

Story Paper

COLLECTOR

VOL. 43

December
1989

No. 516

DIGEST



79P

MAGNETS and GEMS - I have several thousand of these which are in **poor, fair condition, but readable**, some minus covers. Clearance of these is desired. Mixed, or either MAGNET or GEMS: 50 for £25, pre early '20s, **my selection**, or 100 for £40. Later copies, similar condition 50 for £20, 100 for £35, again, **my selection**. This can apply to other boys' papers such as POPULAR, UNION JACK, my selection, same price.

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STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

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THE MOST WONDERFUL SEASON OF ALL

Yes, Christmas will soon be with us again, and I send warmest seasonal greetings to all C.D. readers; my predecessor, Eric Fayne, often referred to your loyalty, and I would like to say too how much I appreciate your continued support, your wonderfully kind letters, and, of course, your excellent contributions to our little magazine which really is a shared venture. I hope that the Christmas spirit will warm all your homes as you read this and the Annual, which should soon reach all of you who have ordered it.

Our artist Henry Webb has not only produced a seasonable cover for this December issue but a wonderful set of Christmassy headings for its articles, as you will see. (He has also provided a gorgeous cover and headings for the Annual.)

At this time our thoughts turn to the many friends in our collecting circle who are no longer with us, and, sadly, 1989 has seen the passing of several readers of and contributors to the C.D. It is, however, good to

know that many younger readers are now subscribing to the magazine; our hobby goes beyond the bounds of merely personal nostalgia.

Christmas would not be Christmas without our memories of the old papers and of childhood reading. I hope that this December issue will conjure up some of the appropriate atmosphere for you.

MORE GLIMPSES INTO THE ANNUAL

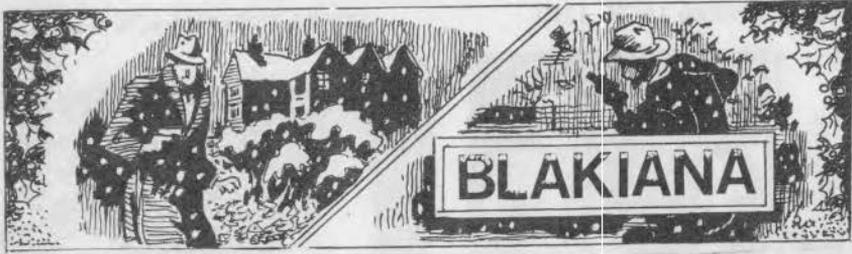
There is still time for you to order the Annual if you write to me almost immediately (£7.00 including post and packet to any address in the British Isles, or £8.50 for anywhere overseas). Some of its contents have already been mentioned in my previous editorials; its further attractions include an article on some of the Christmases celebrated in the Nelson Lee, by E. Grant McPherson, a Silent Three adventure by Marion Waters, and a look at Arthur Ransome's 'Swallows and Amazons' by Dennis Bird. I have written about the girl detective Valerie Drew, not, of course, forgetting her amazingly intelligent Alsatian assistant!

I send to all of you, and to the ever helpful staff at our printers in York, the age-old greetings: may you have a truly Merry Christmas and a Happy, Peaceful and Prosperous New Year.

MARY CADOGAN

It is perhaps a shame to mention at this celebratory time that the price of the C.D. has to go up, from this issue, to 79p, plus postage charges!





I have been re-reading some of Blake's Christmas adventures, and am struck by the very different moods of the stories, as shown in these pictures (all taken from the splendid Howard Baker facsimile volume *CRIME AT CHRISTMAS*). Certainly with Sexton Blake, Tinker, Mrs. Bardell and Pedro around, Christmas would never be dull! (M.C.)

The U.I. Special Xmas Number

**THE MYSTERY OF
Mrs BARDELL'S
XMAS
PUDDING!**



—or, to be quite precise,
Mrs. Bardell's sister's
Xmas Pudding.

A Yuletide Tragi-
Comedy in Nine
∴ Chapters ∴



FROM UNION JACK
1157

"What precisely did you want to see me about, Mrs. Bardell?" "The pudden—the Christmas plum-pudden!" she replied in a sepulchral whisper.



Pausing only to fling back the window, Ruff Hanson leapt down on to the snow-covered lawn in front of the spectral figure of Red Rupert. *Bang—bang!* Hanson's gun spoke twice, but the phantom continued to glide soundlessly on.



Somewhere in the castle a scream had sounded—a long, horrible sort of sound—which had been abruptly cut off before reaching its climax. Blake stood up, rigid. Instinctively he knew that a tragedy had happened.



Sexton Blake
 contributes
 to your happiness
 this Yuletide, and
 wishes you all a
 real, rollicking
**Merry
 Christmas**



A "WHISTLE-STOP" CHRISTMAS TOUR

by Jim Sutcliffe

It would be hard to muster much enthusiasm for the Second New Series Nelson Lee Christmas stories and although we did not know it at the time, the 1931 Series was the last time we would visit some of the best known ancestral homes, four in fact, all of which had been the scene of exciting adventures in the past.

It all began with the arrival of Jimmy Potts' Uncle Ben, whom he had never seen, supposedly returning to England after 15 years in China where he claimed to have become a millionaire. He arrives with his faithful servant, Yen, and tells everyone that the agents of a mythical Mandarin, Fu-li-Sing, are after his life because he had beaten him in a deal with the Chinese Government over a valuable gold concession. He says Jimmy Potts, being of the same blood, is also in danger. Needless to say Nelson Lee recognises him as a confidence trickster who served five years penal servitude 20 years previously. "Uncle Ben" begs Nelson Lee to let him stop the night at St. Frank's and, during the night, he and Yen send Nelson Lee bound hand and foot in a driverless car over the Shingle Head cliff top.

Lee manages to survive, but prefers to remain "dead" to see what Uncle Ben's game is. His uncle planned to take Jimmy to London for Christmas but Jimmy is on Handforth's party list of St. Frank's juniors and Moor View girls to spend Christmas at Travis Dene, the Handforth country home near Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk. Handy insists that Uncle Ben joins them. As soon as they arrive there the electricity supply fails, after which Jimmy Potts is driven into a state of terror by mysterious whispers in the night, and when a doctor is called he advises Potts to leave Travis Dene before he becomes insane.

Incidentally Nelson Lee is lurking around in disguise as Rutley, a new butler. The whole party moves on to the West Country, to Tregellis Castle to join another group at the historic home of Sir Montie Tregellis-West where more mysterious happenings occur, first the appearance of the family ghost, the Cloaked Cavalier, then Uncle Ben dares Jimmy to skate across the frozen lake on the new skates he has just given him, but Yen has weakened the ice and Jimmy falls in. He would have drowned but for the intervention of a mystery man who vanishes. Uncle Ben has a dagger thrown at him after which he decides that he and Jimmy should leave the party. However, Lee, in disguise, contacts Nipper and insists that Jimmy Potts and all the party except Uncle Ben move on to Somerton Abbey, leaving Uncle Ben to go to London on his own. Nelson Lee is around at Tregellis as Zacchi, the Fortune Teller. Once again evil forces are at work, for on the approach road to Somerton Abbey, Yen, Uncle Ben's servant starts an avalanche which buries the coach. On their eventual arrival at the Abbey Jimmy phones his Uncle in London to tell of

Yen's duplicity but Uncle Ben assures him that Yen has not been out of his sight since he left, and tells Jimmy that to him all Chinamen look alike.

On the first night at Somerton one of the footmen claims to have seen the famous Somerton ghost and, later in the night, Jimmy Potts hears the mysterious whispers again. He is grabbed from his bed, doped, and carried to the Abbot's Well, where in olden days many a man had vanished for good. He is dropped into the well but is saved when he hits the water by a mystery man (Nelson Lee again) who, expecting something like this, had concealed himself in a cubby hole in the brickwork of the wall of the well. Jimmy is returned to his bed and in the morning Uncle Ben arrives by plane from London, and makes a "pancake" landing in the snow, all roads leading to the Abbey being blocked. The next night Jimmy is doped and found sleep-walking on the battlements but once again Nelson Lee saves his life by causing him to fall into a snowdrift, rather than onto the cleared concrete courtyard. In the morning his Uncle insists on taking him back to London by train and there is a general exodus to the station, but on the way whom should they meet but Lord Dorrimore, on

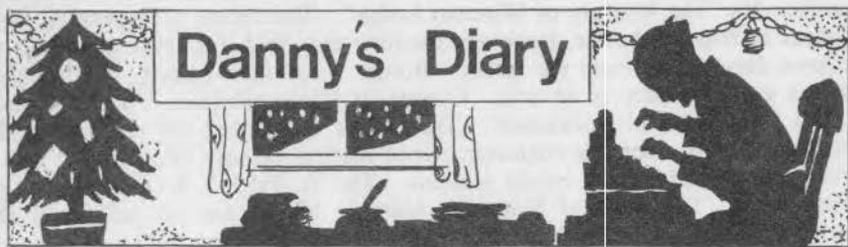
his way to take them all up to Dorrimore Castle in Derbyshire. But even here the hounds of Fu-li-Sing are not shaken off. They attack Uncle Ben almost immediately. Later Dorrie has a fancy dress ball, Uncle Ben having hired the costumes. Jimmy is captured by three men dressed as pierrots and a fourth dressed as Falstaff, but again they are forestalled by Nelson Lee and also this time by Chief Detective-Inspector Lennard and the pierrots are captured. However, Falstaff escapes, and, appearing to Jimmy as the Man in Black, grabs him up onto the battlements again (this time those of Dorrimore Castle). Just before he hurls Jimmy over the top Nelson Lee, in his Zacchi disguise, grabs him in time. The Man in Black escapes and gets away in a car with, as everyone thinks, Uncle Ben as a prisoner. Nelson Lee, Dorrie and Inspector Lennard give chase in a powerful car over the snow covered roads, but the escape ends when the Man in Black's car crashes through level crossing gates and is surrounded.

After trying to shoot his way out the man is captured. It comes as a great shock to Jimmy Potts to find the car contained only his Uncle who is the Number One Nelson Lee has been after and that there never has been any mythical Mandarin. He is relieved to find that his so-called Uncle is no relation at all, but would have, as



A rollicking incident from this week's super-thrilling, long complete yarn featuring the cheery Chums of St. Frank's.
New Series No. 99. OUT ON WEDNESDAY. December 12th, 1931.

next of kin, gained control of Jimmy's estate. Fortunately there is still enough holiday left for all to enjoy the jollifications peacefully.



DANNY'S DIARY

DECEMBER 1939

We spent Christmas this year in the country, down at Layer Marney in Essex, with my Gran and Auntie Gwen. Mum and Dad thought it would be better for us to go to them this year rather than that they should come to us. We found that there are quite a few evacuee children in that area, which is thought to be safer than Kent or anywhere near London.

My Gran has got a bit frail and tottery, but she is a sweet and lovely old lady. She always takes my part in matters concerning which everybody else blames me. Auntie Gwen has a hard heart, but it is a heart of gold, so Mum says, I think that Auntie Gwen doesn't care much for boys. Rum, really, for I'm quite nice, as boys go.

Doug, as usual, gave me the new Holiday Annual for Christmas. The Holiday Annual used to cost six shillings, but in later years the price has dropped to five shillings. However, Doug used the saved bob to buy me a handkerchief with the initial 'D' embroidered in the corner. Doug is a good sort, for all his faults. There is some very good reading in the Annual this year. Apart from some short stories on the main schools, there are 3 longish tales of Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood. The Greyfriars main story is "Sir Fulke's Warning". The chums are spending Christmas with Mauleverer, and it introduces Mauly's rascally cousin, Brian, who plays ghost, among other things. Top-hole stuff.

The St. Jim's tale is "Fighting the Flames" in which Tom Merry & Co. form a school fire-brigade. The Rookwood tale is "The Amazing Proceedings of Timothy Tupper", in which Tupper, the boot-boy and school page, starts to throw his weight about because his father has inherited a pub.

There is a fine Cedar Creek tale entitled "False Witness" in which Frank Richards is accused of throwing snowballs at Mr. Peckover, the Headmaster of Hillcrest School. This must be one of the later Cedar Creek tales, because in the stories which appeared in the Gem, Mr. Peckover had been appointed Head of Cedar Creek, which caused the barring-out there, and Hillcrest School had not yet been created.

There is also a mighty fine Rio Kid tale entitled "The Laughing Outlaw". Plus a football tale entitled "The Ferndale Recruit". I hadn't heard of Ferndale before. I wonder where it came from. The story is by Chas. Hamilton.

A splendid month in the fourpenny Libraries. Good job I've got a fairy grandmother who pays for all my books. The Greyfriars Schoolboys' Own Library is terrific. It's "The Mystery of Wharton Lodge". The chums are spending their Christmas at Wharton Lodge, but every morning they find that large quantities of tuck have disappeared from the larder. Bunter is not in the party, but he is an uninvited guest - hidden in an attic. Georgeous Christmas tale. The Rookwood S.O.L. is "The Sneak of Rookwood". The "sneak" is Marcus, the nephew of Mr. Manders, and he is a horrible character. Good reading, though I don't know why a horrid uncle should have a horrid nephew. The St. Frank's S.O.L. is a lovely Christmas tale, "The Ghost of Somerton Abbey". Nipper and his pals are at the home of Somerton, the schoolboy duke, and a ghostly visitors comes on the scene. Creepy and Christmassy. Tip-top.

In the Boys' Friend Library I had "Captain Justice in the Land of Monsters". Lots of thrills for the adventurers facing herds of prehistoric horrors.

Plus two excellent Sexton Blake Libraries - "The Secret of the Surgery" by Warwick Jardine, and "The Police-Station Mystery" by Rex Hardinge. What a lovely month, to take one's mind off the war. And, recording some war news, a great naval battle has occurred in the South Atlantic. The Battle of the River Plate. The German battleship "Graf Spee" buzzed off and took refuge in Monte Video Harbour. Later, the battleship was scuttled.

Needless to record, the Magnet has been gorgeous all the month. The first story is a single one, "Billy Bunter's Bargain". Bunter gets stranded a long distance from the school, and buys a bike on tick from Smudge Purkiss. It's actually Mauly's bike which has been stolen and re-painted. Rollicking stuff.

Then came the start of what obviously is going to be a mystery series over the Christmas period. The series opens with "The Man in the Mask". A big robbery has taken place, and it is believed to be the work of Slim Jim. Only one person has seen the criminal without his mask, and that one person is Mr. Quelch. Then the Head receives a telegram from Quelch to say that he, Quelch, must go to France where his nephew has been wounded in the war zone. But actually Mr. Quelch has been kidnapped - and Bunter saw the kidnapping. A new art master has replaced Mr. Woosey at Greyfriars, so the Head asks the new master, Mr. Lamb, to take charge of the Remove till Mr. Quelch comes back.

Next, the Magnet's Christmas Number, with "The Phantom of the Moat House". In this one the Head, now learning that Mr. Quelch has vanished, calls on the assistance of Ferrers Locke, the detective. Bunter comes on a ghost in the haunted Moat House, and finally ends up as a welcome guest at Wharton Lodge.

Then "The Man of Mystery". The chums are surprised to find the gentle and lamb-like Mr. Lamb, the new master at Greyfriars, occupying a caravan not far from Wharton Lodge. And Ferrers Locke begins to wonder. Then the year's final tale "The Boy from Baker Street". Where is Mr. Quelch? What is the mystery of the haunted Moat House? Harry Wharton & Co. are desperately puzzled - and so is their old schoolfellow Jack Drake, who is now Ferrers Locke's assistant, and who now joins the Christmas party. This series continues next month - next year. It's grand, eerie stuff.

In spite of the War and the horrid blackout, we still keep up our picturegoing. And there have been some grand films at the locals this month. The managers of the cinemas must know we need cheering up. The first film we saw was "Good-bye Mr. Chips". It is terribly sad, and sentimental, but lovely. It is the life of a schoolmaster from his first post up till his death. It stars Robert Donat and Greer Garson. Also in it is John Mills, and a nice kid named Terry Kilburn plays a number of schoolboys in the Colley family down the generations at the school. I wish my master, Mr. Scatterby, was something like Mr. Chips.

Another time we enjoyed "Calling Dr. Kildare" about a young doctor under the guidance of crusty old Dr. Gillespie. Lew Ayres is Kildare and Lionel Barrymore is Gillespie in the film.

Then a good thriller, "The Four Just Men". Edgar Wallace wrote the book, and it's about four patriotic Britishers who plan to save the Empire by murdering a scoundrel who is an M.P. Frank Lawton heads a big British cast. Then a good sad one which Mum loved - and privately so did I. A society girl finds she is dying of a brain tumour. It stars Bette Davis, Humphrey Bogart, George Brent, and Ronald Reagan. This was entitled "Dark Victory".

Absolutely tip-top is "The Man in the Iron Mask" from the Dumas novel. King Louis the Fourteenth of France has a secret prisoner - his twin brother. Great Three Musketeers stuff with Warren William (who plays D'Artagnan), Louis Hayward, Alan Hale, and lots more. Scorching!

Finally "Tarzan Finds a Son" which is right up my street, with Johnny Weismuller (Doug calls him Johnny Winklemuscle), Maureen O'Sullivan as Jane, and Richard Thorpe as the son.

Actually we only went 6 times to the pictures this month, but we visited two variety theatres in the month. At Kingston Empire (a lovely theatre) we saw Billy Cotton and His Band. And at Chiswick Empire, a gorgeous big theatre, we saw a variety bill including Gaston and Andree, who are dancers, Herschel Henlere who is a delicious comic pianist, and two grand old-timers, Harry Champion and Nellie Wallace.

And now I have to make the saddest entry every in my Diary. At the very end of the year the Gem has died. Killed off by that old beast Hitler. The Gem, which kept its colours flying all through the Great War from 1914 till 1918 has been driven out in the first few months of this war.

In many ways it has been a lovely month in the Gem, story-wise. Of course, Cedar Creek ended some weeks back, and in the last week of November the series seemed to end about Jack Drake at Greyfriars. But all was not quite lost. The long series about Silverson, Tom Merry's rival for an inheritance, has continued all month and ended in the last Gem. The first St. Jim's tale this month is "The Black-Out Mystery". Somebody has given the crook schoolmaster a black eye in the black-out, and of course he blames Tom Merry. Tom is expelled, but it turned out that the innocent culprit was Monsieur Morny. Next, "The Secret Witness", where Trimble, hidden in a cupboard, watches Silverson preparing another plot against Tom Merry.

Then the Gem's Christmas Number, the story being "Jack Blake's Christmas Pudding". Five gold sovereigns have been stolen, and they turn up in that Christmas pud. Next, "The 'Worm' Takes the Count". In this one, Tom Merry, goaded beyond endurance, punches Silverson on the nose.

And then - the last Gem story. "Silverson On The Spot", set mainly at Tom's home, Laurel Villa, Huckleberry Heath. Silverson thinks that he has, at last, put paid

to Tom Merry, but there is an eleventh hour shock for the rascal. I have enjoyed this series, but I'm heartbroken at the end of it.

The Greyfriars tales were replaced with a new series of "Told in the Tuck-Shop" stories by Geo. E. Rochester. It is continuing a series which ran a long time in Modern Boy. I didn't like them much in Modern Boy. I loathed them in the Gem. The titles are "The Phantom Rooster", "The Invisible Double", "The Million-Dollar Skates", and "The Freak Wager". There wasn't one of these in the last Gem. They printed instead a story of Mad Carew, to show you what you've got in store when the Gem becomes the Triumph. Triumph! Pah!

Biggles ended in the second Gem of the month, and then Jack Drake at Greyfriars came back. The first of these is "His Black Sheep Brother" who is Dicky Nugent. Owing to this youngster, Frank Nugent finds himself with a fight with Drake on his hands. Then "The Boy Who Wouldn't Fight". Drake refuses to fight Nugent. And, finally, "The Fag's Fear" in which Dicky Nugent owes money to a bookmaker, Mr. Banks. And it is Drake who saves his bacon.

And that's the end. I can see now just why, in the last few weeks, there have been advertisements for the Triumph. A real treat for you all next week, when the Gem becomes the Triumph, bleats the stupid editor. He didn't even apologise. He didn't say the Gem will be back when the war is over. Fancy inviting Gem readers to buy Triumph. Lemonade and fish-oil don't mix.



THE GEM'S LAST CHRISTMAS NUMBER

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

S.O.L. No. 391, "The Mystery of Wharton Lodge", comprised the 3-story Christmas series from the Magnet of December 1933. This was the "Bunter in the attic" series, and, in passing, it was always my favourite Magnet Christmas series. Restrained in length, and packed with Christmas fun and games, it was the ideal story for Yuletide.

S.O.L. No. 392 "The Sneak of Rookwood" comprises the 4-story Rookwood series about the form-master's horrible nephew at school. A story about a Christmas present to Mr. Manders was omitted, and then the S.O.L. was wound up with the Christmas series with the chums at Lovell Lodge and their meeting with Lovell's irascible Uncle Peter. These 7 tales all came from the Boys' Friend of November and December 1925.

Though Danny didn't know it then, this was sadly the last Rookwood story to appear in the S.O.L. Just why they did not publish any more is a matter for guesswork. Maybe they could not find any more Rookwood tales which had not appeared in the S.O.L. You and I could have found several. Probably the war had depleted the staff at the A.P., the younger ones having gone into the Forces, and possibly there was nobody left to look out the tales to make another Rookwood S.O.L.

The three "longish" stories in his Holiday Annual, mentioned by Danny, were all reprints. "Sir Fulke's Warning" had originally been "The Ghost of Mauleverer Towers", a single story in the Magnet Christmas Number in 1922. The St. Jim's story "Fighting the Flames" had appeared under the same title in the Gem of June 1921. The Rookwood story "The Amazing Proceedings of Timothy Tupper" had originally been "Tupper Goes the Pace" in the Boys' Friend of early 1924.

So Danny saw a new Tarzan film in the last month of 1939. There was a long, long run of Tarzan films, which had started in silent days. The early talkies were splendid productions, particularly the first one "Tarzan the Ape Man" and the third one "Tarzan and His Mate", both starring Weismuller and O'Sullivan and released by M.G.M. Each was a spectacular and costly production. But as others followed on, the quality diminished greatly, though it seems likely that Tarzan was always popular with the average picturegoer.

"Calling Dr. Kildare", which Danny saw in the same month in 1939, was the second in what was also to be a long series. Quite cheap to produce, the series was always entertaining. Lew Ayres played the title role in the earlier ones, but when America entered the war he declared himself a conscientious objector, and was dropped from the series. Later he volunteered for the nursing services, and distinguished himself for great bravery concerning rescuing wounded men. He made a few film appearances after the war.

As Danny records, the Jack Drake at Greyfriars tales in the Gem were discontinued to make way for the "Told in the tuck-Shop" series, possibly left over from the defunct Modern Boy. However, when the Biggles series ended, Jack Drake at Greyfriars came back. There were just three weeks of life left to the Gem. They now jumped several months in the Greyfriars Herald series, probably because they had to miss out a couple of longish series. The three selected for publication in the last 3 weeks of the Gem had been a 3-story series which had appeared in the Greyfriars Herald in June 1921. "His Black Sheep Brother" had originally been "Looking for Trouble". "The Boy who Wouldn't Fight" had previously been "The Coward's Blow". And "The Fag's Fear" of the Gem had been "Nugent Minor's Luck" in the Greyfriars Herald.

Looking back at those excellent Greyfriars tales which had a long run in the Greyfriars Herald in the early twenties, it seems inexplicable that Hamilton was writing these regularly while sub stories were featuring all too frequently in the Gem and the Magnet in those years.

Finally, a thought or two on the Gem's last St. Jim's series. The Silverson series is eminently readable, and it is well-written. Comprising 17 stories, it was far too long, and towards the end it became repetitive. I have no doubt that, when the decision was made to end the Gem, Charles Hamilton just decided to extend the Silverson series and carry it though to the finish. So one gets a sense of padding.

The two main criticisms which one can make is that it is unlikely that Miss Fawcett (unlike Mr. Vernon-Smith in the Magnet's series about the Bounder's double) would be sufficiently wealthy to make an elaborate plot to oust Tom Merry as her heir really feasible. And then Tom Merry was out of character as a rebel of the Harry Wharton type in similar Magnet series.

But Silverson had its moments, and it is precious to us. And it is heartwarming that the Gem ended with Tom Merry as the star, at Laurel Villa in Huckleberry Heath - as it was in the beginning - the beginning long, long years earlier.

"THE BOY WHO MARRIED MORCOVE'S XMAS"

by Esmond Kadish

One of the most enjoyable of the Morcove Christmas tales appeared in the SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN in 1927-8. It is the "Moatby Grange" series (nos. 358-62) and was written, of course by "Marjorie Stanton". By this time, Morcove's creator, Horace Phillips, was in full flood, and had firmly established his principal characters, with the exception of Pam Willoughby, who would arrive a few weeks later, in no. 373.

Moatby Grange - one of those rambling old residences to which Betty Barton and Co. were unfailingly invited at Christmas time - is the recently acquired countryhome of the parents of Trixie Hope. Trixie herself was a fairly minor character in the Study 12 "chummery", her chief claim to fame being a fondness for lapsing into not-very-good French every so often. (Although she played no very important rôle in the stories, Trixie was - like Dolly Delane, the beloved "Doormat" - somehow missed when she was eventually dropped from the Morcove saga.) Betty and Co. are joined at Moatby Grange by Polly Linton's livewire brother, Jack, and his more sober chum, Dave Lawder (later Dave Cardew) from Grangemoor School. The only doubtful element, in an otherwise happy house-party, is the presence of Steve Hope, Trixie's "wayward" cousin, who has also been invited by the Hopes, as his people are "down on their luck". Steve had almost succeeded in getting Jack expelled from Grangemoor, but had been sent away himself, and some unpleasantness is expected between her and Jack. However, the anticipated clash does not materialise; Jack bears no ill-will.

Sundry nocturnal thuds, clanging noises from a hidden belfry, and the switching on and off of the house's electricity supply, suggest spectral shenanigans to the chums, but the disturbances are really caused by Steve, who has accidentally unearthed a secret passage, leading from his bedroom fireplace, and discovered a long-buried Cavalier hoard, which he decides



to keep to himself. The canny Dave, however, suspects some skulduggery, and his coldness to the apparently "reformed" Steve provokes Polly Linton's irritation. Shifty Steve widens the rift between Polly and Dave by pretending that Dave has been openly hostile, and uses this as an excuse for leaving the house-party. He returns secretly, to gather in the loot, just at the crucial moment when Polly has fallen into an icy stream, and is in danger of drowning. Too scared to attempt to rescue her, Steve leaves her to her fate, but Polly believes it is Dave who has abandoned her. Steven is eventually bowled out, when he himself plunges through thin ice, whilst skating, and is rescued by "cowardly" Dave. He is taken, to recover, to the very boathouse in which he has hidden the treasure-trove from the house. His scheming is exposed; madcap Polly is suitably

contrite over her lack of faith in Dave, and perfect Yuletide harmony is restored.

There is the usual light-hearted atmosphere of a country-house setting, in the days before T.V. and computer games, when both youngsters and adults had to make their own amusements. Seasonable outdoor activities include ice-skating and toboggan-racing; indoors, there are ghost-stories, charades, and play-acting. Like Laurel and Hardy, the elegant Paula and the exuberant Naomer argue about who is the more scared: "Eet was you who put your head under the bed clothes", says Naomer. "When I look out I see you." Polly and Jack have their own form of banter:

'You're making the biggest ass of yourself, Polly.'

'I'm much obliged - brother Jack-ass!'

He had to laugh. That was so neat.

The S.G.O.L. reprint, (no. 615), did not appear until fully ten years later, in December 1937. An extra - and totally unnecessary - chapter has been added, to fill up the space, but it certainly doesn't feel as though the real "Miss Stanton" has written it. Shields' thirties-style Morcove girls, on the cover of the fourpenny book, contrast strangely with the original cloche-hatted characters, which he drew, ten years, earlier, for the SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN.

But who cares? It's a lovely story, and Trixie herself would probably have summed it up by using one of her favourite French phrases: "Bonheur!".



No. 227 Vol. 14

PUBLISHED EVERY TUESDAY

Price (including postage) 2s. 11d.

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.

Such was the enormous popularity of the films - especially when the talkies began with 'The Jazz Singer' - that publishers around 1920 brought out all sorts of new papers to cater for this new craze. *Boys Cinema* (1919) and *Girls Cinema* (1920) were just two publications to cater for the juvenile market. Fred Cordwell, who had a group of papers, thought up a brilliant idea of having a comic devoted entirely to the screen comic field, bringing out *Film Fun* on January 17th, 1920, this being loosely based on the old Trapps Holmes comic *Picture Fun*, which was later incorporated into *Film Fun* when Amalgamated Press bought out their comics.



Of course the idea of having either stage or screen stars in comic strip form was not new. As far back as 1896 there was *Dan Leno's Comic Journal*. *Merry & Bright* comic had several famous Musical Hall Stars, whilst the comic *Funny Wonder* had the greatest film comedian of them all, Charlie Chaplin on the front cover for years! Long before *Film Fun* idea was ever mooted.

Such was the enormous success of *Film Fun* that a companion to cater for stars not included in its 20 page new small size format was needed. The same department had in 1919 launched a sort of family paper with the unusual title of *Cheerio*. Certainly it by all accounts did not sell well, so they simply changed the title to *Kinema Comic*, making it similar in appearance to *Film Fun*, with of course different stars (then) of the Silent screen. It should be said that *Film Fun* featured on its front and back pages 'Twinkle' who later on became better known as Harold Lloyd. Others included Earl Montgomery and Joseph Rock, James Aubrey, Slim Summerville, Mack Swain (who thought Charlie Chaplin was a chicken in 'The Gold Rush!') and Ben Turpin and Charlie Conklin - the last named easily the most mysterious comedian of all, as I will come to later. *Kinema Comic's* trump card was

Fatty Arbuckle who was featured on the front and back pages. A free plate of him was given away with the first issue. Other supporting stars were Louise Fazenda, Ford Sterling, Ham, Jack Cooper (no connection with the boy star Jackie Cooper), Mabel Normand, Polly Moran, Larry Semon and Chester Conklin.

There was also a cross-talk page with Ben Turpin and Charlie Lynn - who was the same man as Charlie Conklin, and had obviously changed his name. Indeed the same man was also billed as Chester Conklin in *Film Fun* No. 5, a mystery that was raised in *Daily Mirror* Live Letters some years ago, and never satisfactorily explained. The real Chester Conklin was thick set with a heavy short moustache, who was the foreman of Charlie Chaplin in *Modern Times* getting caught up in the giant machinery. The other Charlie Conklin/Charlie Lynn/Chester Conklin was a much thinner man, with a long stringy moustache. Much later *Kinema Comic* was to feature 'Babe' Hardy, the greatly loved Oliver Hardy in the early days of his career when he played a heavy in the Eric Campbell and Mack Swain mould. *Kinema Comic*, like *Film Fun*, was originally priced 1/2d but in less than a year it went up to twopence. Apart from the comic strips both papers were filled up by gripping serials mainly illustrated by J. Louis Smyth, whilst of course the main illustrator of the strips was George William Wakefield.

Most if not all people associate *Film Fun* with its famous detective, Jack Keen, whose popularity was second only to Sexton Blake (at least when Nelson Lee finished in 1933). Yet he actually started in *Kinema Comic* No. 582, 20th June 1931. He was created by Alfred Edgar, and then penned by Fred Cordwell, plus a host of Sexton Blake writers, including Walter Tyrer, and the last two editors Phil. Davis and Jack Le Grande. Keen had an assistant, Bob Trotter, who, like Tinker and Nipper was a waif of the streets, being constantly told off for eating boiled sweets and reading boys papers!

It is difficult to say if *Kinema Comic* failed because of the far more popular *Film Fun*. The latter was selling almost ten times as many as some of the most popular boys papers in the 'twenties. However, possibly it was just dropped because of the great depression that hit the circulations hard, with boys only able to afford one paper a week. One editor suggested to me that *Film Fun's* starting of Laurel and Hardy in 1930 took away thousands of *Kinema Comic's* readers, but this is only conjecture. Certainly *Kinema Comic* is very much collected today, and far rarer than *Film Fun*.



No. 1 of "THE KINEMA COMIC" is out on Wednesday, April 21st.

THE SCHOOLGIRL



A Happy
Christmas
To You All



Books

REVIEWS BY MARY CADOGAN

With Christmas reading in mind, I can recommend the following for sheer enjoyment, to sample as the turkey, plum pudding and mince-pies are settling!

'BLESS 'EM ALL' - The World War Two Songbook, by DENIS GIFFORD: published by Webb & Bower (£12.95).

To dip into this compilation of songs and music is to bring about instant nostalgia for the warmth and poignancy of the many wonderful songs which we knew so well between 1939 and 1945. Denis Gifford has chosen well: the song covers which are reproduced in colour and black and white provide pictures of favourite singers and dance-band leaders, as well as atmospheric scenes and settings. From the throat-catching 'Goodnight Children Everywhere' and 'There'll Always Be An England' to the anarchic 'Adolf' ('You've Bitten Off Much More Than You Can Chew'), every page is a delight - particularly, of course, to those who are able to play over again some of these great melodies on the piano or other instruments.



PENGUIN CLASSIC CRIME SERIES

Penguin have joined the ranks of publishers who are re-issuing detective stories from the 'golden' era. Recent titles in the series, nicely bound in green and white in the traditional Penguin design, include stories from the beginning of the 1930s as well as some from later decades. They are all full of atmosphere, and well laced with suspense - just right for winter and Christmas reading! The books are priced at £3.99 each and the titles and authors are as follows: *The Case of the Gilded Fly* (Edmund Crispin); *The Man in the Queue* (Josephine Tey); *Hamlet, Revenge!* (Michael Innes); *Mystery Mile* (Margery Allingham); *The Wooden Overcoat* (Pamela Branch) and *Wall of Eyes* (Margaret Millar).

THE COMPLETE CASEBOOK OF HERLOCK SHOLMES by Charles Hamilton; and THE SEXTON BLAKE DETECTIVE LIBRARY (each published by Hawk Books at £9.95)

Each of these bumper and reasonably priced volumes has been designed and compiled by Mike Higgs, and contains an excellent, informative introduction by Norman Wright, who is well known to C.D. readers for his regular contributions to this magazine.

It is a great delight to have all the Herlock Sholmes pastiches by Hamilton (and other authors) in one volume, complete with their original illustrations, something which has never been achieved before. One is struck by the wit and perception of these parodies. Charles Hamilton, of course, was a great admirer of the original saga, and even dedicated Sherlockians would, I feel, appreciate the affection with which the Herlock Sholmes exploits are written. As well as the stories there is a full checklist giving the source and date of each, from the first (in the *Greyfriars Herald* on 20th November 1915) to the last (in *Tom Merry's Own Annual* in 1952).



The Sexton Blake Detective Library comprises four text stories and one picture-strip adventure. The stories are 'The Yellow Tiger' by G.H. Teed, 'Ill-Gotten Gains' by A. Murray, 'The Shadow of His Crime' by J.W. Bobin and 'The Rajah's Revenge' by A. Murray. The picture-strip is 'The League of Crime' by R.C.W. Heade. This lavish feast of reading is supplemented by a full-colour and a half-tone picture of the Sexton Blake bust, as well as a selection of Union Jack, Detective Weekly and Sexton Blake Library covers, also in half-tone (sometimes slightly smudgy but nevertheless an interesting picture selection). Norman Wright's introduction features vintage Eric Parker line drawings which are a joy to behold.

" DENISE 'S DIARY "

DECEMBER 1939

by Dennis L. Bird

The first Christmas month of the war was a strange, uncertain time. The only fighting was between the Finns and the invading Russians; it did not involve us. Then came the Battle of the River Plate and, just a week before Christmas, the scuttling of the German battleship "Admiral Graf Spee". But was it right to feel jubilant at the season of peace and goodwill? It was all rather confusing to a nine-year-old boy.

The four SGOL books published on 7th December posed no such problems; all were set in pre-war days. Three of them are no longer in my collection, so I have to rely on memory. The Cliff House story was "Defenders of Delma Castle" (No. 708), with Barbara Redfern & Co. spending a winter holiday at the Yorkshire home of Jemima's father Colonel Carstairs. They are snowbound, and besieged by a belligerent tribe of gipsies (the Vraas?). Their food runs low, and eventually they have to be rescued by the RAF flying in supplies and routing the attackers.

I have completely forgotten both No. 709, "Sylvia and the Laughing Outlaw" ("a fine story of foreign adventure by Renee Frazer", according to the previous month's advertisement), and No. 710, a specially-written school story by Joan Vincent entitled "Tilly Turns the Tables".

"Renee Frazer" was really Ronald Fleming, and under his other pen-name of "Peter Langley" he wrote the one December book I have kept. This was No. 711, "Noel's Xmas (sic) Ghost Hunt", and consisted of nine short stories reprinted from the "Girls' Crystal" - "exciting early exploits of Noel Raymond the famous detective". As I wrote in the 1988 "Collectors' Digest Annual", Noel was an important figure in my childhood. Of all the fictional characters I read about - and I was an avid reader - he was by far the most real to me, almost like an elder brother.

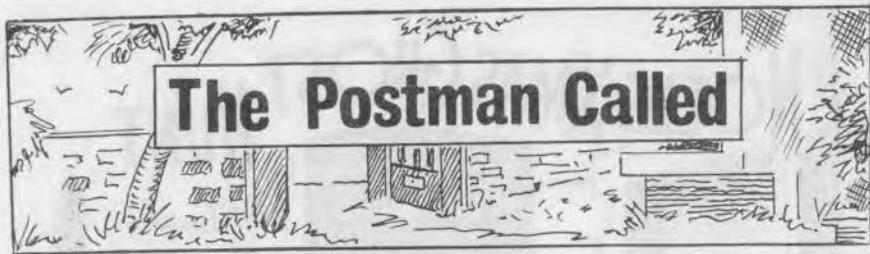
Looking back along the perspective of fifty years, I can see now how artificial some of the plots were, and how completely unworkable the complicated mechanical devices by which some of the crimes were carried out. And yet Peter Langley is a master of swift narrative, suspenseful atmosphere, and sudden surprises; the wrongdoer's identity is not usually disclosed until the very end. He sweeps you along irresistibly; like a good dramatist, he depends on "the willing suspension of disbelief". In describing the London scenes in which many of the 550 or so cases are set, he is almost in the Conan Doyle class. Take the first chapter of a story in SGOL 711, "The Clue of the Double Six". It opens in London's Dockland, "muffled by the yellow fog that hung like a blanket over the narrow Limehouse street... Noel knew Limehouse better than most, and something of its secret, underhand ways. Here in these dark backwaters of London, mysterious signs were frequently passed from hand to hand - messages that spelt a warning - messages that brought disaster in their wake." And, from the same story, this arresting description of a girl: "She was certainly no ordinary waitress... Her features were delicately moulded and sensitive; she carried herself with an unconscious poise... But it was her eyes that riveted Noel's attention - dark mysterious eyes that hinted at tragedy". Powerful writing for a schoolgirl's weekly!

These nine stories show Noel in a variety of situations - best man at a big society wedding ("The Mystery of the Threatened Bridesmaid"), violinist ("The



Phantom Fiddler"), tobogganer - in a hat! ("The Missing Footprints"), mistaken for his own manservant ("The Buried Antlers"). In "The Disappearances from Room 15" he "signed the hotel book under the assumed name of John Noel". That was the pen-name I adopted for 25 years (1948-1973) for my monthly column in the "Skating World", in tribute to my old friend - who amongst his other accomplishments was a skilful skater.

I cannot leave SGOL 711 without another mention of "The Phantom Fiddler". This story I found quite frightening at the time. It is based on the fact that a sustained note on a violin can break fragile glasses and other objects d'art - and the villainous violinist is "an unkempt figure, dressed in a threadbare black coat, his black hair falling long and lank from beneath a broad slouch hat... a gaunt, half-crazed face, convulsed with fear." Thank you, Noel, for half a century of pleasantly chilled spines and bafflement!



LETTER TO MR. JAMES HODGE FROM HORACE JAMES COKER [Sent to us by Irene Radford, who has tidied up the great Horace's spelling. Ed.)

Sir,

I sincerely hope for your sake that my Aunt Judy does not take *Collectors' Digest*, because if she reads the article you wrote for the October issue - well - all I can say is, watch out for the sharp end of her umbrella when you meet her! Old Mother Riley indeed - Huh!

For your information (not that it is any of your business) I have a pater, a mater and a younger brother Reggie.

Reggie spends the holidays with our parents, but ever since I was a little nipper I have always spent the school holidays with Aunt Judy and her brother Uncle Henry Coker at Holly Lodge. They stood my school fees at Greyfriars when my pater was hard hit years ago, and they look on me as a son. I am the apple of their eye, so how dare you say Aunt Judy is lumbered with me - you've got a nerve!

Aunt Judy is Miss Judith Coker and is my pater's sister - and I'd like to punch you in the eye for saying she reminds you of Old Mother Riley - what cheek!

Yours in contempt, H.J. COKER

N. WRIGHT (Northwich): During the years I have subscribed to the *Digest* I have seen little mention of the original artwork which went into the production of the various magazines. I did obtain a framed *Magnet* drawing depicting Quelch and Bunter (it holds pride of place in my dining room - where else?).

Perhaps your readers may be able to share their knowledge and experience on this subject, especially of what happened to the originals after publication.

GORDON HUDSON (Co. Durham): I was interested in one of the recent "wants" advertisements for Swans Schoolboys' Pocket Library. I recall certain issues of this quite vividly. I have two copies somewhere. One is *The Borrowed Caravan* by (I think) E.L. Peppercorn, and the other *Wally Davenport's Dizzy Blonde* by E.S. Brooks - although I can't

remember which name it was published under. I wonder if anyone has ever compiled a list of this Library? There was also a companion Schoolgirls' Pocket Library.

I can remember seeing the different issues in the newsagents window on my way to school - it must have been around 1950/51 - but I was not really interested in them until I purchased *The Borrowed Caravan*. I got two or three issues of afterwards but then they disappeared. I don't know how many there were altogether. No doubt someone has a record of them all.



"Read any good books lately?" This was the question, put to me recently, which set me thinking. Apart from books relating to our hobby, I confess I hadn't read a good book for some time but I remember my introduction to good reading. It began when I joined 3 colleagues at the office at lunch-times. One day I had with me an Edgar Wallace paperback. "It's time you started reading good literature" said one of my companions, and the others agreed with him. The outcome was each one recommending a book to improve my reading and from then onwards I became more selective.

I have enjoyed reading many books - some of which I couldn't put down until I had finished the story because they were so interesting; so for this article I have chosen ten - call it my Top Ten. Most of them I still have in my possession. So here goes: (not in order of preference).

1. THE GOOD COMPANIONS (J.B. Priestley)
I felt I was with them on their travels, sharing their adventures.
2. DAVID COPPERFIELD (Charles Dickens)
Dickens wrote so many good tales, but I prefer this for his characterisations. His Micawber was a gem.
3. SORRELL & SON (Warwick Deeping)
Probably my favourite novel. The sacrifices made by a man for his son (who for a change was grateful).
4. A VILLA IN THE SUN (Cecil Roberts)
The story of an artist who rose from obscurity to fame after meeting Jesse Boot and John Player in Nottingham. If you haven't read it do get it out from your library.
5. BERRY AND CO. (Dornford Yates)

A series of witty situations. Berry was the master of repartee and veiled sarcasm.

6. **THE CHEQUER BOARD** (Nevil Shute)

This is a book I just had to read from start to finish to follow the lives of three men traced by a man who has only a year to live.

7. **THE COLLECTORS' DIGEST ANNUAL**

This always serves to keep me in touch with fellow members of our hobby - contributors and others.

8. **THE HOLIDAY ANNUAL 1921**

This revives memories of the characters in our favourite schools, such as Bunter, Gussy, Jimmy Silver, Nipper, etc.

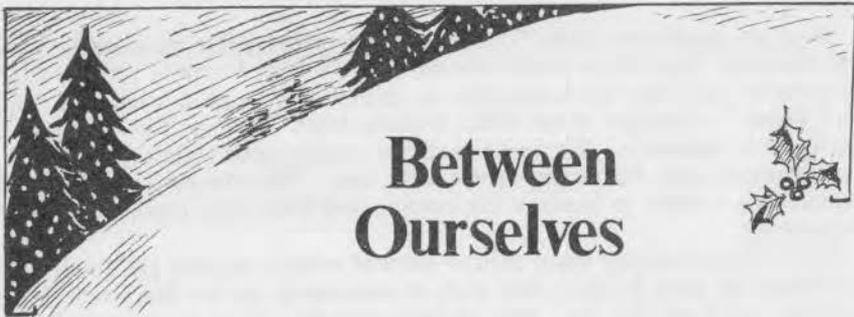
9. **CHUMS ANNUAL**

Any year provided there is a serial by S. Walkey. I used to buy it weekly as a youngster.

10. **SCOUT ANNUAL**

Any year - 1920 period. A reminder of my "scouting days" and my youth. I used to swop my copy of "Chums" for my brother's copy of "The Scout" each week.

So there you are! Regretably I have had to omit authors like P.G. Wodehouse, Lewis Carroll and Richmal Crompton, but you can't have everything. Good reading!



It is always intriguing to hear more about our favourite authors from those who were close to them. Charles Hamilton's niece, Una Hamilton Wright, tells me that her memories of her uncle are especially vivid as Christmas approaches because, as most of us will recall, he passed away in 1961 on Christmas Eve (M.C.)

THANK HEAVEN FOR LITTLE GIRLS

by Una Hamilton Wright

"Charlie is one of those sorts of men who won't marry all his life, but when he's 70 and bald he'll marry a girl of 17." Thus Charles Hamilton's elder sister Edie when my uncle was about 20.

Occasionally I have been asked the puzzling question whether an amorous relationship existed between Charles Hamilton and the late Miss Hood, the last of his housekeepers, 29 years his junior. Was she at 24, having attached herself to my 53 year old uncle's household, to become an old man's darling? Was there a romance?

The answer is 'no'. In youth my uncle had decided he would never marry. Had he been seriously interested in girls someone nearer his intellectual level would have been his target. Although women attracted him, they left him cold, for he saw them not as potential mates but only as little girls: creatures to be protected and spoiled, whatever their ages. He shunned the limitations and responsibilities of matrimony as interferences with his work. Nevertheless he solaced himself with safe friendships with the opposite sex in situations where he considered marriage would be out of the question.

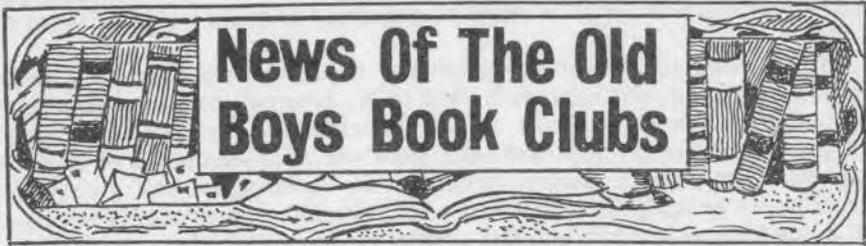
Uncle's own form of self-indulgence was to indulge other people's wishes except where marriage was concerned. Well-to-do, generous, courteous, ever ready to go to endless trouble to please, he had the winning formula to enlist female devotion. Many were the little (and older) girls who nourished hopes of being the permanent rather than the passing favourite. By declaring himself a confirmed bachelor he felt he had placed himself beyond reproach. Sometimes his attentions, often misunderstood, got him into dire trouble, as when his mother ordered him to leave his niece Rosie (girl number 2, my mother being the first) alone, or when girl number 3 (Florrie, my father's sister and one of my mother's bridesmaids) misinterpreted the chocolates, the flowers, the compliments and the theatre trips, and mother's in-laws were disconcerted that the affair went no further. Then there were the fiancée, Agnes and the near-fiancée, Grace, who were friends rather than sweethearts. In addition, there were 'little sweethearts' in Italy and France, such as Marcelle Casalini, the little daughter of the proprietor of the Riviera Hotel, Wimereux, to whom he left £25 in his Will of 1931.

He met Edie Hood when she was 9, helping at Hawkinge Post Office where he lodged temporarily in 1914. The first little girl there was Sylvia Hunt, daughter of the establishment, a little older than Edie. Delicate and sensitive, Sylvia was saddened to be supplanted in my uncle's affections by the diminutive Miss Hood. Edie Hood, who was born at Peane Hill, between Canterbury and Whitstable, was the youngest of the seven children of a woodman who came to work at Gibraltar Farm, Hawkinge. Later during World War I there was another little girl from a farm - Farmer Fowler's little daughter of Broughton Farm, near Aylesbury, where uncle hired a cottage retreat from London's Zeppelin raids. After the war I came on the scene and being the daughter of the first and permanent favourite I had a head start on all the others. Of course I knew nothing about them until I was grown up, when it dawned on me that uncle had much in common with Lewis Carroll. All uncle's little girls enjoyed the attention and the largesse. Each interpreted them in her own way. I took everything for granted because from birth I had known nothing else.

His former housekeeper, the elderly Miss Beveridge, had hinted at matrimony, only to be pensioned off quite soon afterwards. When occasionally he was asked whether he would marry Grace, or Miss Beveridge, Miss Hood or even his cousin Flossie, invariably he replied "What, marry old Margery? No, no, no!" in the words of 'Simon the Cellarer', a song which he sang very entertainingly. Finally, he confided to my mother that he thought Edie wanted to marry him, "but she isn't going to" he concluded, "I don't want to marry her or anyone else". He found her a very useful aide - "try to think of E. as an asset", he wrote to my mother - but

intellectual rapport was lacking, for that he depended on his voluminous correspondence, notably with my parents, myself and George Foster.

After my father's death in 1957 uncle suggested that my mother should live with him at Rose Lawn, Kingsgate, "I am concerned only with you my dear and have no room for anyone else" he wrote. What hope could any of his little girls have of encroaching on such fraternal devotion? They had given him much harmless pleasure but he lacked the ability to fall in love with any of them.



OLD BOYS' BOOK CLUB - MIDLAND SECTION

There was another very poor attendance in October, with only four members present. Except for a few who always apologise for absence, not a word came from anybody else. Our acting Chairman, Geoff Lardner, away on a world tour, was very much missed.

The refreshments were up to their usual excellent standards, and provided by Betty Hopton, Christine Brettell and Ivan Webster. There were quizzes from myself and from Christine Brettell, and two readings, one by Ivan, and one by Christine from 'Billy Bunter Gets the Sack'. Both readings were so uproariously funny that they brought the house down, so to speak. We wish we had a lot more members like Betty Hopton, who came a long distance. (We stretched out the meeting to avoid her having to wait alone in the cold on a station for her train.)

Next meeting: 5th December, out Christmas party. Let us hope for a better attendance.
JACK BELLFIELD

CAMBRIDGE CLUB

For our November meeting we gathered at the home of member Malcolm Pratt in the village of Lode. The members noted the passing of Terry Wakefield, who in 1980 redesigned our Club logo for us besides several other specially-drawn items.

Howard Corn talked about Cowboys on the wireless - although all of these were excerpts from U.S. radio programmes from the 30s, 40s and 50s. Some titles had begun as books and/or films, and all later became T.V. series, and some transmitted in the U.K.: Fort Laramie, Gunsmoke, Have Gun Will Travel, Cisco Kid, and Lone Ranger. Later Bill Lofts discussed Public Libraries and how they can be a great help in our Hobby.

ADRIAN PERKINS

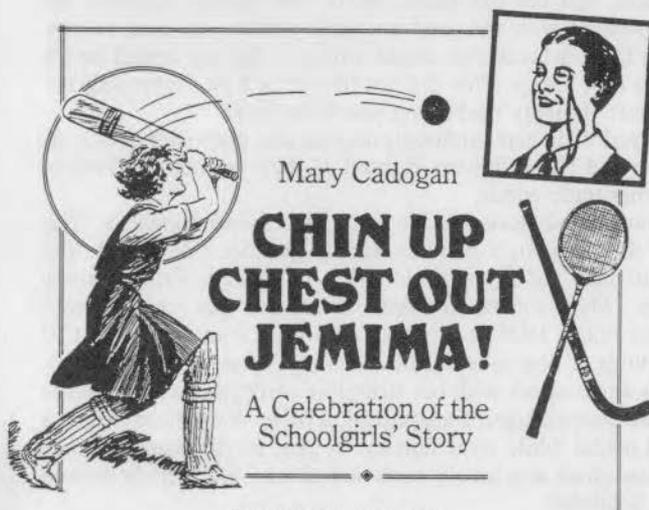
THE O.B.B.C. - NORTHERN SECTION

Chairman David Bradley welcomed the 17 present to our A.G.M. in November. Darrell gave a short tribute to Miss Edith Hood: all at the meeting were sorry to hear of her death and felt this was a lost link in the Frank Richards saga.

Our A.G.M. took up the whole of the meeting, as there was plenty to talk about in the life of our active club. Sorting out business matters once a year enables members to enjoy themselves at the monthly meetings. Joan Colman became our new Chairman for 1990, and the other officers were re-appointed. Favourable reports were received from the Secretary, Treasurer and Librarian. We spoke at length about our Ruby Anniversary Luncheon to be held on 12th May, 1990, with guest speakers, followed by an informal social evening afterwards. Look out for special announcement in the C.D. in due course with information about the guests for the event. We should be very pleased to welcome members from other Clubs for the day.

Next meeting: our informal Christmas Party on the 9th December commencing at 5.30 p.m. All welcome!

JOHNNY BULL MINOR



Mary Cadogan

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MEMORIES OF THE MODERN BOY

By R.J. Drummond-Smith

I well remember the day in February 1928 when my mother gave me a paper and said: "I saw this in the newsagent's and thought you would like it". It was No. 2 of *The Modern Boy*, and from then until I was "too old" for such publications it displaced *Rover*, *Wizard* and *Adventure* in my affections. Perhaps Mother thought it was more "educational" than the D.C. Thomson favourites.

I never did get No. 1, despite several recent attempts, but 60 years later I have acquired a dozen of the early numbers and have unashamedly wallowed.

Ken King, South Seas trader in his ketch *Dawn*, and known as King of the Islands, was the superstar of those boyhood days, and the banality of it all from a 1980s viewpoint does nothing to reduce my enjoyment on reading those Charles Hamilton (Frank R., of course) stories. At first he was credited jointly with Sir Alan Cobham, who was a hero of the air, but as Mary Cadogan says in her recent book on Frank, Sir Alan had no hand in the actual writing, and before long his name was dropped.

Through all the intervening years I have never forgotten some of the characters: Kaio-lalulalonga (Koko for short), the Kanaka bo'sun; Kit Hudson, the Cornstalk (Australian) mate; Bully Samson and Jabez Wild, baddies; John Chin, Chinese storekeeper.

We were taught at school that the sun never set on the British Empire, our atlases showed the world splashed with red, and we were totally innocent of any thoughts of racism. Natives in lava-lavas that shone white in the sun loafed under the palm trees near the beach on Lalinge. We did not blench at Ken expressing his anger to the Hiva-Oa crew thus: "I plenty mad along you feller boys".

Revolvers and rifles played their part (although no-one was ever shot dead) in the many wrongs which Ken and His followers righted as they roamed the Pacific with cargoes of copra and other trade goods.

George E. Rochester contributed stories of the air. The earliest I have is "The Ivory Trail" ("complete in this issue"), a baddies versus goodies tale set in "the sweltering, humid, poisonous heat" of Equatorial Africa. The baddies, as mostly happened, had foreign names. My favourite Rochester series was that about George Porson, a 17 year-old who set out in 1928 to establish an airline with a battered £10 Maurice Farman, a few shillings, a dog called Bill, and a big sense of fun. He still wore a school blazer and his experiences with his stringbag aeroplane with a pusher propeller included chasing an escaped tiger, transporting a prize Wyandotte hen to a show to compete for a gold medal while rival fanciers sought to eliminate her, and an encounter with a Christmas ghost at a lonely snowbound inn. Once he borrowed an airship to carry a cow to Scotland!

Alfred Edgar was a crack writer on motor bike racing. In "Whizzing Wheels" young Jim Curtis and broad-shouldered Joe Morgan built a wonderful speed bike (speediron was a term often used in those days) but lacked the funds to make fame, which of course they eventually achieved. Later there was Dave Knight, expelled from St. Clair College for sneaking off to ride on the dirt track, who fought his way to the top, and to exoneration, in the Schoolboy Speedmen series.

Truth was at least as strange as fiction in Tom Rogers' accounts of his wanderings in Canada and Australia with colleague Pud Drummond; fiction was

certainly stranger than truth on the volcanic "Isle of Peril" in the Antarctic, where fabulous prehistoric monsters thrived in the 20th century.

February 1929 brought "The Invaders from Mars", in which Professor Powerby and his young wards Ron and Will Neville were called on to save the world from weird creatures, which communicated by "glowing antennae", and their equally weird machines. That was another Alfred Edgar serial.

The summer of that year introduced Cloyne of Claverhouse, by Walter Hammond, "the 25 years old cricket champion". Drummond Cloyne, fast bowler extraordinary, who had been coached at his boyhood home in the Java Sea by a former Test Match player, joined Claverhouse public school in England, and through many vicissitudes, not least of them his rival Scaife, eventually played for his country.

From stories of the Canadian Mounties, schoolboy engine drivers and a youthful tugboat skipper on the Thames to the most unlikely subject for a serial by C. Malcolm Hincks - office life in a London shipping firm - entitled "Opportunities Unlimited", The Modern Boy had it all! It carried many informative articles and a centre-spread of news items. In December 1928 there was a page about "the telephone that works itself - an astonishing invention that has definitely come to stay". It was the dial phone, not the one-piece handset we are used to, but the old candlestick variety with the dial fixed to the base. Practical wireless, advice on careers, the secrets of the motor car and the airship R 101, instruction on ju-jitsu and roller skating, factual motor-cycling speedway, stamp collecting, soccer - there was much, much more; too much to touch upon without making this article over-long.

Those Modern Boys of my youth may no longer be "modern", but they live on!

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.

ALWAYS WANTED: Singles-Collections: SOL's, SBL's, Beans. Dustwrapped Biggles, Bunters, Williams. Enid Blyton, Malcolm Saville. ALL original artwork NORMAN WRIGHT, 60 Eastbury Road, Watford, Hertfordshire.

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DRAWN BY R.J. MACDONALD

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Editor: Mary Cadogan, 46 Overbury Avenue, Beckenham, Kent, BR3 2PY.
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