

Story
Paper

COLLECTORS

VOLUME 43

No. 513

DIGEST

SEPTEMBER 1989



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STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

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The Editor's Chat

THINGS PAST...



It is impossible to write an editorial dated September 1989 without reflecting that fifty years ago the Second World War began. We all have vivid memories of 'The Day War Broke Out', as both Danny and Denise recall in their Diaries this month. I remember being (very briefly) evacuated to Hastings (before anyone ever dreamed that it would eventually become a dangerous 'invasion' area) when we heard Mr. Chamberlain speak his fateful words over the radio. And I will never forget the sound of the siren so soon afterwards; a false alarm it may have been, but at the time it seemed an uncomfortable confirmation of the fact that Hitler & Co. meant business!

The years from 1939 to 1945 still have an extraordinary vividness for those of us who lived through them. There is no doubt that we saw the worst - and the best - aspects of the human spirit in operation then. Amongst the thousands of indelible vignettes, those of some of the magazines (wartime 'Make Do and Mend' and cookery tips) and the comics (**Film Fun's** heroes - even the Americans -



suddenly blossoming out into British army uniforms) are as potent as ever. Of course, as Danny half foresees in his Diary this month, we lost most of our wonderful story-papers for ever. For girls at least there remained the consolation of the **Girl's Own Paper**, which decided to launch Captain W.E. Johns's **Worrals of the W.A.A.F.** in 1940, thus producing a great and durable heroine. And we all had those marvellous wartime popular songs, some unashamedly sentimental, and some that were really comical. Interviewed on B.B.C. **Woman's Hour** in August of this year, Dame Vera Lynn was asked why she still sang the songs of the 1940s. Her reply was that many, many people still requested these, and moreover, that they were, and still are, jolly good numbers. They certainly are, and hearing them today is yet another reminder that the period of the Second World War, despite all its horrors, contained a great deal of innocence and idealism. Even the newspapers of the time, seen with hindsight, are a good deal more optimistic and joyous in tone than the doom and gloom offerings of today...

THINGS TO COME ...

I am now working on the Annual, and am glad to say that I have already received some splendid contributions from several of our most popular contributors, as well as from some newer ones.

There is still room for many more articles, stories or illustrative features, so do please send me your contribution in the fairly near future. In order to get the Annual out to you all in good time for Christmas, it is helpful if I can receive your articles by the early part of October - or even **before** this, if possible. Next month I will provide a list of 'tasters' to whet your appetite for what promises to be an Annual in the best traditions of C.D. and the old papers. Our order form is enclosed herewith, and, again, it is helpful if I could please receive your orders fairly soon. In spite of printing and postal charge increases since last year, I am keeping

the price pretty well the same as it was for the 1988 Annual, so that as many readers as possible will be able to buy it. (I'm actually charging just 5p more! This rounds out the amount, makes accounting easier and provides a small contribution towards the increased costs. The price shown, of course, includes postage and packing.)

MARY CADOGAN

(The picture at the beginning of this editorial was drawn especially by Terry Wakefield for an article which I wrote some time ago on The Comics of War for GOLDEN FUN, the excellent comics magazine produced by Alan and Laurel Clark. The Pansy Potter picture is from a 1940s Beano, Copyright D.C. Thomson.)



THE WORST OF THE LOT

By C.H. Churchill

Of all the characters depicted in the Nelson Lee Library stories written by E.S. Brooks some were bad, some rather worse and a few very bad indeed. I would say that the very worst one of all was Titus Alexis, the Greek junior. For such a short sojourn at St. Frank's (two stories) he caused more chaos and mayhem than anyone could possibly imagine.

In the first story "Alexis the Mysterious" No. 221 dated 30/8/19 we were regaled by the tantrums and ill will of this unfortunate Greek junior. It was obvious that he was entirely out of his element at a British public school and his resentment at being sent to St. Frank's fueled his evil temper to the full. We were not told anything about his parents, his past history or why he was sent there.

He was assigned to study M occupied by De Valerie and the Duke of Somerton. Despite their efforts to be friendly with him he spurned all their efforts in this direction. One one occasion he entirely lost all control of his temper in an argument with Somerton and, picking up a knife from the table, attempted to stab the Duke in the back. De Valerie arrived just in time to avert a tragedy. After cooling down, Alexis merely said "It was a mistake to take the knife. I regret it!".

In the form room he was intractable and thwarted all Mr. Crowell's attempts to control him and get him to behave as the other boys. Complaining to Nelson Lee, Mr. Crowell was told confidentially that steps were being taken to get the boy sent home. Mr. Crowell said that the earlier the better would suit him.

Later Nipper caught Alexis badly bullying a Third former and knocked him down. The Greek boy, always one for revenge, tricked Fullwood & Co. to help him get Nipper lured down to the Monastery ruins. The cads of Study A thought it was only a rag and helped daub Nipper with paint, etc., leaving him bound and helpless. They then left to tell the other removies where Nipper was, hoping to get a cheap laugh out of the incident. However, while Nipper was still helpless Alexis returned and gave the Remove captain a bad beating with a stick. Watson & Co. coming to the rescue, it all came out and Alexis received a flogging from the Head.

In the next story "The Great Fire at St. Frank's" (No. 222) we read how Alexis succeeded in setting fire to the College House to get revenge on all. As a result the College House was burned to the ground. There was no loss of life, and this led to the next series of stories about how the school was transferred to the Turret College in London.

As to Alexis, he was quietly removed from St. Frank's by his parents. Never did anyone do so much damage to so many in so short a time, as my famous namesake might have said!!

WINDMILLS AND THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY

by Jim Sutcliffe

Windmills have often been featured in the Nelson Lee, both in the early detective stories and in the school stories. Windmills remind me of our hobby. For many years, they were taken for granted while all the time the forces of nature were slowly destroying them, and many have fallen by the wayside, the victim of gales.

Fortunately, some have been saved for future generations. In the same way the books we loved in our younger days have been saved by those who with foresight valued them and could not bear to see them discarded.

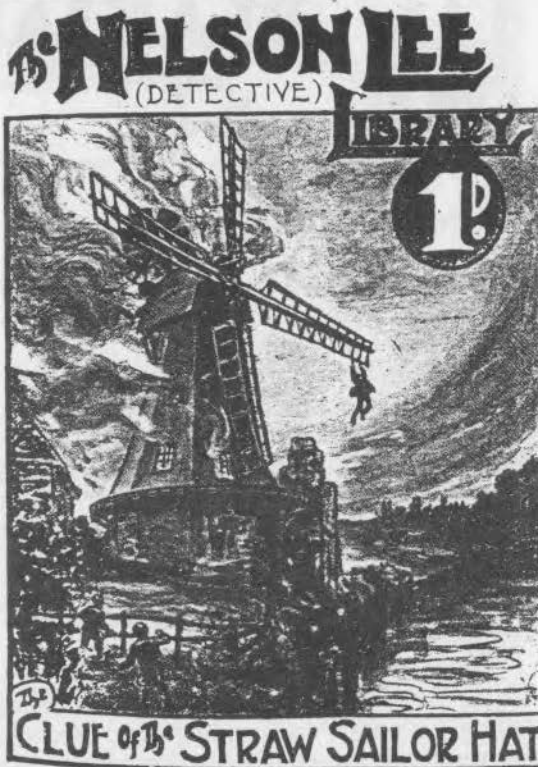
The earliest mention of a mill was in N.L. No. 3 Old Series, the cover of which shows a fine illustration of a windmill on fire, with Nelson Lee hanging on one of the sails to escape from the burning mill in which he has been imprisoned. A river flows below, and, about 50 feet above this, he lets go and is swept away towards the nearby watermill where but for Nipper's quick intervention he would have been crushed by the millstones.

Again in one of the early Jim the Penman stories Nelson Lee has another narrow escape, being once more tied to one of the sails of a mill so that his head will be crushed as it hits a large boulder on the ground. But yet again Lee's life is saved. In one of the early St. Frank's stories,

No. 114, O.S., an illustration of the Bannington windmill is on the cover of the story about Farman, the American junior.

Other O.S. Covers showing illustrations of mills were No. 275 in the Dick Goodwin series, showing Nipper hanging on a sail to look into the window of the mill, and also No. 441. Here, to test his courage, Buster Boots is tricked into thinking that Irene Manners and her father have been kidnapped. In No. 494, Professor Tucker, on his way to take up his post as Science Master at St. Franks, suddenly remembers a comet is due to appear in the sky and enters the mill to set up his telescope on the top floor. In the St. Frank's stories the mill is always that on Bannington Moor, which in the sketch by E.E. Briscoe is shown as being of the Post Mill type, whereas in the cover illustrations they are all shown as Smock Mills.

No. 3.-New Detective Story Paper-



Week ending June 26, 1915

This mill also featured in the Moat Hollow mutiny series. There is no doubt that old windmills, along with ruined castles and Priors, made ideal settings for the school and mystery stories in which Edwy Searles Brooks excelled.

HAMILTONIA ALL TYPES: Swops, sales and purchases; or maybe just a jolly good chat about the hobby. Lots of Holiday Annuals for my Holiday Annual Hospital wanted in 1989/90. Generous prices paid. Contact: COLIN CREWE, 12b Westwood Road, Canvey Island, Essex, Tel. 0268 693735, Evenings 7.15 - 9.30 p.m. and weekends.



THE INDIAN ROPE TRICK

by Reg Hardinge

One of the most formidable and devilishly cunning criminals that Sexton Blake ever came up against was Gunga Dass, the son of a deposed Rajah of Northern India.

The Adventure of the Renegade Spy (Union Jack No. 1021) tells how Gunga Dass planned a rebellion to oust the British Raj from India, aided and abetted by Ralph Marshall, an ex-British administrative officer in the Indian Civil Service who had been disgraced and dismissed. When news of the unrest reached London, Sexton Blake was sent for by Sir Roger Mayne of the India Office, and asked to proceed to India to investigate the matter. So that is how the Guv'nor and his assistant Tinker (the Young 'un), disguised in dishevelled tropical kit with skin darkened to a walnut hue, came to be in the bazaar of Tunganarh in the Punjab, which was the hub of Gunga Dass's activities.

The intervention of Blake and Tinker foiled the plans of Gunga Dass, and, in fact, led to his capture. But managing to slip his bonds and eluding the police surrounding him, Dass dashed into a dense crowd that was watching an aged fakir performing that illusion, the boy-and-rope trick. The fakir threw a stout rope into the air, retaining one end in his hand. The rope became as rigid as a pole, remaining in a perpendicular position with one end firmly on the ground. Gunga Dass forced his way through the spectators to reach the rope, swarmed up it and disappeared from view. The rope went slack and fell to the ground in a limp coil.

The author's name, unfortunately, was not appended to this story. But because the tale was written by a person who knew India intimately and was familiar with the language and customs of the people, he could very well have been Anthony Parsons. In a footnote, Parsons (if it was he) states that from the top of his bungalow in Calcutta and through a pair of field-glasses he viewed, at a distance of a quarter of a mile away, a fakir performing the trick. At this distance the author deemed that he was outside the influence of any hypnotic field. But what he saw was exactly what the audience saw - a ten-year-old boy swarming up a stiffened rope, disappearing, and the rope falling to the ground.

No rational explanation has ever been put forward to account for the trick, nor have photographs been taken of its performance. In the early

twenties, a Major Branson offered a year's pay to any British soldier serving in India who could say that he himself had seen it, and furnish the name and address of the performer. But the offer was never taken up. Some of the best brains in the world who have investigated the Indian Rope Trick have been unable to provide a solution. The magical East still retains its intriguing secret.

DID THEY WRITE OF SEXTON BLAKE - Part Four

By W.O.G. Lofts

Peter Cheney was one of our most popular crime writers, his books selling world wide with his creations Lemmy Caution and Slim Callaghan. It was revealed in a biography by Michael Harrison, "Peter Cheney - Prince of Hokum" (Neville Spearman 1953), two years after his death that he had tried his hand at writing a Sexton Blake story for The Union Jack. This was at some time in the mid-twenties, early in Cheney's career.

A friend of his, Donald Stuart, was then established as a Blake writer. Cheney gave the manuscript entitled 'The Clue of the Yellow Moccasin' to him for the editor H.W. Twyman to read. According to Donald Stuart, Twyman would not even look at it, with Cheney calling him at the time a 'hard man'.

Twyman, whom I met a few years after the biography was published, had heard about the story, though had not read the book. When he saw it, to say that he was annoyed would be putting it mildly. He could not recall the incident at all, neither was it in his interests not to peruse any story submitted. He might be letting slip through his fingers future star writers of the mould of Teed, Gwyn Evans, or E.S. Brooks who were his principle authors.

Peter Cheney later in person submitted the idea for "Tinker's Note-Book" which was accepted - a popular feature penned by Cheney with the assistance of Ex-Detective Brust of Scotland Yard. Twyman remembers this clearly, with the remark that it was astonishing in the circumstances that Cheney never mentioned his Sexton Blake story, and its rejection without ever being read.

Unfortunately Donald Stuart died in 1980, so the truth will never now be known. I met him once at a Sexton Blake party at Fleetway House in the Directors' Suite, a very tall man with a stoop, with old trilby hat, and big brown overcoat that he wore winter and summer. He told me he was born in London - Hackney, the same place as E.S. Brooks - a clue that eventually established that both 'Stuart' and 'Gerald Verner' (names he was known by) were not in fact his baptismal name.

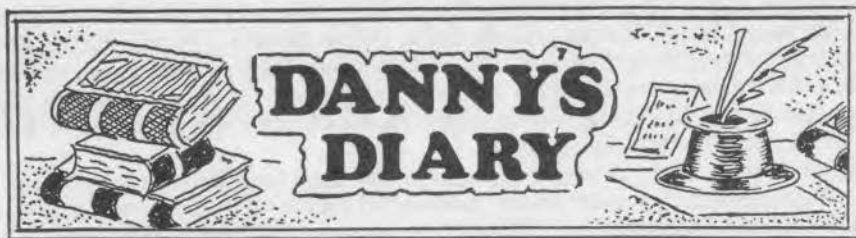
A highly colourful individual, he was in his own right a first class writer, though at times he was prone to borrow from Edgar Wallace, Sax Rohmer and many others. In closing this series it is worth mentioning the incident when an editor had to write half a Sexton Blake Library so that the story could meet the deadline date for the printers.

'Jackie' Hunt was an extremely amiable editor with whom I had many meetings at the old Fleetway House. He was Editor then of 'Princess', a girls' paper. In his earlier days he had been assistant editor on Union Jack, Sexton Blake Library, Thriller and Detective Weekly, consequently knowing much of the background

regarding stories and authors. Once when the subject of Donald Stuart cropped up (curiously he always called him 'Gerald' as he was paid for at least the S.B.L. tales under that name) Hunt told me that he was still bitter over having to write half a Sexton Blake story that took him all one weekend. More so, as he had promised his family an outing that went by the board.

Gerald Verner, as he called him, had been commissioned to write a Sexton Blake Library story with a deadline date on a Friday, as the manuscript would be going to press first thing Monday morning. Gerald turned up mid-week and said he had written half the story, but had some domestic problem that required him needing the full payment to meet his obligations. He would without fail deliver the rest of the story on the Friday. Jackie thought hard and long about this, but finally gave the cashiers' department authority to pay him the £60. Of course Gerald never turned up on the Friday, so the only thing Hunt could do was somehow to be a stop gap and write the rest himself. This took him all the weekend, and was difficult as he was not strictly a detective fiction writer.

Of course Gerald never offered to pay him, say, £30, his excuse being that his 'domestic' problem took longer than expected. The story might have been "The Third Victim" No. 653 Jan. 1939, as after this date (and event) he was only entrusted with rewriting old yarns by other writers, and was not featured in the Third series at all.



SEPTEMBER 1939

It's happened. It's been threatening for more than a year since Hitler began his bullying and his stealing and his awfulness.

Everybody thought it might happen. We all said it wouldn't. But we were all secretly afraid that it would. And it has! WAR!

They say it became inevitable when Hitler and Molotov signed that pact in Moscow which brought about an agreement between the Huns and the Russians. On 1st September at dawn (it was a Friday), German troops began to invade Poland. And Britain and France had promised that, if that happened, our two countries would go to the aid of Poland.

And at 11.15 a.m. on the 3rd (it was a Sunday) our Prime Minister, Mr. Chamberlain, came on the wireless to tell us that, from that moment, Britain is at war with Germany.

And, within a few hours, the German wireless was broadcasting warnings to Britain about the awful things that will happen to us in opposing the might of Hitler.

The speaker on the German wireless has a very, very posh English voice, and it gets on your nerves when he keeps on repeating the threats.

We were away on holiday in Devonshire on that Sunday, and, as big air-raids are expected over the London area, Dad wanted Mum and us to stay there for a while in Devon, but he had to go home. Mum wouldn't hear of it, but she said that Doug and I must stay there a while. But we wouldn't hear of it. So we all came home on the Monday, wondering what is going to happen.

I hope it won't have any effect on my papers and the fourpenny libraries. Doug says it won't, as the war won't last long. And in the previous war the papers carried on through it for 4 years or so. So I'm hoping for the best.

Now to happier things, and I won't mention the war again in my Diary if I can help it.

It has not been a good month in the Fourpennies, though the Schoolboys' Own Library has been tip-top. The Greyfriars one is "The Secret of the Holiday Annual". This brings an end to the stories about the chums hiking. A smash and grab raider stole a lot of jewellery and hid it, and the only clue to where he hid it is to be found in Bob Cherry's new copy of the Holiday Annual. Lovely reading. The Greyfriars chums must get quite a kick out of reading the Holiday Annual which tells of their own adventures at school. The second S.O.L. is "The Great Grundy" and it is good fun if you like the Grundy type, which I don't. It seems to be 3 separate adventures of Grundy, and in part of it he takes lessons to try to become a hypnotist. The 3rd S.O.L. is "The Island of Terror". The lovely little Pacific isle of the St Frank's chums has been invaded by cannibals, and to add to the excitement there is a hurricane and a volcano in eruption. Good adventure reading.

In the Sexton Blake Library I bought "The Case of the Bogus Monk" by G.H. Teed. It is an interesting tale and quite unusual in plot, and, besides Blake and Tinker, it introduces George Marsden Plummer and his lustrous associate Vali Mata Vali.

The Boys' Friend Library has been a bit odd this month. There was none of the usual type of B.F.L. tales such as I often buy, but one story is a Sexton Blake story. It seems so strange to find a Sexton Blake tale in the B.F.L. So I bought this one, "The Station Master's Secret" by John Andrews. A railway servant takes a mysterious midnight trip after a valuable package disappears from the guardsvan of his own train. Doug says he feels sure that this one is a reprint of an old Sexton Blake Library. Perhaps they are a bit short of material at the Amalgamated Press.

Hitler has started on his horrors. The liner "Athenia" has been torpedoed only a few days after war was declared. And the next day Canada declared war on Germany.

The STATIONMASTER'S SECRET



A trusted servant of the railway takes a strange midnight journey just after an important packet has disappeared from the guard's van of his train. At the same time an ex-convict disappears. Sexton Blake, the Wizard of Baker Street, and his young assistant, Tinker, tackle a case of absorbing interest and mystery.

BOYS' FRIEND LIBRARY No. 687

Of all Newsagents and Bookstalls 4d

I'm finding it a bit hard to get used to the latest sized Modern Boy, with its light-buff coloured paper. Some of the tales are not too bad. The Captain Justice tales are good. The series about Kelensky, who means to rule the world, has ended with the month's first two tales. He decides to wreck the Panama Canal in "Panama Peril" and finally he himself gets killed in the next story "Ten Seconds to Go", and Capt. Justice saves the canal. Two weeks later Justice was back in a new series, the first tale being "Space Bomb", to be followed in the month's last issue by "The Doomed Planet" with the adventurers somewhere in space in a new sort of world.

The Biggles serial is "Castle Sinister", and there are several farcical tales which don't appeal to me much in the rest of the paper.

Bad news on the war front. H.M.S. "Courageous" has been sunk by a U-boat.

In the Magnet the Greyfriars chums are having a holiday on the Thames in their boat, the "Water Lily". First tale this month is "Greyfriars to the Rescue". The boys trespass on the land of Sir George of Tipton Lodge and he is much annoyed. Then Shifty Spooner robs Sir George, and Shifty is foiled by our pals, so Sir George is pleased after all. And it turns out that Sir George is the uncle of Stephen Price who arrives at his uncle's house for a holiday, accompanied by Loder and Co. Next, "Coker Takes Command", when Coker joins the party. Followed by "Mystery on the Thames" when the chums witness a highway robbery. Then "Bunter on the Spot", with Bunter foiling the rascal, Shifty Spooner, who is anxious to get possession of the "Water Lily". Then the last of the month is "The Secret of the Water Lily" which brings the series to a close. It turns out that the boat has a false bottom where Shifty Spooner had hidden the spoils from a jewel robbery. There has been a lot to like in this series, but it is a wee bit repetitive and padded, and I have read holiday series I liked a lot better.

I have been to the pictures quite a lot this month. Must have something to take your mind off the war. Mum is always worried in case the sirens go, for an air raid, while we are there, but it has been quiet enough. I very much enjoyed Tom Brown and Louis Hayward in "Duke of West Point" about an army cadet who finds the life tough. Fredric March and Joan Bennett were pretty good in "Trade Winds" about a girl who flees to the Far East as she thinks she has murdered someone, and falls in love with the 'tec who goes after her.

John Wayne is terrific in "Stage Coach", all about cowboys and injuns. "They Drive by Night" is a lovely little British thriller starring Emlyn Williams. All about the silk stocking murders! Another very good British film is "Q Planes", starring Ralph Richardson and Laurence Olivier, about a secret ray which helps aircraft during flights. A nice one in technicolor was "Jesse James" with a huge cast headed by Henry Fonda and Tyrone Power, about two brothers who become highwaymen when they leave the army after the American Civil War. Clark Gable and Norma Shearer were rather dull in "Idiot's Delight", a kind of answer to Hitler. And with this one there was another Blondie film, "Blondie Meets the Boss".

The Gem has brought me my regular weekly welcome doses of St. Jim's, Cedar Creek, and the Benbow. With the first St. Jim's story of the month we reached the end of the summer's holiday series set in Brazil, where Tom Merry & Co. have been seeking the lost Lord Conway, Gussy's brother. And in this final tale, "Gussy's Wild Man", the wild man of the title turns out to be Lord Conway himself. It has been a pretty good adventure series, but I really prefer the tales to be set in the school.

Next comes the start of a new series, which is evidently going to star Tom Merry. The Terrible Three are at Tom's home, Laurel Villa, and there they meet a

distant relative of Miss Fawcett. Soon it is evident that this relative, James Silverson, is out to disgrace Tom Merry and take his place as Miss Fawcett's heir. The first tale is "Baggy Trimble's Booby-Trap". Back at school, Trimble fixes up a booby-trap, and unfortunately Mr. Lathom falls into it. So Mr. Lathom has to leave the school for a while, and Silverson takes his place as Fourth-Form master.

Then came "Tom Merry's Enemy", and he is, of course, the oily Silverson. The plot carries on next month with "Schoolmaster and Schemer", and final of the month is "The Plot Against Tom Merry". I am enjoying this series very much, with Silverson plotting and getting foiled each week.



"What!" murmured Manty Lowther as the disreputable figure met Mr. Silverson. "What a specimen for a St. Jim's master to be meeting!"

At Cedar Creek the barring-out series is going strong, with boys supporting Miss Meadows who has been sacked by the school board. Month's first tale is "No Surrender". The barring-out goes on in "Holding the Fort", with a gang of ruffians attacking the schoolboys. The rebels, hungry and with their remaining food running short, carry on with the good work in "The Siege at Cedar Creek". Next, in "The Rebels' Surrender", the rebels are treacher-

erously tricked into surrender. But the fight goes on in "The Hungry Rebels", with Frank Richards and Bob Lawless trying to get food for their starving young garrison. The series continues next month. It's lovely.

The Benbow chums are going on with their search for hidden treasure in "Rival Treasure-Seekers". Then came "Buried Treasure", with the quest over. Next week, in "Drake's Daring", the Benbow boys find themselves beset by savage Indians. Then came "Homeward Bound" with the Benbow setting sail for England.

Next, a surprise. The Benbow closes down, and Jack Drake and Rodney go to Greyfriars. This story is "Jack Drake at Greyfriars". And a further intriguing bit. The Benbow tales were by Owen Conquest, but I see that this Jack Drake at Greyfriars yarn is by Frank Richards. Well I never!

ERIC FAYNE comments on this month's DANNY'S DIARY

S.O.L. No. 382 "The Secret of the Holiday Annual" comprised the final 3 stories of the Hiking Series of the magnet of the summer of 1933.

S.O.L. No. 383 "The Great Grundy" is a curious little volume from any viewpoint. It comprises 3 Gems, each one a number of years apart from the others.

The first was originally a story "The Other Grundy" from early in 1924. This has a strange plot. Grundy urgently wants a day and night away from school, and to achieve this he persuades his brother Gilbert (never heard of before and never heard of again) to take his place at St. Jim's. But though Gilbert is like George Alfred in appearance, he is a different type of character, so the fellows are surprised. One is tempted to think of it as a sub story, but I don't think it is. The middle part of this S.O.L. is a story from 1916, "Grundy, the Hypnotist". And the volume is completed with a story from 1931, "Battling Grundy". The interesting point about this final episode is that it was the last story to be published before they started reprinting the old Tom Merry tales in the Gem. This one, in my opinion, was genuine Hamilton, which is strange, as it followed a long, long run of sub tales in the Gem.

And now to Danny's September 1939 Gem. The 5 Cedar Creek stories had originally run consecutively in the Boys' Friend from the start of November 1918. "No Surrender" had been "The Strikers' Triumph" in 1918. "Holding the Fort" had previously been "Facing the Foe". "The Siege at Cedar Creek" and "The Rebels' Surrender" had the same titles on both occasions. "The Hungry Rebels" had been "A Desperate Venture" in 1918.

The Benbow tales had originally run consecutively in the Greyfriars Herald from early December 1920. "The Rival Treasure-Seekers" had been "Up Against Slaney" in 1920; "Buried Treasure" had been "The Treasure Trail"; "Drake's Daring" had originally been "From the Jaws of Death"; and "Homeward Bound" carried the same title on both occasions.

"Homeward Bound" was actually the last of the Benbow tales. It was the 61st story in the series. With this issue "The Greyfriars Herald" became "The Greyfriars Boys' Herald", and soon they would drop Greyfriars from the title and the paper would be just "The Boys' Herald", taking the same name as Hamilton Edwards' lovely old paper from the first dozen or so years of the century. And, with the dropping of "Greyfriars" from the paper's title, they abandoned any idea that it was a "school magazine. The great charm of the first Greyfriars Herald had been that it was, indeed, very much like a genuine magazine run by schoolboys. When the Herald first returned in 1919 there was some slight, but not successful, effort to give the impression of a paper being edited by the boys of Greyfriars for their school, but that had gradually faded away.

The final tale, mentioned by Danny, "Jack Drake at Greyfriars" had originally been "How Jack Drake Came to Greyfriars". Danny mentions correctly that, in the Gem, the Benbow stories had been credited to Owen Conquest, and now Jack Drake goes to Greyfriars the author is given as Frank Richards. And, from now on, in the Gem, the author is shown as Frank Richards. In the old Herald, the first Greyfriars tale was credited to Conquest, and after that the tales appeared anonymously, though they were all written by Charles Hamilton.

A small point about the film "They Drive by Night", seen by Danny in 1939. This was a British film with Emyln Williams, and a very good one. Some eighteen months later an American film with the same title, "They Drive by Night", starring Humphrey Bogart was released in the States, and in Britain the title of this one was changed to "The Road to 'Frisco" to avoid any confusion with the British production.

It is interesting that "The Station Master's Secret" appeared in the Boys' Friend Library in September 1939. Danny says that it appeared under the name of John Andrews. I have in my collection a Sexton Blake Lib. "The Station Master's Secret"

from somewhere about 1919. At that time the tales were published anonymously, but the Sexton Blake catalogue, put out by the Sexton Blake circle long years ago, gave the author of this one as A. Murray. But author's names were not all that reliable, and I should think it was this story reprinted in 1939. Anybody know for sure?

REMEMBER RICHARD BIRD AND JEFFREY HAVILTON?

BRIAN DOYLE reveals the hitherto-unknown facts behind these two popular and well-loved but, until now, rather mysterious boys' school story authors...

A chance remark I heard on a recent BBC radio programme has led to my unmasking at least some of the details behind two very popular writers of school stories mainly active in the 1920s and 1930s: Richard Bird and Jeffrey Havilton.

Bird's real name and the fact that he was a real-life schoolmaster were known many years ago; but Havilton has always remained a mystery man about whom nothing was known, apart from the details of his books. Now I have unearthed the curious information that these two elusive but very fine school story authors were closely linked...

It all began (as the best stories so often start) last April when I was listening to BBC Radio 4's Wednesday morning talk-show 'Mid-Week'. One of the guests being interviewed was George MacDonald Fraser, author of all those best-selling and highly-enjoyable novels about the later career and adventures of FLASHMAN (the bully of Rugby in TOM BROWN'S SCHOOL DAYS) after his expulsion by Dr. Arnold. At one point he mentioned that he was taught English at Glasgow Academy by Walter Barradell-Smith, who wrote school stories under the name of 'Richard Bird'.

I knew that but, thinking it would be interesting to learn some further details, I wrote to Mr. Fraser, c/o his publishers and received a charming and helpful letter by return, telling me what he knew of Barradell-Smith and also mentioning that the latter's Deputy as English teacher at Glasgow Academy had been one B.G. Aston, who had also written school stories, under the name of 'Jeffrey Havilton'! I at once wrote back and asked if he could supply me with any details on him... He sent a few facts and suggested I contact the Editor of the Glasgow Academy Chronicle, who may know more about both men. This I did and by amalgamating what I learned from Mr. Fraser, Glasgow Academy, and Mrs. Aston (whom I subsequently telephoned as her elderly husband was not inclined, and also too ill, to reply to my letters and questions), and what I knew about their work, here is the resumé of the information I gleaned...

Walter Barradell-Smith was born in 1881 and graduated from Cambridge University with a B.A. degree. He spent almost his entire teaching career at Glasgow Academy, starting there in 1907, becoming Senior English Master, and eventually retiring in October, 1945, when he was succeeded as Senior English

Master by his Deputy, B.G. Aston ('Jeffrey Havelton'). He was a teacher there for 38 years.

Recalls George MacDonald Fraser: "He was called 'Beery', not because he drank but because he had a fiery red face and a glittering eye; he was one of the fiercest-looking men I ever saw, and affected a rasping snarl - but in fact he was the kindest and gentlest of men. He was small, stocky, and a brilliant teacher - probably because he didn't 'teach' at all, but simply talked at length about books and writers. He encouraged me to write just by marking my essays very highly; he didn't even mind if I ignored the subjects he set for composition and simply wrote what I felt like writing - he still gave me 18 or 19 out of 20, and it was this that gave me the notion that perhaps I might be a writer some day."

"Of course, we all knew that he wrote as 'Richard Bird'" (says Fraser) "and his books were gone over for topical allusions. He had the eccentric habit of referring to the Rector of the Academy as 'the Chief' - he does the same thing in his school stories."

Barradell-Smith was a fine rugby player in his youth and often played for the Glasgow Academicals XV when he was a young schoolmaster at Glasgow Academy. For 35 years (from 1909) he was Editor of the Glasgow Academy Chronicle, and also produced many successful theatrical shows at the school. He once said that if he had not been a schoolmaster he would have been a journalist.

He saw Army service in the First World War and was a Home Guard Quartermaster during the Second. He was happily married and had a son.

His writing career began in 1911, when he began contributing short school stories to THE CAPTAIN, under his pen-name of 'Richard Bird', as well as publishing his first adult novel THE FORWARD IN LOVE (under his real name). Another novel, GAY ADVENTURE, appeared in 1913. In 1915 he contributed his first full-length school serial to THE CAPTAIN; this was THE DIPCOTE SKIPPER, published in hard-covers in 1916 as THE RIVAL CAPTAINS. Four more CAPTAIN serials followed: THE RIPSWAYD RING, HOOLIGAN HALL (later re-published as THE DEPUTY CAPTAIN) BATS VERSUS BOATS and THE LIVELIEST TERM AT TEMPLETON. He subsequently wrote school serials and short stories for BOY'S OWN PAPER and CHUMS, as well as many other publications. He was most prolific in the 1920s, when he turned out no fewer than 17 hard-cover stories, plus numerous short stories. Typical hard-cover titles included TROUBLE AT WYNDHAM, PLAY THE GAME, TORBURY!, THE MORELIGH MASCOT, THE WHARTON MEDAL and QUEER DOINGS AT ALDBOROUGH (the latter being a very entertaining story about a boy at a big public school, who suddenly and hilariously becomes invisible!). His last and 23rd school story was A SCHOOL LIBEL, published in 1934, and three of his popular books appeared in THE RICHARD BIRD OMNIBUS in 1937. He also wrote stage plays, one of which, MARRIAGE BY INSTALMENTS, was produced at the Ambassadors Theatre in London's West End, in 1923. He was a regular contributor of adult short stories to such popular magazines as THE STRAND, too.

'Richard Bird' died sometime during the 1960s, but I have not yet discovered the actual date of his passing.

Benjamin Gwillim Aston - better-known to school story readers as 'Jeffrey Havelton' and a complete 'mystery man' until now - was born in 1902 in Gloucestershire, and educated at Monmouth School, in Wales, and at Worcester College, Oxford University. His teaching career began at a preparatory school in

Hoylake, Cheshire, in 1924 and he joined Glasgow Academy as an English teacher a few years later. He eventually retired from Glasgow Academy at the age of 65, in 1967, so he - like 'Richard Bird' - taught there for nearly 40 years. Truly a double portion of Mr. Chips...

Aston was Deputy Senior English Master to Walter Barradell-Smith for many years, taking over the job when the latter retired in 1945. George MacDonald Fraser says he was known as 'Baggy' Aston (presumably because of his initials, 'B.G.' and not through any fault in his trouser-wear...). He served in the Army during World War Two, rising to the rank of Major and remaining in the U.K. throughout his service.

Mr. Aston today lives in Glasgow at the age of 87, but has been ill in recent times, suffering a stroke and eye cataracts. I understand that sadly he has no interest in and little recollection of his writing career. He ceased writing around 1940 and never returned to it after the war, feeling that school stories were rather 'old hat' and that there was no demand for them. He now lives quietly with his wife.

As 'Jeffrey Havelton' he had a small output - only 11 books in 12 years, plus a few short stories - but his school stories were elegantly written with great humour and good character-drawing. They were mainly set at Loom School, in Gloucestershire (Aston's own birthplace) and often featured the inhabitants of Study 13, in Tanker's House, who were Weasel, Jonah, Skimpy and George, not forgetting their twin associates, Adolphus and Henry Wilkes, and their housemaster, Mr. Postlethwaite ('Snobby').

His first book was THE SCHOOL WINS in 1928, and his last SCHOOL VERSUS SPY in 1940. Interspersed were such titles as HAROLD GOES TO SCHOOL (1931), GEORGE PULLS IT OFF (1932), THE LUCK OF STUDY THIRTEEN (1934) and THE SLEUTH OF STUDY THIRTEEN (1938). They were invariably finely illustrated by H.M. Brock. A few 'Havelton' short school stories appeared in such publications as THE OXFORD ANNUAL FOR BOYS and THE BIG BOOKS OF SCHOOL STORIES FOR BOYS, but he never contributed to boys' papers or magazines, so far as is known. It is also rumoured that he published a boys' spy and adventure novel under his own name (B.G. Aston), due to some error on his publishers' part, but I have been unable to trace this.

So there we are. Another mystery - this time a double one - in the old boys' book field has been solved! And now we know, after all these years, at least some of the background to two of the most popular and accomplished school story writers of the first half of the 20th century - 'Richard Bird' and 'Jeffrey Havelton'. Curious that they should have been colleagues at the same Scottish public school for so many years. I understand that they both tended to write their stories in the school holidays and almost never discussed their books with one another, though they shared the same publishers (Blackie and Son) for many years. Both lived into their eighties ('Havelton', as I've said, is happily still with us). And both have always been - for me at any rate - in that small and select group of really first-class and forever enjoyable school story authors which includes (apart from the great Charles Hamilton, of course) Hylton Cleaver, Gunby Hadath, R.A.H. Goodyear, R.S. Warren Bell, P.G. Wodehouse - and 'Richard Bird' and 'Jeffrey Havelton'...

Books

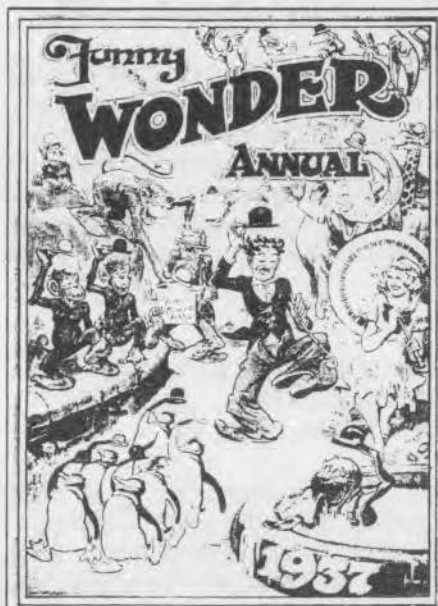
REVIEWS BY MARY CADOGAN

THE COMIC ART OF CHARLIE CHAPLIN (Hawk Books £14.95)

This is a truly stunning celebratory book, marking the centenary of Charlie's birth and concentrating not so much on his images in the cinema as on the wonderful range of visual representations of the 'beloved tramp' in comics and periodicals. Denis Gifford provides an informative and entertaining text, and Mike Higgs has designed page after page of mouth-watering pictorial spreads which are both hilarious and nostalgically heart-warming. There is naturally a great deal of emphasis on Charlie's strips in *THE FUNNY WONDER*, as this was the first comic to feature sets of 'The Scream of the Earth', 'The King of Laughter', 'The King of the Kinema' etc. (as he was billed at various times). The first artist was the great Bertie Brown. His work, and that of many other comic artists who drew Charlie, is well covered in this intriguing book. It is a joy to have the illustrators' names given for so many of the pictures. A specially interesting page shows examples of Charlie's portrayal by seven different artists in *THE FUNNY WONDER* over the years (these include two of the highly talented Parletts, George and Reg, and Terry Wakefield, whose original pictures sometimes embellish the pages of the C.D. and prove that he still draws with as much zest as when he was producing Charlie Chaplin strips in the 1930s).



Charlie's appearances in other comics are represented; there are reprints of text stories about him from *PLUCK* and *THE FAMILY JOURNAL*; reproductions of postcards, sheet music and posters from which the



Just one of the illustrations from "The Comic Art of Charlie Chaplin".

baggy-trousered hero peers out. This excellent compilation includes sixteen full-colour pages. It is a bumper book - 128 pages, each measuring 10 x 14 inches, large enough to do justice to the comic strips that are reproduced, and to provide the same 'feel' as the original papers in which they were featured.

**ELINOR M. BRENT-DYER'S
CHALET SCHOOL**
(Armada, £3.99)

Not yet quite so long lasting as Charlie Chaplin, but apparently well on its way to literary immortality, is the famous Alpine school created by Elinor Brent-Dyer almost 65 years ago. This long series about the glamorous, tri-lingual, international

school set amidst blue lakes and majestic mountains (and surviving wartime evacuation to less colourful locations) is still a best seller in Armada paper-backs. This new book is a collection of stories, articles, puzzles and so on about the school, its characters, its author and its real-life Austrian background. Wonderfully atmospheric and evocative, this collection is a treasure, inspired by the guiding hand of Helen McClelland, who knows and loves the stories so well. It is full of interesting items, both in its black-and-white and colour pages. Reproductions of early (and pretty well unobtainable) dust-jackets gave me particular pleasure. Though primarily designed for today's school-girl Chalet books fans, this book is likely to occupy a proud place on the shelves of nostalgic collectors too (it certainly will on mine!).



GROWING UP AT WAR by Maureen Hill (Armada £3.50)

Childhood revisited once again - this time in the period of the Second World War. This book endeavours to convey to today's children what it was like to be growing up during Hitler's war; its main interest for me and, I suspect, others of my generation, is its wide range of pictures which are so evocative of those times of heightened intensity, turbulence and triumphs. It is fascinating to see again ration books, clothing coupons, aircraft recognition charts, gas-masks, recipes and advertisements which were so much part of our lives then.

THE GIANT HOLIDAY FUN COMIC ALBUM and THE GIANT HOLIDAY ALL-GIRL COMIC ALBUM (each published by Hawk Books at £2.99)

This new series of holiday albums is 'aimed unashamedly' at the mass market readership, so it cannot be judged by quite the same standard as this publisher's range of collectors' high quality books. Nevertheless these two albums contains a great deal to amuse and intrigue nostalgists and comic enthusiasts. All the picture strip contents have been taken from Fleetway publications (mainly, I imagine, from the 1950s), and these are lively enough to appeal to children and adults today, whether or not they have any nostalgia for the period in which the strips originally appeared. The books represent splendid value for money - just over a penny for a big page of pictures. The FUN album includes amongst its wide-ranging contents strip featuring Laurel & Hardy, Harris Tweed, Captain Hurricane, Eagle Eye, Billy Bunter (Knockout version), Our Ernie, Steadfast McStaunch, Cardew the Cad and Deed-a-Day Danny. The GIRL album, taken mainly from the Fleetway picture libraries, includes **Sue and the Moon Visitors, Schoolgirls Riders to the Rescue, Angel Street Detective and That Elusive Grey Ghost**. There is also the bonus of a short Silent Three picture-story (probably taken from one of the Annuals) although this does not seem to have been drawn by Evelyn Flinders, the original artist. The comic-strip Bessie Bunter also capers briefly across the pages of this album. Although entirely made up of pictures, the book provides interesting links with the pre-war girls' story-papers. The story-lines of several of the strips were dreamed up by authors such as L.E. Ransome and John Wheway; also by Stewart Pride (Dorothy Page), a sub-editor of the **Schoolgirl** and the Editor of the 1950's **School Friend**, who wrote several excellent secret society stories in the pre-war papers and annuals.

WANTED: 1939 GEMS containing complete Cedar Creek and Benbow stories.
MARY CADOGAN, 46 Overbury Avenue, Beckenham, Kent, BR3 2PY.



By
ROGER M. JENKINS

No. 23 - POPULARS 400-406 - ERIC WILMOT SERIES

The Popular was probably in its heyday about 1926 when this Rookwood series appeared. The bold cover in blue and red was very striking, and there was the added attraction that Hamiltoniana was always the mainstay of the post-war Popular. Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood were regularly featured. In addition, there were two other serials and a large central section which included some very detailed nature stories. All in all, there was something for everyone.

It must be admitted that whereas each original Magnet and Gem story was split into two halves to fit the available space, each Rookwood story could be reprinted in full. Nothing of the Wilmot series was lost in these Populars, which was all the more important since the original Rookwood stories in the Boys' Friend came to an end in 1926, and the Popular then became the only weekly source of Rookwood tales.

This series began on the last day of the summer holidays, when the Fistical Four and Putty Grace, accompanied by a donkey called Trotsky (so-called because he did not like work) were camping near Deepden Manor. Jimmy Silver caught a glimpse of an armed cracksman running from the mansion, and when Eric Wilmot, an ex-professional player, turned up as football coach at Rookwood Jimmy seemed to recognise him as the cracksman. The following week, the Fistical Four saved the coach when he was about to be stabbed by a ruffian. In No. 402 was an even more melodramatic scene, when he was arrested as a criminal on the football field. Eventually he was released but he seemed to have suffered a personality change. The Series continued to develop in a lively manner until the whole truth was revealed in No. 406.

Wakefield, the Rookwood artist, was often thought to draw boys looking too young for their age, but there was a great deal of atmosphere in the construction of some of his pictures, and the drawing in No. 400 of boys crammed into a railway compartment, all wearing top hats, is quite impressive in its way.

It is interesting to note that Charles Hamilton's view of the reprinted stories in such papers as the Popular and Schoolboys' Own Library was scarcely one of pleasure. The Amalgamated Press required their cheques to be endorsed on the back acknowledging the sale of copyright in the story,

and those hard-headed businessmen at Fleetway House had no intention of paying more than once for the copyright. Nevertheless, in 1926 this was not really a problem for Charles Hamilton, since his publishers were willing to purchase every new story he could find time to write - but hardly any more Rookwood stories were to come from his pen, and we therefore have a special affection for the limited number that he did produce.

"DENISE'S DIARY"

by Dennis L. Bird

SEPTEMBER 1939

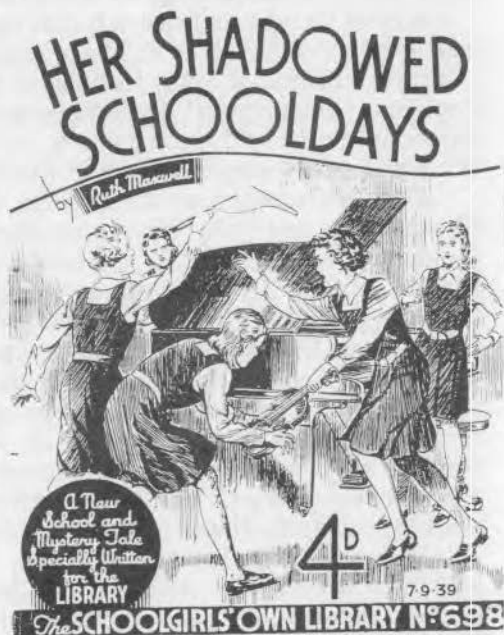
No Briton who lived through 3rd September, 1939, is ever likely to forget it. Now, 50 years later, memory is sharpened by the fact that 1989 dates fall on the same day of the week, so this year's 3rd September is also a Sunday.

On that sunny far-off Sunday morning the nation gathered round its wireless sets with fearful foreboding, to hear the flat, tired voice of the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain - the man who, a year ago, was a heroic figure to my parents and many others when he came back from Munich. "I have to tell you now that... this country is - at war - with Germany." A few minutes later the air-raid sirens went. Everyone had been conditioned to believe that war would mean instant air attack; we expected to be annihilated at any moment. I remember my father dashing to the family car, to bring my mother back from church before the bombs dropped.

Fortunately it was a false alarm, as was another "alert" at breakfast-time the following Wednesday which delayed my departure for school.

Life returned to some semblance of normality - for eight months, in fact. The four SOL books appeared as usual, on 7th September.

For once, there was no Morcove story. The Cliff House tale was No. 696, "The Secret Society Against Babs & Co.", and NO. 699 featured Red Indian territory -



Elizabeth Chester's "Three on the Lonesome Trail". Neither of these is in my collection.

The two I still have were both followed by sequels in February 1940. One was "Her Shadowed Schooldays" (no. 698), specially written for the series by Ruth Maxwell. This was a curious story about an orphan girl, Myrtle Lang, living with a foster-mother. She becomes involved with a disagreeable rich woman, Lady Tarrant, whose grand-daughter Sonia was due to start at a nearby girls' public school, St. Freda's; Sonia, however, has defiantly run away, and on an impulse Lady Tarrant decides that Myrtle shall go instead, under the name of Myrtle Tarrant. To add to the confusion, Sonia later turns up and Lady Tarrant sends her to the school too. Subsequent complications include an ill-natured Fourth Form captain, Rhoda Royal; a damaged violin (Myrtle is a talented musician); a school secret society, the White Masks; and mysterious hints from a French detective and an English lawyer that perhaps the penniless Myrtle has wealthy connections. A tall story indeed - and what makes it quite unbelievable is that "Lady Tarrant" is an impostor - the family governess Mrs. Hough - and yet she has been fully accepted by the solicitor who has acted for the family for decades, and knew the real aristocrat.

It turns out that the genuine Lady Tarrant has been living in the South of France; she is the grandmother of both Sonia and Myrtle, who are cousins. So all ends happily. Five months later the follow-up story appeared - "The Yellow (not White) Masks of St. Freda's" (No. 716) by a different author.

The last September book is a much happier story, and one of my favourites: No. 697, "Mystery at Meads", by Anne Laughton. It had a welcome bonus: it was much shorter than usual (81 pages instead of 95) and the space was filled by a Valerie Drew detective story, "The Phantom Frock".

"Mystery at Meads" has a thoroughly likeable cast of characters; even the villains are not very bad, and indeed have a comic aspect. The central figures are Benita Bowden, a 16-year-old known as "Binnie", and her recently-widowed mother. They have little money, and welcome the offer of absent friends to look after the great country house, Meads. There are horses, and the cheerfully energetic Binnie decides to help the family finances by giving riding lessons. Paying guests are also profitable - an amusing young merchant seaman on leave, Peter Cairne, and a mild little professor and his formidable wife. Two domestics, Ned Lark and Queenie Withers, provide light relief - they have been engaged for many years but "Us bain't in no hurry!". The inarticulate but honourable Major Twitchet-Blaze and teenage Stella Martin (a riding pupil) complete the company.



All seems serene and pleasant - and then Binnie's worries begin. The bantering Peter, to whom Binnie is known as "Dustbin", is discovered making secret and seemingly rather sinister searches at dead of night; mystery hangs over Professor Naegle and his wife, "the Grenadier". Eventually we learn that the specification for a profitable new silk-drying process for the textile industry is at stake. All is satisfactorily cleared up. Mrs. Bowden becomes engaged to the Major; Ned's "shy maid's up and named the day at last", and Peter remarks significantly to Binnie (who is of age - just) that "Marriage seems to be in the air". We must look forward to the further adventures of these endearing folk in "Queen of the Secret City", No. 718.

THE KEEPER

by E. Baldock

Peter Todd of the Remove does not shine with any great brilliance in the Greyfriars firmament. Seldom is he to be found at the heart of affairs. Usually he is playing a minor yet necessary role on the fringes of any adventure in progress. Even so he is something of a bulwark in that he is the self appointed 'keeper' and 'guardian' of William George Bunter. As such he is instrumental in keeping that hopeful youth from straying too far from the paths of righteousness, the fives-bat, the occasional boot and a legal turn of phrase being his chief weapons in the constant and wearing battle to preserve Bunter's continuing presence at Greyfriars. Little is heard of this perpetual warfare, yet it exists in a very real form. A thankless task, for the 'Owl' is rarely appreciative, yet 'Toddy' is renowned for his tenacity and sense of responsibility for the study-mate with whom he has been lumbered. His determination to instil, if possible, some rudiments of decent behaviour in the sterile material which largely constitutes the fat Owl's make-up can only be regarded as admirable in the highest degree.

In every way possible 'Toddy' is the complete antithesis of Billy Bunter, and many would agree that he deserves some order of merit for patience, tolerance, and severely stretched good humour in his dealings with such a study mate. Invariably he rises to the occasion, not, of course, always to the satisfaction or comfort of the Owl - but ever for his ultimate good. "I say Peter old chap, what are you going to do with that stump..." is a much reiterated and anxious enquiry!

Toddy is driven on numerous occasions to resort to applying the fives-bat to the tightest trousers at Greyfriars, to instil some semblance of reason. "This pains me far more than it does you, Bunty boy", he was apt to say, which expression brought no signs of appreciation from the howling Bunter. The fives-bat and other instruments of correction (i.e. cricket stumps, rulers and the leg from an old chair) are kept always to hand, to lend themselves to the contingency of the moment. Bunter is deeply - and sadly - versed in first-hand experience of them all.

According to Bunter, Toddy's background left much to be desired. In his own inimitable and charming way he has been known to inform

outsiders that "Todd is a common solicitor's son you know, hardly the type for Greyfriars I should say..." We may gather from Bunter's contemptuous remarks that Peter Todd was the son of a solicitor, and was therefore credited with the 'know-how' of the legal profession. The settling of any Remove dispute was usually brought to him for arbitration, and his view was abided by more frequently than otherwise. Buntler, however, was less impressed with Toddy's stewardship, as the endless arguments over the true ownership of the solitary study armchair testify, while the draconian tactics employed too to keep the Owl on the 'straight and narrow' received not half the appreciation they deserved.

THEIR HOLIDAY MYSTERY AT BLACKWATER PELE

PART 2 - Chapter 3

by Margery Woods

"I sus-say, girls---there's a tea shop!"

"Oh yes---shall we ask the bus to wait while our fair Bess goes for a feed?"

The laughter of Babs and Co. pealed out and Bessie directed a deadly glower at the speaker, tomboy Clara Trevlyn, before pressing her snub nose against the window and looking back wistfully at the attractive old-world tea room just passed. "It's closed now, anyway. I was just pointing it out", the plump duffer said loftily. "We may want to come here for a snack, you know."

More mirth, and more indignation from Bessie as the bus slowed to a halt in the market square of the little Northumbrian town. Impatiently the girls waited while several prospective passengers boarded the vehicle in the more leisurely way of the countryside, each exchanging a greeting with the driver. Excitement was becoming tense in the chums now, as the end of their journey neared, holding a hint of uncertainty about its outcome. Babs watched the last passenger, a girl, board the bus and for the first time experienced a sense of forboding. It had seemed so easy to plunge blithely into the unknown, not knowing and having no means of knowing the reason for that strange letter to Colonel Carstairs, apparently cancelling their holiday stay at Blackwater Pele up in the heart of the wild Northumbrian fells. Supposing there had been some ghastly mistake. All very well to talk of hotels, Babs thought, but she was beginning to have a suspicion, judging by the twenty or so miles of countryside through which they had passed since leaving Newcastle, that they were going to land somewhere many miles from any hotel.

"What's the hold-up?" murmured Mabs at her side.

"I'm not sure..." Babs looked at the girl who was still standing on the top step at the bus door, caught in some low-voiced altercation with the driver. She seemed to be about their own age, perhaps a little older, and there was a desperation in her expression as she searched yet again in her purse. The tender hearted Babs had already forgotten her own worry. She stood up, hesitating only a second before moving along the aisle between the seats.

"I'm sorry, miss", the driver was saying, "but we've all just had a right rocketing about fare dodgers these summer weeks, and if the inspector---"

Babs opened her purse, taking out several coins which she held out towards the driver.

"Oh no!" The girl caught at her arm. "I can't let you pay. I'll walk. I-I thought I had money in my pocket but I--"

Babs smiled. "Please let me help---some day I might be in the same predicament." She dropped several coins in the tray beside the ticket machine and pulled the ticket out of its slot as the driver counted out the change.

"Thank you", the girl faltered. "You're very kind. "It's nearly five miles, and..." she bit her lip, sliding into the seat nearest the front and settling a weighty looking carrier of groceries on her knee. "Thank you", she whispered again.

Colouring now under that strained gaze and the interest of the other passengers, Babs returned to her seat beside Mabs. The merriment had gone from them now, and it was with more serious and slightly tired expressions that the girls watched the lonely road and even lonelier vista of countryside slip away behind them. There was one more village, little more than a hamlet, then the girl got off, giving a wistful glance at the party of schoolgirls still aboard the bus, almost as though she wished she could be with them. She scurried across the road, scrambled over a stile, and the last glimpse the girls had of her was her disappearing into a narrow pathway that dropped into rough woodland.

"Next one is ours, methinks", announced Jemima, folding the map she had been studying for the last ten minutes. "Come on me hearties, gather up thy goods and chattels."

"Blackwater", called the driver, and the girls began a frantic scramble to disembark themselves and their belongings, and Bessie---not the easiest of tasks.

"I hope this is the right place---whew!" whistled Clara, turning up her jacket collar, "what a gale!"

"I can't see any tower! Where are we?" cried Janet.

"Out in the wilds, I guess. Well, lead on, MacDuff!" Leila turned hopefully to Jemima.

They certainly did seem to be out in the wilds. Windswept fells undulated away down to their left, swallowing up the road by which they had just come. Ahead of them was wooded terrain, rising steeply and without any immediate hint of anything so domesticated as a hut, let alone a house. But Jemima, whose observation remained acute even behind her most inane burbling, indicated a gate at the far side of the road. A decrepit gate, pushed open against the undergrowth, bearing on its weatherbeaten paint the faded sign, Blackwater Pele.

"Hurray!" Eagerly they trooped across, Clara valiantly burdened with Bessie's case as well as her own. The trees closed overhead, leaves and branches swaying and sighing in the strong wind, and Marjorie gave a little cry as a low bough whipped back almost into her face.

"It's spooky!" exclaimed Janet. "Did your father know if the tower's haunted?"

"He didn't mention the possibility." Jemima switched her case to the other hand. "But you don't believe in ghosts, do you?"

There was an indignant gasp from the rear as Bessie halted. "You didn't tell us there's a gig-ghost!" she cried. "I'm not staying if there's a gig-ghost, you girls."

"Suit yourself", said Clara. "Here's your case."

"Clara, you cat, I kik-can't carry that case another step."

"You haven't carried it one yet, you fat fraud. Of all the ungrateful!--"

"There it is! The pele!"

Bab's exclamation stopped the wrangling as the girls emerged into a clearing and saw the gaunt forbidding tower that was to be their abode for the next few days.

It was traditional in style, massively built of dark seamed stone blocks and rising to some forty feet in height, and crowned with corbelled battlements, below which were the machicolations no fortress dared be without during the grim periods of its history. "Now that sure is an entrance of distinction", observed Leila admiringly, eyeing the great door of ancient oak, studded and barred in its deep, arched recess. "The key, Jimmy! Or should it be open sesame?"

The girls held their breath as Jemima inserted the heavy iron key in the massive oldlock and the door, almost reluctantly, gave way to the girls' thrusting hands. In they surged, into a gloomy vaulted hall with a huge old manorial type fireplace at the far end. Jemima located a switch and two high bare bulbs cast a thin yellow light over the interior. The girls began to shiver. It had been a warm August day, drenched with the rich golden sun of approaching autumn, but none of that sun had penetrated the pele's solid stone walls, nor lent any warmth to linger on in a welcoming atmosphere. There was little in the way of furnishing, a couple of old deal tables, several chairs of utilitarian vintage, and no floor covering to mitigate the hard damp chill of uneven stone flags underfoot.

"Where do we sleep?" whispered Mabs.

"Where's the kitchen?" asked Bessie fearfully.

"Go on, girl. Fine!" chuckled the irrepressible tomboy.

Bessie elevated her snub nose but her instinct led her unflinchingly through a door to her right and along a dim passage which led to the kitchen. In dismay the girls looked at the stone sink and a blackened range, and an ancient cupboard, all of which looked as though they'd been auctioned from the original Ark. Bessie opened the cupboard to reveal a pile of plates and a row of white mugs of the coarsest and thickest pottery. There was no sign of any food.

"Primitive!" said Leila.

Primitive indeed, as the chums found when they explored the rest of Blackwater Pele. But despite dismay there were chuckles when they came to the large room on the first floor in which were ranged about a dozen old-fashioned army type camp beds.

"So this is what a mediaeval dormitory was like!" beamed Jemima. "I'd often pined to know."

Babs did not smile. "Surely that old lady didn't live in--- in this!" she exclaimed.

Jemima shook her head. "I can't understand it all. The Guv did inspect it all and said it was a most attractive place. And he said everything was laid on."

"Well it looks as if everything has been laid off", gumbled Clara. "Anyway, I thought there was a house. Did anyone notice a desirable collection of mods and cons on the way?"

"No, but I'm going to have a look", Jemima said crisply, adjusting her monocle. "No, not all of us. Someone must stay and guard the luggage---and our plump spartan, of course." She went out briskly, accompanied by Clara and Janet, while Babs and the rest of the chums tried to work out how they were going to prepare for the contingency of a night under Blackwater Pele's inhospitable roof.

The main problem was food. Although a kettle and a large chipped brown enamel teapot came to light they had neither tea nor milk and coffee. The chums had been in many situations which entailed roughing it, and the prospect did not daunt them unduly, but Bessie was the most worrying problem; Bessie and roughing-

it were far from synonymous. The hours of the night could prove long and fraught with the hungry duffer's complaints.

"I hope they're all right", murmured Mabs. "It's nearly dark."

"I can hear them now." Babs ran to the door, her gaze searching Jemima's enigmatic face anxiously. "Well, did you--"

"Yes, there is a house, just a little way round the curve in the drive, but it's hidden by the trees until you get almost to it. If we'd--"

"It's a beautiful old manor", broke in Janet excitedly, "covered with ivy."

"And those lovely mullioned windows", cried Clara. "It's obviously where we're supposed to be."

"Well?" said Babs, "What are we waiting for?"

"There are lights of the windows", said Jemima.

"Somebody's living there", added Clara.

CHAPTER 4

So what were they to do? March up to the house and announce themselves? Pretend that they knew nothing of cancelled arrangements--for it was obvious that something had gone awry, and had Colonel Carstairs not been called away so unexpectedly no doubt it would have been sorted out. Yet there was still an instinct telling the girls that all was not as it should be. For it was the sending of the keys to Colonel Carstairs that was puzzling when they reflected again on the housekeeper's letter. Surely she would have simply given the keys to whoever was now in occupation. And who had told her that the Colonel had cancelled the arrangements? The more the chums argued about it the less sense it made.

"I vote we go up to the house and find out just what has happened", said Clara.

Bessie suggested that someone go to the little village they'd passed and see if there was food and accommodation--and a taxi to take here there. This suggestion was ignored, much to Bessie's disgust, while Jemima decided that, if they were willing, they should put up with an uncomfortable night in the pele and then start some enquiries in the morning. "We can get the old bus along to that tea room for grub, then go and visit the housekeeper."

"But I'm starving!" wailed Bessie. "And if you think I'm going to sleep on one of those awful beds upstairs you've got another think coming."

"The floor would be preferable?" scoffed Clara. "Never mind, we'll put two beds together to make--"

"What the devil is going on here?"

The girls whirled with shock as the rough voice yelled from the door. A man stood there, dark-haired and swarthy skinned, his face a mask of rage.

"Who are you?" he snarled. "You're trespassing."

Jemima was the first one to recover from the shock. She adjusted her monocle and stared at him coolly. "I don't think so", she drawled. "We were supposed to be here at the invitation of Mr. and Mrs. Newton."

"I thought that was all stopped", he gritted. "Didn't you get the message?"

"From you?" Jemima asked icily. "No, we didn't. And who are you, anyway?"

"I--I represent the Newtons", he snapped. "There is work to be done--decoration to the house--and it isn't convenient to have a bunch of kids larking about. So the sooner you clear off, the better."

"At this time of night?" Jemima's brows went up. "Where do you recommend--and nothing rude, please."

His mouth grimaced, then a voice broke in timidly:

"Greg? Who's there? Is it---" The owner of the soft voice advanced timidly from the doorway, and Babs started forward, recognising the girl immediately. At the same moment the girl's face lit up and she darted towards Babs.

"Keep out of this, Sis", he grunted.

"But---

"I said keep out of it. Get back to the house--I'll deal with this."

She was terrified of him, that was plain, and Babs stepped forward defiantly. "There seems to have been a misunderstanding, which was not our fault, but I'm sure it can be sorted out without losing our tempers. It's too late for us to find somewhere else to stay, even if we had transport. I assure you we'll do no harm if we may camp out here till morning, then we'll be on our way. But we would appreciate some tea and milk to make ourselves a drink."

For a moment it looked as though he would refuse. He shook the girl's hand from his arm with an impatient gesture and said grudgingly, "Very well, but if you're not all off the premises first thing in the morning there'll be trouble. I'm warning you."

With that he swung round and strode out into the darkness, leaving the chums to stare after him with dismay and anger flaring in their eyes.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

COLLECTOR wishes to purchase William, Bunter, W.E. Johns Jennings, First Editions in dustwrappers. Also bound volumes of The Modern Boy. Also will pay £3.50 for H. Baker Press volumes, £7.00 for Club volumes, many numbers required. MR. P. GALVIN, 2 The Lindales, Pogmoor, Barnsley, S. Yorks., SY5 2DT. Tel. (0226) 295613.

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MORE WONDERFUL HOWARD BAKER BOOKS

Reviewed by Eric Fayne

"BOB CHERRY'S SECRET"

Frank Richards (Howard Baker
Book Club Special: £18)

This volume looks good, feels good, and, by golly, it IS good. It contains 6 consecutive Magnets - all 32-page issues with their glowing Red covers - from mid-February 1913.

There is, perhaps, nothing particularly memorable in the stories themselves - the great outstanding series are still in the distant future - but each yarn is a heart-warming joy for the reader. And, somehow, both the Red Magnet and the Blue Gem, as much-loved weeklies, had some special quality which was partly lost in the Great War years and never entirely found again.

The opening tale, "A Split in the Sixth", has a charm which is always found in stories of the seniors. Wingate is in a spot of bother, owing to the activities of Loder and his clique. Harry Wharton plays in a First Eleven soccer match, which Greyfriars loses. Finally, Wingate and Loder come to blows, resulting in Wingate losing the School Captaincy.

The sequel is "Captain Coker" which is memorable owing to its theme. Coker makes a hash of the job, in rib-tickling chapters, and at the end Wingate is back in his old place as skipper.

Next, an unusual story, "A Son of the Sea". The chums rescue a quaint Irish boy, Con Fitzpatrick, from the sea, and it turns out that he is destined for Greyfriars. But he is so much a son of the sea that the Head, the staff, and the rest of Greyfriars, decide that is unsuited for school life - and off he goes at the finish.

With "The Captain's Minor" we have the yarn which introduced Jack Wingate to Magnet fans. Reminiscent of Dicky Nugent and Reggie Manners, the youngster proves troublesome to his older brother, the school skipper. And Loder sees a way of making trouble for Wingate through the Captain's Minor.

"Bob Cherry's Secret" (the overall title tale) introduces us to Paul Tyrrell, Bob's rascally cousin. He arrives, ostensibly as a football coach, but with the intent of robbing the school. This Tyrrell was to turn up again now and then, in earlier days, in several interesting narratives.

Finally, a spice of adventure in "Chums Afloat", a tale which was a big favourite in those far-off days. Harry and Bob go for a row off the Shoulder after dark, and get swept out to sea. They are picked up by a ship where a mutiny is taking place. The captain of the ship is lucky that he finds two stalwart supporters in the boys who were plucked from the waves. A period piece today, of course, but still fascinating reading.

So, with a sigh of rapture one comes to the end of a lovely volume, and carefully puts it into the bookcase where its glory will never fade. Don't miss it, whatever you do.

WANTED: Swan's Schoolboy Pocket Libraries, Nos. 1,2,3,4,5,6,8,9,10,11,12, 14,16,18,22. £8.00 each offered plus postage. Please write: M. FOLLOWS, 60 Hipwell Crescent, Stocking Farm, Leicester, LE4 2DL.

Yet another splendid thoroughbred from the same stable. Here we are delighted with 6 more Red Magnets, following on from the volume we have just considered, and taking us into the early summer of the year 1913.

With the opening story, yet another new boy comes on the scene. This time it is Oliver Kipps who arrives as "The Schoolboy Conjuror", a pleasantly amusing story to pass a happy hour or two. It was a period when new boys were arriving constantly, to star for a short while, and then being left on the scene eventually making the Remove into a top-heavy Form, far too large to be likely in an English Public School.

Next week, in "Barred by the Fags", we find Jack Wingate in the lead again. He is not popular with his form-fellows, and is a continued worry to his harassed Major, the School Captain.

With "Bob Cherry's Chase", we have Paul Tyrrell paying a return visit to our favourite periodical. This time he defrauds Lord Mauleverer, and the irate Bob Cherry sets out on his chase to make his rascally cousin answer for his crimes.

Next comes "The Impossible Four", for some reason a great favourite of mine long ago. I still find it a delight. Alonzo Todd returns to the school bringing with him his remarkable Cousin Peter. We find Peter, Alonzo, Dutton, and Bunter as study-mates, and Peter is determined that this Impossible Four shall rival the Famous Five of two other studies.

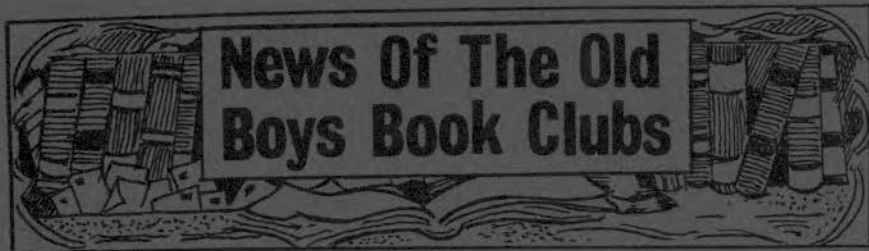
Then, for a change, a welcome meal of Fish. "The Schoolboy Moneylender" is, naturally, the American junior, and he provides a nostalgic evening. Fishy is, maybe, an acquired taste, but really we all love him, I'm sure.

Finally, a cricket tale, "Friars Versus Saints". The title rather suggests a sub story, for Hamilton seldom, if ever, used those terms to describe the boys of Greyfriars and St. Jim's respectively. But the story is good and genuine, even if the title is ersatz. An early tale, with the introduction of both schools into a Magnet story. Wharton fixes up a cricket match with St. Jim's juniors. Presumably it became a regular feature from thence. A delicious chunk of nostalgia, this one.

So! Another superb volume, beautifully bound with superlative contents, to brighten your lives and to cast a glow over your book-shelves. We recommend it highly. Don't miss it!

WANTED: To buy or Hire! Complete set of all 20 copies of SCOOPS. Individual copies also considered. Contact 01-969-80981 or Box 3, C.D., 46 Overbury Avenue, Beckenham, Kent, BR3 2PY.

WANTED: GEMS 129 or (1377), 141 (1385), 142 (1386), 207 (1412), 334 (1489), 792, 800, 801, 1031, 1034. **MAGNETS** 46, 510, 511, 793 to 799, 1032, 1034. **FOR SALE** individual MAGNETS in good condition for the Greyfriars connoisseur from 818 to 1682 including complete series, s.a.e. for complete list. £1 per copy plus 10% p.&p. Write to MR. JOHN CONNOLLY, 'Jasmine', 20 Sandlands Road, Walton on the Hill, Tadworth, Surrey, KT20 7XA.



News Of The Old Boys Book Clubs

LONDON O.B.B.C

We met again in August in the Chingford Horticultural Society's Hall, and Roger Jenkins, in the Chair, welcomed everyone, including new member Jeremy Stanton. After business had been conducted, Alan Pratt read from S.O.L. no. 20, 'The Vanished Schoolboys', and Don Webster gave a very good double quiz of anagrams and 'fill the blanks'. Bill Bradford gave the Memory Lane reading (of the August 1969 meeting). After tea, Mark Jarvis read from a 1968 Merlin paperback BUNTER THE SPORTSMAN, featuring one of his favourite characters, Alonzo Todd. Roger Jenkins conducted a rhyming synonym quiz, and Eric Lawrence read a brief extract from MAGNET 1185, showing Bunter at his selfish best. This item, intended as a 'filler', provoked over half an hour's lively discussion and was one of this very happy meeting's highlights.

Warm thanks to our hosts Audrey and Tony Potts were expressed by Roger and heartily endorsed by all. Next meeting: Sunday, September, at the Walthamstow Co-operative Rooms, 342 Hoe Street, Walthamstow, from 3.30 p.m. onwards.

MARK JARVIS

NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

There was a good summer attendance of 15 at our August meeting, and we were treated to a varied programme. Keith and Mary Atkinson were the stars of the evening. Mary presented one of her famous celebrity quizzes, and Keith read some of his poems about the Greyfriars characters. We all urged him to send them to the C.D. to be published. I hope he does. (Editor's note: Yes, I have received the poems from Keith and hope soon to start to publish these. I'm sure C.D. readers will enjoy them as much as the members of the Northern Club did.) Geoffrey Good then gave one of his excellent readings from the Magnet. We also discussed the forthcoming annual dinner in September, and next year's programme.

PAUL GALVIN
(in the absence of Johnny Bull jnr.)

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