Famous Five's Christmas Good Deed.

THE END

* * * *

DAY SCHOOL STORIES: REX MILLIGAN

by Mark Taha

We've all heard of Anthony Buckeridge's "Jennings" books. He also wrote four books about a day school, the "Rex Milligan" series.

Written between 1953 and 1961, the books are set at Sheldrake, a London grammar school with a rival technical school nearby (which I'd have much preferred to go to, but that's another matter!). They're all narrated by Rex M. himself, member of Form 4, a fairly ordinary easy going chap with an unfortunate talent for landing right in it. His best friend is "Jigger" Johnson, described as "A stocky square-rigged sort of chap with red hair, freckles" and an animal-lover. Other boys include the over-imaginative Alfie Cutforth, the "School swot" Boko Phipps, the would-be inventor (vaguely Skimpolish) J.O. Stagg, and their Tech. rivals "Spikey" Andrews and "Bubblegum" Tucker (who merit a book of their own). The only masters featured are the vaguely Quelch-like form-master Mr. Birkinshaw, (a tall man with a limited supply of patience and a horror of being ragged), Mr. Frisby, the French master-ex-RAF with the moustache to prove it, a likeable giant of a man with a loud laugh and an old banger, Mr. Hunter, the "Head-hunter" (vaguely reminiscent of Mr. Pemberton-Oakes of Linbury Court), Mr. Stanton, the games master, and Mr. Howard, "Old Snorker" of the Tech.

The first book, "Rex Milligan's Busy Term", deals with Rex and Jigger being responsible for saving the school's playing fields from a property developer. I can't elaborate as I haven't read it for years.

The second, "Rex Milligan Raises the Roof", deals with efforts to raise the money to preserve the school's Great Hall, and features a mock battle with the Tech, part of a rivalry that lasts through the book, and a hilarious meeting with a police sergeant.

The third, "Rex Miligan Holds Forth," consists of Rex writing the book. He's shown as writing down his adventures as they happen. These include a bull terrier in the form room, a rugby match, and a school play featuring a monkey and a twist in the ending.

The last book, "Rex Milligan Reporting", features a rivalry with the Tech. following a cricket match. It shows a slight falling off in quality, so perhaps Buckeridge was right to stop there.

The series is well worth reading if you can find it. It's been out of print for a long time.

Cliff House Corner

by Margery Woods



Thoughts on a Cliff House Yuletide

As in other leading school-storypapers, holiday series in SCHOOL FRIEND and THE SCHOOLGIRL followed a fairly regular pattern. The summer hols were spent in glorious independence, free of the restrictions of school, home and adults. Authors and girls revelled in audacious and perilous exploits, often in the wilder parts of planet earth, where their own courage and ingenuity were the only means of escaping danger, and should some foolish adult be reckless enough to go along for the ride, well, the girls would not fail in their duty and the grown-up would be duly extricated from whatever pickle in which he or she had landed.

But Christmas was different.

Perhaps dictated by editorial policy, the Cliff House Christmasses were strictly family affairs, though none the less adventurous for this, and it was usually the homes of their parents or close relatives which provided the kind of Christmas settings we dreamed of---perhaps still do! Luxury was the by-word. Super-spacious rooms where no-one had to go seeking an extra chair from the spare bedroom or borrow a neighbour's camp bed for Uncle Joe, who'd got a bit merry and missed his last bus. No opening an extra tin of peas because the veg wasn't going to go round, or eking out with extra stuffing and bangers in case the bird didn't run to second helpings. The Cliff House festive board never ran out. Even with a Bunterian appetite to cope with turkey, ham, plum pudding with six-pences, mince pies and fruit and nuts and candies continued to flow in abundance from the unseen kitchen regions where an army of minions must have really spent a slaving Christmas. And the presents! The girls exchanged such trifles as silver wristlet watches, necklets, cameras, handbags and other luxuries. But this was only one side of the Cliff House Christmas coin. Always, the true Dickensian touch entered the stories. Poverty appeared in the form of a waif or some down-trodden youngster, and the kind hearts of the girls instantly responded. Their charity was always genuinely unselfish, never a token offering with regrets about no time for further involvement, and never ever patronising.

And with the advent of the waif began the conflict without which the story

could not exist. Sometimes this divided girls and host, sometimes isolated one girl from the chums she had always believed trusted her implicitly. In THE KIDDIES MUST HAVE THEIR CHRISTMAS (SCHOOLGIRL 441 Jan 8th, 1938) we find all the ingredients of Christmas Joy and Christmas pathos, to bring a lump to your throat one moment and a smile to your lips the next...

Take one tomboy, the much loved Clara Trevlyn, a faithful dog, a troubled mother and two sad-eyed mites, a covetous and ruthless villain, a stern laird and a weak uncle, a good man wrongfully accused, a romantic castle in the Highlands, blend together with the skill of John Wheway and wrap up in lots of snow, and you have a tale which will bring about exactly those very mixed emotions described above.

While exploring the countryside round Glengowrie Castle where the chums' host is Jean Cartwright's uncle, the Laird of Glengowrie, Clara's map-reading fails to take them back to the castle. Here the faithful dog appears to persuade them to follow him to a nearby cottage. Here they meet Mrs. Wallace, who, on seeing Bessie's dismay at the prospect of a four-mile walk through the snow, invites them to rest for a while and share the broth she has made for herself and little Lisbeth and Bobbie. Then the sad story is told; no Santa Claus this year. Our hearts warm to Clara as she says:

"What chumps we are. We haven't told Bobbie the latest news about Santa Claus. Poor Santa Claus got lost in the snow," Clara went on, "and we had to dig him out. He was in such a bad way we had to take him to the Castle and pack him off to bed. But he didn't forget you, Bobbie, nor Lisbeth..."

Clara goes on to improvise about Santa sending them to tell the children that Santa is going to visit them tonight. She then takes off her silver bracelet to give to Lisbeth and finds a compass in her pocket for Bobbie. The pleasure engendered by this is abruptly dispelled by the arrival of James White, who with his unreasoning determination to possess the Wallaces' little farm has been led to get the children's father accused of theft. Now he is determined to get Mrs. Wallace to sign the paper which will make the farm his at last.

Ever a champion of the victimised, Clara tries to persuade her uncle, Ernest Trevlyn, also a guest at the Castle, to help. But he has formed a friendship with White who succeeds in discrediting Clara. She is forbidden to have any further association with the Wallace family. This, naturally, is an open invitation to defiance from the tomboy. She organises a wonderful Christmas celebration for the unfortunate little family, during which Bessie plays Santa and with her marvellous gift for ventriloquism conjures forth the voice of Santa himself from the chimney, to the great joy of the children.

And what a transformation the girls create in the little home:

Garlands of ribbons and tartan hung from the rafters. Holly and mistletoe decorated the pictures. Coloured lanterns were suspended from the beams, and the Christmas tree, a blaze of lights and illuminated toys, glowed like a fairy forest in the little bay window. "And now supper!" Clara cried. "Where's that Glengowrie home-made wine, Babs?" Under the table, Toonie the dog worried and growled over a juicy venison bone which Jemima had thoughtfully included in the treat.

But when the joyous day is ending, after the girls come happily downstairs from their stocking-filling in the children's room, they find the abominable

Mr. White at the cottage door, with Clara's uncle, who says freezingly that he has a carriage outside and it is his duty to enforce his authority. Clara's face turns deathly white:

"And if I refuse?"

"I shall consider it my duty to take you home--by force if necessary."

Again, a very dangerous attitude to take with the tomboy! But Babs and Mrs. Wallace mediate to prevent further confrontation between Clara and her uncle. And once back at the castle Clara has to face the Laird himself. She loses her temper, then repents and turns back, only to overhear the Laird saying to her uncle that she ought to go...

Of course, in the time-honoured tradition of this play she does not hear the rest of his sentence and decides she'll do exactly that. Out she goes, into a blizzard as stormy as the tempest raging in her own heart.

The girls and the Laird are dismayed and set off to search for her, not knowing she has encountered the evilly triumphant James White, who has just succeeded in getting Mrs. Wallace to sign the paper; the farm is now his! Clara is so angry she makes a grab for the paper, White springs back and goes over a mountain ledge, to crash down and lie like a dead man. A more vindictive person



"MRS. WALLACE signed," said the man, and mockingly exhibited the envelope. "Here's the document which gives me possession of her farm." Clara's face whitened. So the bully had won, after all! Impulsively she leapt forward.

might have left him there but not Clara. She struggles to drag him to the shelter of a small cave where she wraps him in her own coat. It is there that the chums find them and take White to the Wallace cottage, where he repents of his misdeeds. The paper is burnt, Mr. Wallace's name cleared and Clara is restored to the good books of her family. Her uncle admits that if he can make a mistake he can also make amends, whereupon he presents Mr. Wallace with fifty pounds to help keep the farm going.

This denouement approaches dangerously close to the cloying pathos of Victorian melodrama when the villain at last sees the error of his ways:

"Funny," he murmured, "that you, my enemy, (Clara) should rescue me, that the woman I wronged should take pity on me. What a blind, heartless fool I have been." (He tells Clara to take the envelope from his pocket.) "Take it---it contains the paper, Clara. Give it to Mrs. Wallace. Let her burn it for me. Ask her, if she can, to forgive a harsh man who had to learn the meaning of the word mercy from herself and a schoolgirl."

He then makes his confession about how he deliberately lied about Mr. Wallace and asks Clara if he has done all she would have wished him to.

"Oh yes!" Clara cried. "Yes, Mr. White, bless you, thank you." And now, impulsively she bent, touching the white cheek with her lips. "You'll never let yourself down again," she added softly.

"For that, thanks," he muttered. "I'll do my best to live up to it, Clara---" his head sagged and his eyelids drooped again.

Borderline sentiment, but we remember that at the time of writing, the thirties, the influence of the Victorians still lingered in many ways. After all, the close of the Victorian era was not so much further back in time than the early sixties from our present time---and how we are still feeling the influence of those years! We accept this storypaper emotionalism because it is so patently sincere, one of the great qualities of our favourite papers. They never preached---in this respect they had moved light-years on from Victorian fiction---but they certainly got the message over!

And so, at the end of another great Christmas for the chums of Cliff House, the true spirit of Christmas once again prevailed. For although editorial policy, for obvious reasons, did not encourage touching on any specific religious creed, the sense of Christianity always ran like a golden thread through the Christmas stories---indeed, all the stories---in our beloved papers. Looking back, weren't we lucky to have them as part of our childhood?

WANTED: Capt. W.E. Johns' Mossyface (William Earle), Blue Blood Runs Red (John Early), Desert Night. Also: All Hamilton and Oxford first edition Biggles, particularly in dustwrappers. All first edition Steeley. And, in dustwrappers only, Wings, The Air V.C.'s, Thrilling Flights, The Spyflyers. Also Johns in the Boys' Friend - nos. 469, 501, 610, 614, 617, 630. David Gillard, 16 Grasmere Road, Bromley, Kent, BR1 4BA. Tel: 01-464 6892.

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.

OUR BOOKSHELVES



"THE CHILDREN'S ANNUAL: A History and Collectors Guide" by Alan Clark.
Published by Boxtree at £16.95. Reviewed by Norman Wright.

It is surprising that a book on Annuals has not been written before now. They enjoy a degree of popularity amongst collectors that they do not perhaps warrant. Annuals were, and for that matter probably still are, the bug-bear of most comic artists. Those busy individuals with weekly deadlines to meet for their regular strips have always had to squeeze in the extra work required for the bumper yearbooks. Consequently the original material often ends up inferior to the weekly strips. I think that many collectors like annuals as it is possible to collect a whole 'set' of them, whereas it is a difficult and costly business to collect the complete run of a comic or story paper.

Whatever the quality of the material inside the annuals their covers were invariably eye-catching, often miniature masterpieces, and Alan Clark's book does full justice to them, featuring within its pages almost two hundred illustrations, thirty of them in full colour.

The book begins with a brief look at the earliest annuals from the Victorian era, then chronologically traces the multitude of miscellaneous annuals published early in this century, "British Boys Annual", "Empire Annual for Boys", "Girls Budget", etc. All familiar to the collector, if somewhat unexciting. The most interesting chapter as far as collectors of old boys books are concerned must be that dealing with the annuals published by the Amalgamated Press. After the success of "Tiny Tots" in 1899 they went on ten years later to launch "Playbox", the first annual to have a starring character - the long lived Tiger Tim. Tim and the Bruin Boys featured in several annuals, their popularity in no small measure due to the superb artwork provided by Herbert Foxwell, who took over the characters in 1914. Several of Foxwell's covers are illustrated in the book. There are illustrations of many 'firsts' including the "Holiday Annual", "Schoolgirls Own", "Champion" and virtually every other story-paper related annual that the Amalgamated Press published.

The 'funnies' are by no means forgotten and "Jester", "Jingles", "Sparkler" and "Tip Top" are all there, together with a host of others, their covers painted by such masters of comic art as Walter Bell, Reg Parlett and Roy Wilson. The superb Wilson cover painting from the 1939 "Funny Wonder Annual" is used on the dustwrapper of the book.

A substantial part of the book is devoted to the many comic and story-paper related annuals published by D.C. Thomson. There are chapters on film and T.V. related annuals, and the vast number of post war publications that did, and still do, brighten the newsagents' windows and shelves each Christmas. As a picture reference Alan Clark's book provides a wealth of material. I found the text a trifle stilted, the author not always displaying the enthusiasm for



MORCOVE MINIATURES



ROSE OF THE DESERT

By TOMMY KEEN



Perhaps Rose of the Desert does not really qualify as a Morcove 'miniature' but she was featured in so many of the series in the SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN (from her introduction in 1921, to her final fade-out in 1935), that she is probably remembered more vividly than some of the schoolgirl characters.

Rose of the Desert (what a romantic name - how it must have appealed to the readers in those far off days), had arrived in England with a group of Moorish people, and the female members of the party almost mesmerised Betty Barton & Co., who watched them gliding through Barncombe town. It was soon made clear to the juniors that these strange people were in Devonshire to attempt to regain a rather special lamp, the Lamp of Susahlah, which had at one time hung in the Mosque of Susahlah, from where it had been taken by Jack Somerfield, the brother of Morcove's Headmistress. This lamp had been 'pinched' by Somerfield when he escaped captivity from the Sultan of Susahlah several years before. The lamp was now at Morcove School in the care of Miss Esther Somerfield. (How could the emissaries from Morocco have known where that lamp was?)

Stories of the fair Rose have been recalled before in one or two C.D. Annuals, but as it is now almost Christmas, and it was on a certain Christmas Night many years ago that Rose undoubtedly made her presence felt, this outline is mainly concerned with the introduction of this rather mysterious female. The story of his meeting with Rose was told by Jack Somerfield to the Linton Hall Christmas party, as they sat in a semi-circle around the log fire.

Somerfield had found 'a wee native girl lost in the desert', and although returning her to Susahlah, he was immediately flung into prison. During a prison riot, he managed to escape, and get into the mosque, and take the lamp. Of course the small girl was Rose, but by the time she arrived in England in search of the lamp, she was described (in spite of her face being heavily veiled) as a very beautiful young woman. 'Tall and slim, she walked with the grace of a queen...a voice as soft as the purring of a cat!'. She spoke good English too! This she had been taught by Jack Somerfield, during the brief time she had been with him.

At first Rose was definitely an enemy. She had already been involved with the kidnapping of Cora and Judith Grandways at Morcove, in the series leading up to the Christmas, but the Grandways girls had escaped their captors. Now, on Christmas Night, Rose and her brother Hussuf broke into Linton Hall to attempt to find the lamp. It was discovered, but during a struggle between Hussuf and Somerfield, it was broken. With the exception of one small fragment, Hussuf escaped with the precious object.

Then on the evening of Boxing Day, at an Ice Carnival, Madge Minden and Tess Trelawney were captured by Rose of the Desert, and in no time at all whisked to far off Morocco...and yes, in hot pursuit, Jack Somerfield and the entire Linton Hall crowd!

Madge and Tess were rescued, but the aeroplane which Somerfield had standing by for their flight to England refused to start. As he was attending to the engine, a girlish figure, in white raiment, was seen standing only fifty yards away. "Rose of the Desert" gasped Madge and Tess.

Poor Rose. Because her prisoners had escaped she had been turned out into the desert, to wander aimlessly until she died of exhaustion or starvation. Now, sad, weary and hungry, she has an emotional reunion with Jack Somerfield. "Kismet - it is fate! I have not sought you - no, no." Such tragic despair the girls had never witnessed before! But Somerfield could, and would, save her life again. By handing Rose the fragment of the lamp, which, fortunately, he had with him, she would be able to return to Susahlah in triumph. "The Sultan will forgive all" she says.

The Morcove girls are fascinated by the



THE CAUSE OF IT ALL! "Rose of the Desert," said Somerfield, "here is the missing fragment of the lamp. Take it!"

strong ardour which evidently prevailed between Somerfield and the desert girl. "If I were Mr. Somerfield, I think I should be in love with Rose" said Tess Trelawney. And Betty Barton replies, "Isn't it pretty clear that he loves her just as much as she loves him". But this romance was not to be. "East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet" says Rose, "it is farewell". Now the aeroplane decides to work properly, so all aboard go the English party. As the plane takes off, a lonely figure in white is visible amongst the rocks.

It is Rose of the Desert...waving her last farewell. So ends the Christmas series, but this was not to be the end of this interesting and romantic character. By the following Easter she was in England again, staying near Morcove with a certain Mr. Hartry, and his daughter Pearl. This time, Rose was a captive. At the end of the series, she goes to stay at Morcove as a sort of companion to Miss Somerfield, but with the arrival of Naomer Nakara in 1923, Rose becomes involved in all the many future trips to Morocco. Unfortunately for Rose, Jack Somerfield decides to marry a different (and European) lady. Rose was a lovely character but possibly, as time passed by, she became a little dated. The middle 1930s was quite a different period from the early 1920s. Hollywood had taken over.
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MIDLAND O.B.B.C.

Nine members attended the October meeting and, in the absence of our acting chairman Geoff Lardner, Ivan Webster took the chair.

Bill Lofts gave a splendidly illustrated talk on 'Treasures', dealing with old comics and story papers going as far back as the middle of the nineteenth century. There was a wonderful display of some of these treasures. After refreshments, which were generously provided by Betty Hopton, Christine Brettell and Ivan, the latter read a short and very amusing passage in which Bunter tells Dr. Locke that he would rather be sacked than flogged. Then your correspondent conducted a 15 question quiz, which was won by Christine Brettell.

Special note should be taken of our next two meetings dates, November 22nd and December 13th (Christmas party).

Jack Bellfield

CAMBRIDGE CLUB

The home of Bill and Alice Thurbon provided the venue for our November Meeting.

Howard Corn spoke on the Dr. Morell character, a psychiatrist with an interest in solving problems in criminology. Created by the "BBC Armchair Detective", Ernest Dudley, he first appeared in the early 1940s, saw publication and then reappeared on the airwaves in the late 'fifties. We heard audio tape excerpts

from this radio series with Dr. Morell being acted by Cecil Parker and his Secretary Miss Frayle, by Sylvia Sim. Later we were quizzed by Paul Wilkins with questions, on the literature of our hobby.

Adrian Perkins

LONDON O.B.B.C.

Chairman Phil Griffiths welcomed twenty members to the meeting held at our Walthamstow venue on Sunday, 13th November, an especially warm greeting being extended to Alan Pratt, one of our more recent members. Members were given a preliminary warning that the Annual General Meeting would be on 8th January, 1989, when elections for a Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary would take place. The Hamiltonian and Sexton Blake Librarians both reported improved business as the postal strike receded. Chris and Duncan Harper have produced a truly commendable catalogue for the Sexton Blake Library. Well worth having, and a rare bargain at 20 pence for a copy, or 30 pence for a copy plus a protective vinyl sleeve!

We were then at our leisure to enjoy reading the many excellent reviews of Mary's book about Frank Richards. Mark Taha gave us an impressive account about an expulsion of H. Vernon-Smith, and there was a novel "laddergram" quiz by Duncan Harper. The first three winners were all ladies with the initial 'M' - Miriam Bruning, Mary Cadogan, and Myra Stewart, only one man coming in the first four - Phil Griffiths. Arthur Bruning was our Desert Island castaway who would take with him an extensive selection of reading with which to while away the dreary hours. If you happened to be marooned with Arthur, there was plenty to suit all tastes; all aspects of our hobby were well and truly represented, and you could enjoy the "Ravenspur Grange" series, the "Ezra Quirke" series or a Sexton Blake story, whilst Arthur got on with Karl Barth's "Dogmatics". With the reading of two extracts from the popular "Lancaster" series in the "Magnet" Win Morss brought the meeting to an interesting close. Next meeting: Sunday, 11th December, 1988, at the home of Bill Bradford, 5 Queen Anne's Grove, Ealing, London, W5 3XP. A full tea will be provided but be sure to inform Bill well in advance if you are attending. His phone number is (01) 579 4670.

Leslie Rowley

NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

Chairman David Bradley welcomed the 14 members present at our A.G.M. Officers were elected as follows: Chairman, David Bradley: Secretary, Geoffrey Good: Treasurer, Darrell Swift: Librarian Paul Galvin: Catering Officer, William Hirst. Our programme for 1989 was discussed and approved for publication. A report was given on the very successful W.E. Johns meeting organised at Nottingham in October by the Northern Club; another meeting would take place in October 1989.

After refreshments Keith Smith took us to . . . Hulme Beaman's Toytown, and after his fascinating talk about the pictures and characters Keith played a nostalgic recording of Toytown radio episode. Next meeting: 10th December, our Christmas Party, commencing at 5.30 p.m. All are welcome to join us.

Johnny Bull Minor

* * * *

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CHRISTMAS AND A
HAPPY NEW YEAR

