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# COLLECTORS' DIGEST

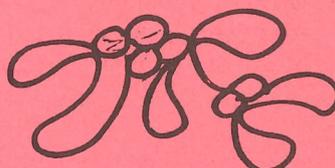
ANNUAL

# The MAGNET 2

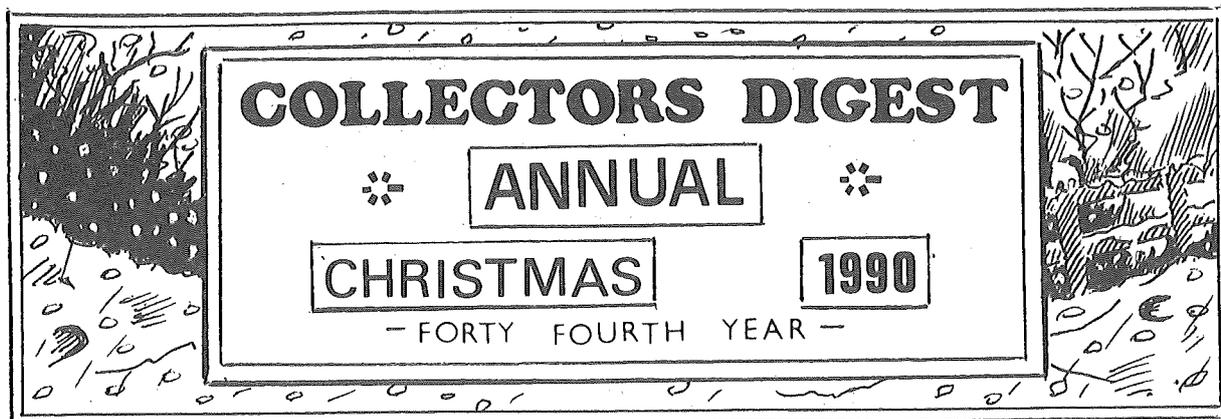


A PRESENT FROM BUNTER



  
  
  
**Happy  
Xmas!**

*Terry  
Wakefield*



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Kent. BR3 2PY

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### FOREWORD FROM THE EDITOR

The season of peace and good-will is once again upon us, and, as always, we are marking it with another edition of the C.D. Annual. It seems to me that nothing could be more fitting: as well as its links with the great story-papers and annuals of the past, our own offering also symbolizes the warmth and good fellowship of the Old Boys' Book Clubs and our collecting circle in general. Happily this spirit survives resiliently into the 1990s, and I feel sure that it will extend even beyond this.

As you will see, the Annual offers its usual variety of stories, articles, pictures and puzzles. Our dedicated contributors deserve our sincere thanks and appreciation. Once again, designs for the cover and for most of the headings have been provided by Henry Webb, for whose help with the Annual and the monthly I should like to express deep gratitude.

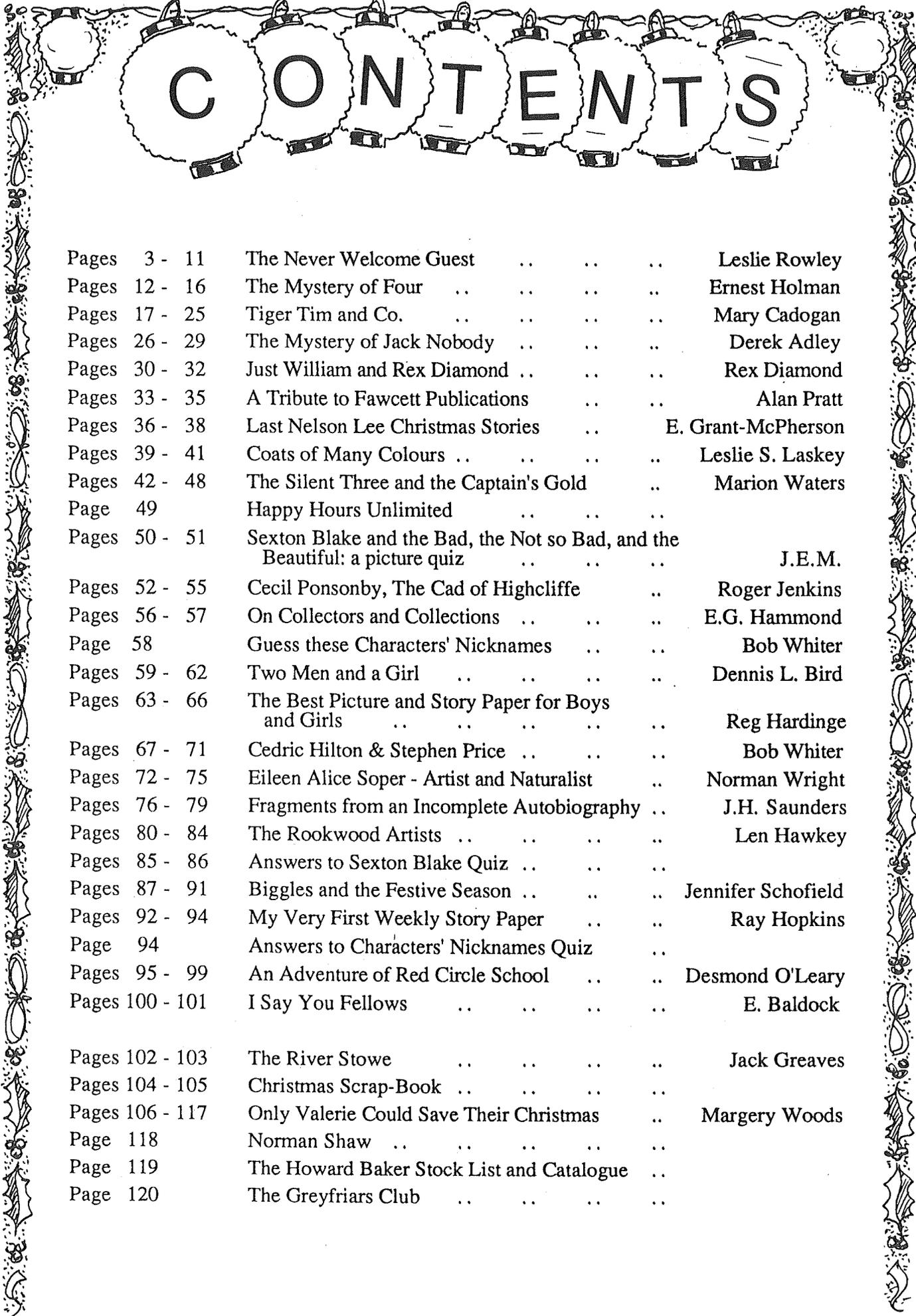
I think you will agree with me that there is something in the Annual for every collector; we can join in Bunter's conniving for a luxurious Christmas holiday venue which offers a glorious range of comestibles, or the St. Frank's juniors on several of their adventurous Yuletide vacs. Appropriately, admirers of Sexton Blake will find a quiz on which they can rack their investigative brains. There are other sleuthing mysteries too, connected with Sherlock Holmes and, a far cry from his Victorian setting, with those intrepid post-Second World War schoolgirl righters of wrongs, the Silent Three.

The assortment of heroes on which we focus includes cowboys and characters from nursery story-papers and comics; from Charles Hamilton's Jack of All Trades to Richmal Crompton's Just William. High adventure - with a practical note - is the theme of articles on W.E. Johns's Biggles, and the Hotspur's Red Circle School, while the more traditional atmosphere of the Hamilton schools has inspired a new look at the villain of Highcliffe, and the illustrators of the Rookwood saga. Fetching young females crop up in various articles, and are especially starred in a feature discussing their enigmatic relationships with some boy chums, and in a story about the charismatic girl sleuth from the Schoolgirls' Weekly.

As you can imagine, it has been a great pleasure to prepare this Annual. I now wish you joy in reading it, and hope that all your Christmas dreams will be fulfilled, as well as your expectations and hopes for the New Year. Thank you all, for your loyal support of the C.D. and the Annual.

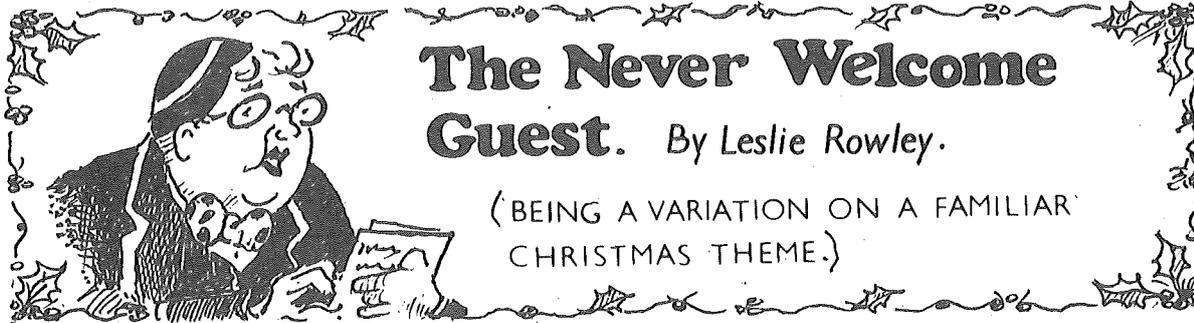
Warmest seasonal greetings from

*Mary Cadogan*



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# The Never Welcome Guest. By Leslie Rowley.

(BEING A VARIATION ON A FAMILIAR CHRISTMAS THEME.)

The snow lay thick on branch and bough. It formed a feathery blanket over field and meadow, and it touched, with magic, the ledge and sill of every casement and window just as it had the tiles and chimney pots of Wharton Lodge. A series of sharp, cold frosts had bequeathed the windows a coating of rime that sparkled in the pallid sun of the December day. Those who ventured out did so with the collars of their overcoats turned up, with mufflers at their throats, and the stoutest of boots that crunched as they found the crystalline surface beneath them.

It was the second day of the Christmas hols, and that morning Harry Wharton and his guests had been busy decorating the hall and library of Wharton Lodge. Sprays of holly lent the green of their leaves and the red of their berries to enhance the gilt frames that contained the likenesses of Whartons of times past. Festoons of gaily coloured glass and paper crossed from corner to corner. The oak panelling of the walls threw back their reflection of the flames of the fire from the great fireplace. The Famous Five had paid special attention to the giant Christmas tree, ensuring that its attendant electric lanterns were working properly before they made their way to Wharton's den for a break in their labours.

They chattered about the term that had recently come to a close - the battles of the soccer field or cricket ground. There was serious speculation of the outcome of future matches, and then the conversation turned to more topical matters of less importance, and someone mentioned the name of Bunter. William George Bunter was conspicuous - very conspicuous - by his absence! It was an absence which the fellows felt able to endure without fortitude, but it was an absence sufficiently important to arouse comment.

"I wonder just how long the Bounder will put up with the fathead before he speeds his departure from the house in Portman Square", opined Harry Wharton.

"I certainly can't see Smithy standing Bunter for the whole of the vac.," observed Bob Cherry, "in fact I wonder how he managed to get Smithy to invite him in the first place!"

"The wonderfulness is terrific, my esteemed Bob" replied Inky, "but the pleasure of the ridiculous Smithy for his fat guest was lamentably not apparent on the last day of term."

"Remind me to thank Smithy for relieving us of the benefit of Bunter's company", remarked Wharton. Nevertheless one can't help wondering how our prize porker is getting on among the fleshpots of Mayfair."

\*\*\*\*\*

Snort!

There was an abundance of expression in that snort! Distaste and disgust; irritation and indignation but, most of all, annoyance. Even then, that snort did not do full justice to the feelings of the person who uttered it! Mr. Vernon-Smith frowned, as though to add emphasis to that snort, as he gazed on the rotund form of William George Bunter. But Bunter was too busy, as he breakfasted, and that snort passed him by like the idle wind that heedeth not. The pig at the trough had nothing on Bunter when it came to taking in a cargo of food! The relationship between host and guest has been defined at length in numerous tomes on the subject of etiquette. Perhaps the Bounder's father, busy man that he was, had yet to find time to read them! It would have availed him little if he had, for those weighty volumes on *savoir faire* contained no guidance on how one should treat a guest as charming as Bunter. If, for this reason, Mr. Vernon-Smith could lay no claim to being the perfect host, neither, for a multitude of reasons, could Bunter lay claim to being the perfect

guest. In fact, it was extremely unlikely whether Bunter could lay claim to being a guest at all! Bunter's presence under the roof of the millionaire financier was due to the most tenuous of circumstances. In Bunter's possession was a letter from a Mr. Joseph Banks addressed to Smithy. On cheap and beer-stained stationery were recorded certain racing transactions between bookmaker and schoolboy. As an item of literary merit that letter was not destined to rank with the deathless prose other men had left behind them. Yet, it was of some importance to Herbert Vernon-Smith who knew well, only too well, what the consequences would be should the eyes of Mr. Quelch or Dr. Locke fall upon that letter and the message it conveyed. Bunter knew that too! Only too often did Bunter know that which did not concern him, and he was not beyond putting that knowledge to serve his own ends. Other fellows, on finding such a letter, would have handed it back to Smithy or, at least, stuffed it down the back of his neck! Not so Bunter! He had used it as a means to being invited to the Bounder's home as a "guest" for the Christmas hols. That this might be construed as blackmail did not worry Bunter in the least. His conscience, always an elastic one, was adaptable enough to convince him that what he was doing was for the Bounder's own good!

Mr. Vernon-Smith, of course, knew nothing of all this. He had, to say the very least, been surprised at his son's choice of guest. What little he had previously seen of Bunter had not awakened within him any desire to extend that acquaintance; rather the reverse! As Bunter helped himself to his sixth liberal portion of kidneys, bacon and sausage, Mr. Vernon-Smith regarded that youth with a baleful eye. It had been a pity that the boy Redwing was spending the vacation on board his father's lugger, Mr. Vernon-Smith had always rather liked Redwing and, as he now looked at Bunter, he found he liked Redwing even more! He really must speak to Herbert about Bunter.

"I say!"

The last of the sausages had followed the last of the bacon and kidneys on that journey from whose bourne no traveller returns, and Bunter was prepared to improve the shining hour with some of his enlightening conversation. Mr. Vernon-Smith looked, or rather glared, in the fat Owl's direction. If his look did nothing to encourage discourse, Bunter did not notice it. Having eaten enough for six, Bunter felt that he could talk enough for two. He prattled happily on.

"I say", he repeated, "is it right what Skinner says at school, about you having made your profits out of your bankruptcies? I suppose it costs a bit to keep this place going - not that it is a patch on Bunter Court, of course. I suppose there has to be some dividing line between aristocracy and the money lenders. Not that I'm a snob, but breeding counts. I think that you'll find that Smithy has improved greatly through my taking him up. By following my example he'll be like that chap in the poem:-

'the noble nature of his friend  
won him to virtue in the end'

Of course it will take time, but ----- beast!"

The financier, whose presence graced a score of board rooms; whose voice commanded respect at both the Bank and the Exchange, had no time for the opinions expressed in the Junior Day Room at Greyfriars.

Slam!

Smithy's pater left the room, and the emphatic closing of the door might have warned the least sensitive of guest that any welcome which had hitherto existed had now expired. But the feelings of his host were of little account to the fat Removite. Feeding was! The supply of bacon, kidneys and sausages, ample though it had been, was now exhausted, but there was plenty of toast and a variety of marmalade and other preserves deserving Bunter's attention. He reached for a knife, and soon traces of toast and marmalade joined others that adorned his sticky and greasy countenance. As he resumed his attack on the provender, Bunter pondered on the programme for the day. Nothing too strenuous, of course! Say a trip out into the country. Not that the beauties of Nature had any appeal, but Bunter knew that there would be racing at one of the provincial courses and he intended to display his undoubted skill at picking winners and gaining a fortune thereby. It was true that he would need money with which to place his bets and, since Bunter's resources were

limited to a French penny, that money would have to come from some other source. Bunter rather fancied that he knew what that source would be! There would follow a gargantuan dinner at one of the most expensive places in town where the bill would be of the same ample proportions as the amount that Bunter intended to consume. After that he would take in a show - a private box in which to sit and a large supply of chocolates to gobble as the entertainment unfolded. A rather expensive programme, but then the expense was going to be no object to Bunter since the sordid question of payment was one which he intended to leave to the Bounder. Smithy might quibble, in the rather mean and petty way he had, but he would soon come to heel when Bunter mentioned the letter. Bunter intended to be quite firm in the matter, not only for that day but for the many to follow. In his mind's eye the unscrupulous young rascal visualised unlimited extravagance for the rest of the vacation. It was as well that he enjoyed seeing it in his mind's eye for, unknown to him, he was not destined to see it in any other!



While Bunter was travelling through the provender at the breakfast table, Herbert Vernon-Smith was going through Bunter's possessions. Really, it could not be called a mammoth task for, when Bunter travelled, he travelled light! He depended on his kind hosts to supply any change of apparel that might be necessary, and that morning his own substantial form was clad in Smithy's most expensive lounge suit - with somewhat disastrous consequences for the suit! Smithy was making the most of the opportunity to search Bunter's large and rather loud checked trousers and jacket, but the inspection had produced nothing more interesting than a broken penknife, to which an aniseed ball was clinging affectionately, and a handkerchief that had long lost any pretence to being clean. He was about to give up the search in disgust, when a polite cough apprised him that he was no longer alone. He turned and faced Pilkington the butler.

"The young person by the name of Bunter", (the butler's voice managed to convey that he found it repugnant to refer to Bunter as a 'young gentleman') "the young person, sir, borrowed your dressing gown and I would like your permission to send the garment for cleaning. It is in a sticky, a very sticky, condition indeed. I have done my best to remedy the matter but, even after removing the remains of the veal, ham and egg pie from the pocket ----"

"All right, all right!" snapped the Bounder irritably "do as you think best." But the butler had not finished.

"There is the matter of the letter, sir", continued Pilkington. "Addressed to yourself, and which I found with the remains of the pie."

He handed over a grubby envelope which Smithy recognised immediately. The Bounder gave Pilkington a sharp look, but the butler merely bowed deferentially and left the room. A moment later the incriminating letter from Joey Banks had become ashes in the bedroom fireplace. Having dealt with the letter, the Bounder now considered dealing with Bunter. His first inclination was to project Bunter from the premises with the applied science of a well directed foot. That would have provided some satisfaction, but not enough! Smithy favoured something lingering with boiling oil in it but, unfortunately, the laws of the realm had been somewhat modified since those happy days when such luxuries were permitted. There were, however, more ways of killing a fat cat than choking it with cream and, during that day, he intended giving further thought to the matter.

Happily unaware of the drastic changes in his fortunes, Bunter had prepared himself for a day's outing. Those preparations had not been extensive - certainly not extensive enough to embrace the wash of which Bunter stood sorely in need. Nevertheless, even Bunter realised that something was expected from the guest of a millionaire, and Smithy's most expensive overcoat now shrouded the same ample form as did Smithy's lounge suit! A half an hour having lapsed since finishing breakfast, Bunter was now contemplating lunch, or something substantial in the way of a snack. He did not mind which, so long as it materialised soon. If Bunter could have had his way meal times would have been abolished and continuous eating substituted in their place. As the Bounder came down the staircase, Bunter greeted him with an air of unveiled petulance.

"I say, Smithy, this won't do", he complained imperiously, "this won't do at all! I have actually been kept waiting thirty minutes. This is not the way that we look after our guests at Bunter Court, I can tell you! I have tried to make allowances for your not having the breeding of your betters, but there are limits. Sometimes", he added, shaking his head sadly, "sometimes I despair of you. How fortunate it was that I did not take you home to Bunter Court, now that the house is full of the nobility, especially as one or two of the princes are likely to give the place a look in!"

Vernon-Smith, listening to the fatuous prattle of the Owl of the Remove, could barely restrain himself. As he gazed upon his guest an almost wolfish expression came into Smithy's glittering eyes, and Bunter never knew just how near the Bounder was to committing mayhem on his fat carcass. With a supreme effort, Smithy managed to keep himself under control. Something that Bunter had said had given him an idea.

"Come on, old fat man", he said quite mildly. "How about a spin in the car, lunch on the way, and then a call on some people before dinner?"

"I had rather intended putting some time in at Newbury", retorted Bunter loftily. "I've been giving the jolly old gee-ges a bit of a study - I'm rather a good spotter of form, you know, and I fancy I could make quite a killing. Do come, old chap, you might pick up a useful point or two from me."

"Please yourself", replied the Bounder. "I've told you what I'm going

# Christmas Greetings

To All  
MAGNET READERS



to do, but it's a free country and, if you want to go and play the giddy ox", he continued, regardless that he had often played the giddy ox himself, "I'll drop you off at Paddington where you can catch the train to Newbury."

Bunter look peevishly at Smithy. In the programme that he had visualised it was necessary that a large amount, a very very large amount, of that valued item, cash, should be readily available. Since cash was needed, then it followed that the Bounder was needed also. Bunter decided that he would have to have a talk with Smithy once they were within the Rolls, and that talk, in which the letter would be mentioned, would make it abundantly clear to the Bounder that he would have to toe the line or else!

"Let's have this clear, Vernon-Smith" said Bunter in a threatening tone. "You expect me to travel by rail whilst you have the use of the Rolls! I think that it is time for us to have a little talk, but first call the car and let us be on our way. Don't forget that I shall need some tuck. So, see to it", added Bunter, rather as Caesar of old might have said 'See to it, Tigellimus!', "See to it that a hamper is put handy on the back seat!"

Vernon-Smith said nothing, but turned on his heel and went to give instructions to the butler. Minutes later, two servants appeared bearing a large wicker basket which was placed in the car. This procedure met with Bunter's full approval for it indicated - or so he thought - that the Bounder was coming to heel. Having previously helped himself to a box of glacé fruits from one of the dining room sideboards, Bunter settled himself comfortably into the deep upholstery of the Rolls, a smirk of smug contentment on his fat face. If only brother Sammy and sister Bessie could see him now, esconced in a luxurious limousine, a hamper of tuck to hand, and the prospect of a day's racing with other delights to follow. This was the style to which Bunter often wished - and boasted - that he was accustomed. It was a style to be maintained for many days to come, or Bunter would want to know the reason why! Only the slamming of the car door, as the Bounder got in beside him, betrayed the passion that Smithy was just, but only just, managing to keep in check! But, then, Smithy was always a bad-tempered beast, and Bunter did not connect this present display of bad temper with himself. Jenkins, the chauffeur, had apparently received his instructions for, with the gentlest of purrs, the car got into motion and was soon gliding through the streets of Mayfair and on to the outskirts of London and beyond. The grey, leaden, skies had deepened and a fresh flurry of snow drifted lazily past the windows, bringing with it a promise of a really white Christmas.

Bunter drew the Bounder's best overcoat around his fat frame. With his mouth full of glace fruit, the fat Removite turned to the fellow at his side.

"I take it that you've given the shuvver instructions to take us to Newbury, Smithy, and that there will be no more nonsense about my travelling by train. If you wish me to keep your shady secrets you've got to treat me like a pal. Which reminds me that I'm temporarily short of funds, so I shall require you to let me have some cash. You needn't worry", he added with a lofty sneer, "I'll settle out of my winnings later. By the way, I hope that the servants have packed plenty of grub in that hamper, bearing in mind the kind of things of which I am fond!"

"You needn't worry, old fat man", the Bounder replied, looking strangely at his fellow-passenger. "What's in that hamper should be ample for your needs and, if it isn't exactly what you've been accustomed to in the past, at least it is what I think you will be accustomed to in the future!"

The car had left the London streets and thoroughfares behind and was now running through the open countryside. Outside, the flurry of snow had become heavier and fields and meadows were receiving a deeper blanket of white. Villages and small townships flashed by, and the broad ribbon of the highway had been exchanged for narrower roads which, in their turn, gave way to winding country lanes that were little more than cart tracks. Bunter's attention, hitherto directed at the supply of glacé fruits, was now focussed on the landscape. The route to Newbury seemed to be a very roundabout one! Suddenly the car slackened and then stopped. As it did so, Jenkins pushed back the communicating panel.

"This seems a suitable spot, Master Herbert. The nearest village is some two miles away, a rather pleasant walk if you are prepared to weather the snow!"

"Quite so Jenkins", agreed Smithy turning to Bunter. "Jenkins and I are whales on exercise, old fat man. It would do you good to join us in a tramp to the nearest village. There and back can't be more than five miles. Are you coming?"

Bunter blinked at Smithy indignantly. Exercise of any kind held no attraction for him at any time, besides he was anxious to reach Newbury and invest some of the Bounder's cash.

"And what about Newbury?" he enquired indignantly. "I thought I made it clear to you that I wished to give the races a look in!"

"Nothing about Newbury", the Bounder replied smoothly. "Racing has been cancelled for the day, according to the BBC broadcast before we left home. Now are you coming or not?"

Bunter gave Smith a glare that threatened to crack the glass in his specs. Why Vernon-Smith should expect him even to consider a walk through the snow, when he could sit back in the comfort of the car and investigate the contents of the hamper, Bunter could not even begin to comprehend. The fact, of course, was that the Bounder did not expect Bunter to stir himself. He rather knew his Bunter of old!

"Please yourself", came the terse reply as he and the chauffeur left the car.

The figures of schoolboy and chauffeur were soon lost to sight, and Bunter decided that it was safe to turn his attention to that outsize in hampers. It was as well, Bunter considered, that the contents of that hamper be attended to now. After all, there might be only sufficient grub for one - or at least one of Bunter's appetite! And if there was only enough for one, that one was going to be W.G. Bunter! The lid of the hamper was fastened by a twisted length of wire, a very twisted length of wire indeed! How unnecessary, Bunter thought petulantly. But difficulties were made to be overcome. It took both time and effort to untwist that awful length of wire but, as he toiled, Bunter's fat mind dwelt on the good things that would be revealed. Flasks of hot soup to be followed by cold meats of every description, and then a host of those sticky confections that Bunter liked best! At long last the wire was straightened enough to be removed and, with impatient haste, Bunter lifted the lid, an expectant and ecstatic, smile on his chubby face as he did so. Then, and only then, came a sudden change o'er the spirit of the dream.

"The rotten beasts!"

No flask of hot soup greeted his piggy eyes; no array of meat and pastries. There, neatly arranged in a bed of straw, lay a loaf of bread and a bottle of mineral water. Only that and nothing more, and Bunter gazed at the contents of that hamper in both anger and dismay.

Bread and water, even mineral water, held no appeal at all for Bunter. He could only surmise that this was some hideous jape of Vernon-Smith's. Well, the Bounder was going to learn that he, Bunter - like the good old Queen - was not amused. Bunter could hardly wait to show his displeasure, but wait he had to! As minute followed minute, so did the frown on Bunter's indignant brow intensify and the feelings in his fat breast could have found expression in no known tongue! It was an hour and a half before Vernon-Smith and Jenkins came in sight through the swirling flakes of snow. They were laughing as they came, as though they were enjoying a joke together. It was a pleasing picture of the young master and the not so young servant sharing a moment of festive goodwill - a picture of goodwill that might have inspired the great pen of Dickens himself, but which failed to inspire Bunter! For one thing, he did not believe in being familiar with menials and, for another, what he had to say to Smithy was to be said with emphasis and without delay! As Vernon-Smith came up to the Rolls and looked in on its fat occupant, Bunter, his face flushed with indignation, pointed dramatically to the hamper!

"I suppose", he demanded, his face registering scorn, "that you consider this some form of joke. Leaving a fellow for hours with only bread and water! I suppose-----"

"Not at all", replied the Bounder blandly. "I said that the hamper contained what would be ample for your needs, and so it should have been. After all, chaps have been known to survive for weeks on bread and water. I also said that you would become accustomed to it in the future. So you will, you fat freak of a blackmailer, when eventually you go to chokey. Right! get her moving, Jenkins!"

"Right! That does it!" Bunter declared wrathfully. "I take you up. I keep your rotten secrets, and all the thanks I get is to be kept short of grub and to have cheap insults thrown at me. Well we shall see what your chances are at Greyfriars next term! I rather fancy that when the Head sees a certain letter, you won't be seeing much of Greyfriars. Perhaps you'll think it funny when you've got the sack. Now chew on that and, if you want me to change my mind, the sooner we get to a place for a meal the better!"

"Not my fault if you haven't had the lunch I provided for you. You see, Jenkins and I had a very good lunch, back at the last village. They do you really well at "The Happy Trencherman"! You know, the usual stuff, roast turkey, the trimmings, Christmas pudding, mince pies-----"

"Beast! Just you wait until the Head jolly well gets that letter!"

"What letter is this that you keep burbling about?" enquired Smithy, with interest.

"You jolly well know what I mean", bawled Bunter. "The one that Joey Banks wrote to you about your shady betting transactions!" Which was rather cool, coming from someone who had been planning a day at the races and laying bets with someone else's money!

At this point in the proceedings Vernon-Smith should have recoiled in fear at the thought of the Headmaster of Greyfriars receiving such a letter as Bunter had described. At this point, Vernon-Smith should have begged Bunter's pardon for the spiteful joke of the bread and water. At this point he should have instructed Jenkins to drive to the nearest restaurant where Bunter would have been free to gorge himself to his own satisfaction and at the Bounder's expense. At this point in the proceedings all these things should have happened and, indeed, Bunter waited for them to happen, a bullying sneer on his fat face and fire of vengeance in his heart! Vernon-Smith did none of the things expected of him by Bunter and, as he waited in vain for the Bounder to do so, a feeling of unease came over the Falstaff of the Remove. He did not like the smile on Smithy's face. It was not a nice smile, and it did not convey any seasonal message of joy!

"You see, you fat freak, there isn't any letter, and I fancy if you mention any such matter to the Beak he will call upon you to produce it. I reckon that he might give you a flogging for wasting his time. Still you're welcome to the flogging and I hope that the Head lays it on hard!"

Bunter's brain worked in mysterious ways its wonders to perform and certainly at no great speed. Yet even Bunter could assimilate the fact that something had gone wrong, dreadfully wrong, with his grand strategy for an expensive Christmas. He gazed at the Bounder in ever increasing horror as he wondered what was to come next.

"The bread and water diet is what blackmailing johnnies can expect if they get found out, so be warned. After this you will not be coming back to Portman Square. You've reminded me enough times of the number of invitations you have had from or sent to, your nobby friends. Well, I'm going to drop you off at one of their homes. No! Don't thank me. They are welcome to you: that is, of course, if they want you!"

The miles had been speeding away beneath of the Rolls. It was now mid-afternoon. Bunter had given scant thought to time and space, but now he realised how important it was that he should be settled for the night. It was considerate, in the circumstances, for the Bounder to be dropping him off at the home a friend, although it was extremely doubtful if the 'friend' would think so!

"I say, Smithy! Do you thing that we will get to Wharton Lodge in time for tea? I'm famished because of that rotten joke of yours, and I shall be ill if I don't have something to eat soon."

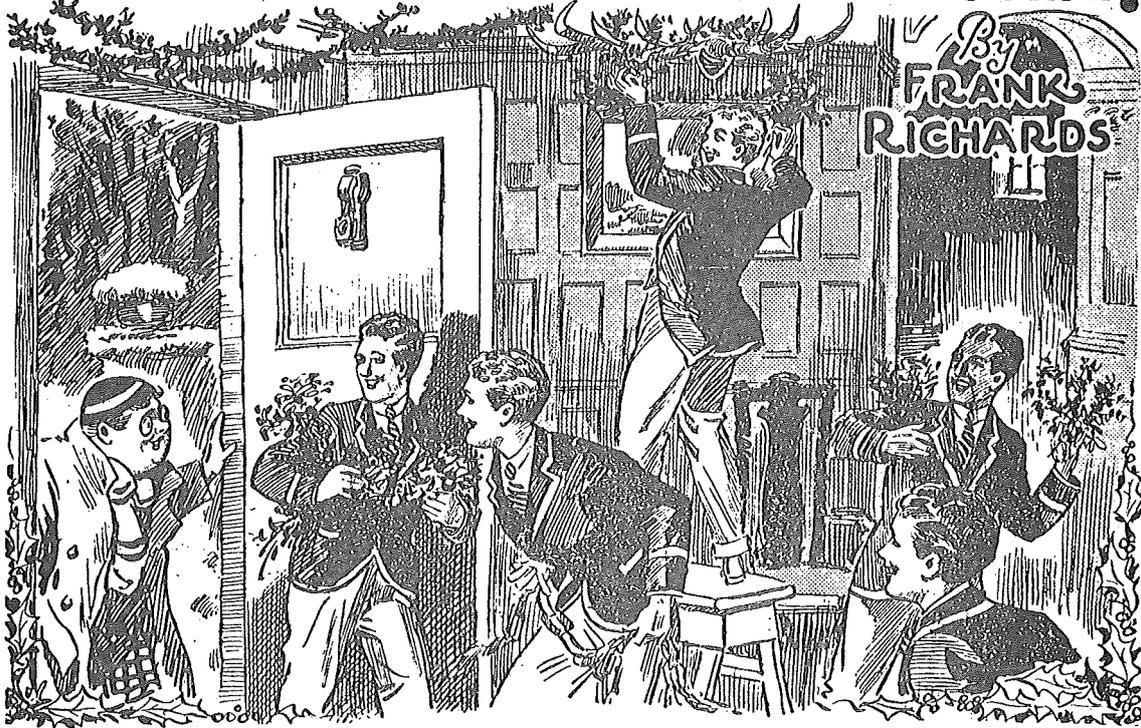
"Who said I was going to take you to Wharton's place? It was only last week that you were telling Wharton that you couldn't bear staying at his pokey little place. Something grander is more in your line, somewhere where you won't have to rub shoulders with the sons of the poor-----"

"Mauleverer Towers will suit me fine, but let's have some tea before we go on!"

"It's not Mauly's place either," replied the Bounder, "For you, old fat man, nothing but the best! I gather these people do their guests rather well in the food line. What's

more, they are likely to give the odd race meeting a look in. There's one drawback, though! I believe they expect you to wash. That'll be a bit of a novelty for you! Ah! I think that we are nearly there!"

## HARRY WHARTON'S CHRISTMAS GUEST!



The car was running into a small town, the streets of which were thronged with people doing their Christmas shopping. Jenkins slowed down beside a massive stone wall and the car came to a halt before some equally massive gates.

"This is where you get out, Bunter," announced Smithy cheerily. "Just in time for tea - if you get anywhere near it!"

Bunter sat puzzled for a moment. Jenkins was already opening the door for him, and the fat Removite stepped out and looked around him. The car door slammed and the chauffeur returned to his seat as Smithy lowered his window for a word of farewell.

"I-I-I say, Smithy, where am I!"

"Don't you know? asked the Bounder. "Surely you recognise the home of your friends? Look over there, perhaps that will refresh your memory!"

Bunter followed the direction indicated by his schoolfellow. Inside the gateway a wide road wound uphill toward a formidable round tower. From that tower a coloured standard was fluttering from the top of a flagstaff. Bunter was the despair of his form-master on the subject of English history, but even Bunter could not fail to recognise the battlements, the turrets, and the buildings of many centuries that lay ahead of him!

"Smithy! Stop! You can't leave me here. Stop you beast!"

The Rolls was already in motion, the Bounder leaning out for a final word.

"So long, Bunter. Have a good time eating off the gold plate! Don't forget to give my regards to your old pals, the princes!"

Bunter gazed after the car until it disappeared. For a moment he paused, undetermined what to do now that he had been cast off by Smithy. When Bunter eventually moved, however, it was not toward the castle. Bunter had enough neck for most things, and often a bit over. It had been all right swanking that a couple of the princes might drop in at Bunter Court. What a couple of the princes might say to Bunter returning this real - or imagined - courtesy, Bunter did not dare to think! When he moved, he moved

toward a distant telephone kiosk in the bustling Windsor High Street. And, as he moved, he wondered whether anyone at Wharton Lodge would accept a reverse-charge telephone call!

\*\*\*\*\*

The tea that they had taken in Wharton's den was all but over when Wells announced that Master Harry was wanted on the telephone.

"It is Master Bunter, sir, and I have taken the liberty of accepting the charge for the call which is, I understand, coming from Windsor. Master Bunter said that he was calling on a matter of the greatest importance!"

"Thank you, Wells, I will take the call." Harry Wharton looked significantly at the other members of the Co. and they looked significantly back. The signs and portents were all too familiar to them! Wharton Lodge was, once more, due to give shelter to the never welcome guest!



Christmas 1990! God bless us all, fans of the Boys' Schools, of the Girls' Schools, and of the "World of Comics", each and every one.

BILL LISTER.

\*\*\*\*\*

Yuletide Greetings and All Seasonal Good Wishes for a Merry Christmas and Happy and Peaceful New Year.

GEOFFREY CRANG, INDIAN QUEENS, CORNWALL

\*\*\*\*\*

Season's Greetings to all friends. Is anyone interested in exchanging duplicates?

KEN TOWNSEND, 7 NORTH CLOSE, WILLINGTON, DERBY, DE6 6EA.

Telephone: Burton-on-Trent 703305

\*\*\*\*\*

WANTED to purchase: H.B. Vols. 26, 'A Bargain for Bunter'; 29, 'The Mystery of the Moat House'; 37, 'Billy Bunter's Lucky Day'; 38, 'Bunter Tells the Truth' - and H.B. Book Club: 1, 'The Worst Boy at Greyfriars'; 4, 'Harry Wharton & Co. in India'; 5, 'Tom Merry's Schooldays', and H.B. Book club 7, 'The Greyfriars Crusaders'. All postage will be paid. Write with offers to:

NAVEED HAQUE, 152 SPADINA ROAD, RICHMOND HILL, ONTARIO,  
L4B 2V2, CANADA.

(P.S. I am also interested in Skilton & Cassell's post-war Bunter Books)

\*\*\*\*\*

Season's Greetings to all Hobby Friends old and new. Always interested to hear of Rupert Items for sale.

JOHN BECK, 29 MILL ROAD, LEWES, SUSSEX

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Christmas Greetings and best wishes to Madam Editor, Eric, Chris, Norman, Laurie, Les, Bill, Mac, and Collectors everywhere. I still want C.D. Annuals 1947, 1948, 1953. Early Saints, etc. to swap or sell.

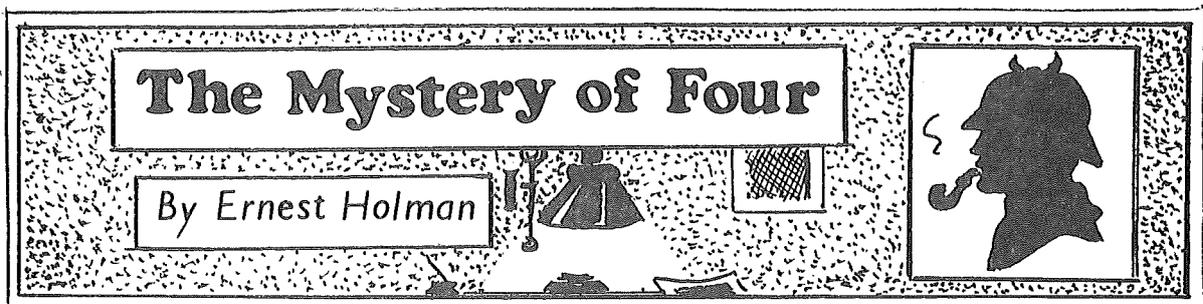
JOHN BRIDGWATER, 5A SAULFLAND PLACE, HIGHCLIFFE, CHRISTCHURCH,  
DORSET, BH23 4QP

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Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year to all Digest readers.

LESLIE KING, CHESHAM, BUCKS

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## PROLOGUE

One of the many places of destruction during the London war-time Blitz was an 'impregnable' deep Bank Vault in premises at Charing Cross. Amongst the irrecoverable possessions therein was a travel-worn and battered tin despatch box, with a painted name upon the lid - that of John H. Watson, M.D., late Indian Army.

Watson, in his chronicles of Sherlock Holmes, tells us that this box was crammed with papers, most of them concerned with the great detective. Most of them - but what Watson never revealed were the undoubted private papers of his own life.

They were not considered worthy of much mention in his many Case Books - and in those days of more rational publishing, the Doctor would not have given any thought to writing his Autobiography. Unhappily, nobody else was ever able to concoct a 'Life of John Watson', which is my main reason for assuming, by now, that any available papers for a researcher would long ago have turned up.

There would have been a great deal of interest today in a Biography of the good Medico; for, whilst much over the years has emerged relating to Holmes, far less has been forthcoming about the Doctor's full life. Just **what** was contained within that tin despatch box - a treasure trove that vanished for ever fifty years ago?



*(Illustrations from the Strand Magazine by Sidney Paget)*

## A QUESTION FOR THOUGHT

The revelation that would have interested me more than a little would be the truth behind the four stories of Holmes that Watson DID NOT write. During the last decade of the Strand Magazine adventures of Holmes, four episodes did not emanate from J.H.W. I will take them individually in a moment or so, but before then, I must lay claim to a thought that a certain aspect of our Hobby might well be applied to the great investigator. I will

dare to say it, moreover, on the basis of a particular type of person reputed to be slow of intellect but of forward movement - well, I'm no angel! Therefore, I am going to suggest that the four 'non-Watson' stories were (No, no, Moriarty, not that!) - substitute stories!

So - here goes; let's have a look at the luckless quartet.

### ON HIS MAJESTY'S SERVICE

In the September 1917 issue of the Strand appeared a story entitled 'His Last Bow', and the reader was further enlightened to the extent that it recorded the War Service of Sherlock Holmes. Watson appeared as a heavily-built, elderly chauffeur with a grey moustache. He is not identified until the Von Bork affair is 'sewn up', when he learns what his old companion has been up to in recent years. He is told the details over a glass of Imperial Tokay but it is only during the last few paragraphs that anything like a Holmes-Watson conversation occurs. Holmes describes his old friend as the one fixed point in a changing age, which before long would see a cleaner, better, stronger land.

We were left to wonder why, with all the facts at his disposal, Watson allowed someone else to become narrator of his (until then) unbroken sequence of Strand stories. 'His Last Bow' at least did have the merit of being a good story, but written purely as adventure.

Sight must not be lost, of course, of the fact that at about this time in the history of the Strand Magazine, Watson's offerings were becoming occasional pieces. Watson admits, in 'The Second Stain', that the blame for this lay with Holmes himself. With the detective's retirement to Sussex in 1903, he now became reluctant to a continuance of Watson's accounts of his Cases.

Grudgingly, he did relax from time to time to permit his Chronicler to produce another offering - but it was probably hard work indeed for Watson to obtain that sanction. By 1917, when 'His Last Bow' finally broke the Doctor's succession of writings, Watson had been allowed to average only about a story once every second year. Perhaps his ardour cooled somewhat as a result of this 'slowing up'.

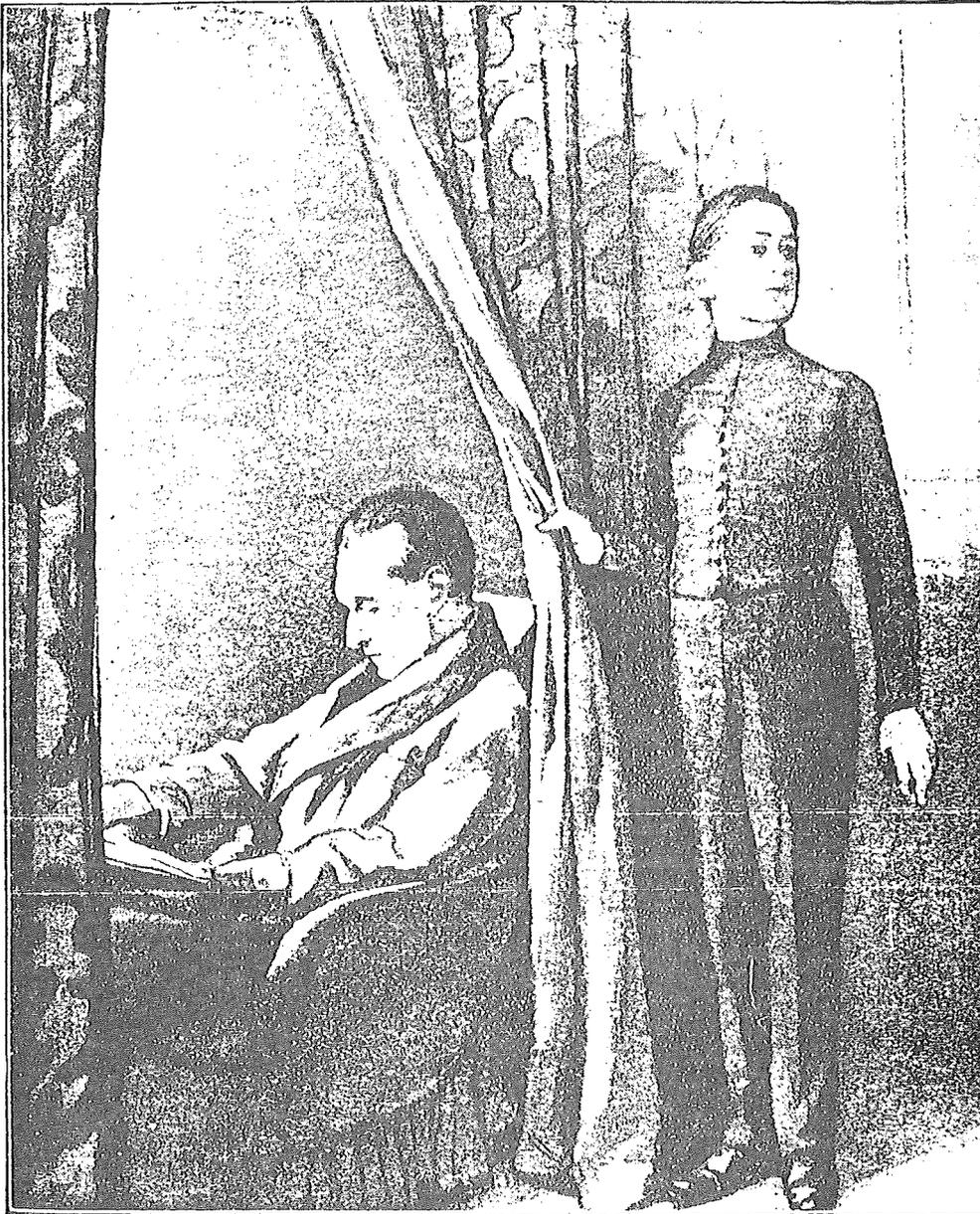
### THE PYGMALION TOUCH

The next story of Holmes did not appear until 1921 - once again, the teller was not Watson. Obvious, too, was the fact that the writer of the previous tale had not attempted 'The Mazarin Stone'. The reader must have shaken his head sadly over this one and wondered 'whatever next'. For years now, the Sidney Paget illustrations had been finished and now it began to look as if the good Doctor was finished, also - as a story teller. He was present well enough in 'Mazarin', but this story of Count Sylvius had all the features of a 'non-original', those 'way-off' substitute renderings so well-known to Hobbyists.

The reader was asked to believe that, with Watson a rare visitor to 221b, the detective's loneliness and isolation (!?!) were relieved by the presence of Billy, the Page Boy. No indication is given of the time or period of this adventure - and Billy had first appeared many years earlier in William Gillette's play 'Sherlock Holmes' (a part once played by a young actor named Charles Chaplin).

It is Billy who introduces Watson to the 'latest' addition to Baker Street - an effigy of Holmes. The author of this story does allow Watson to remark that something of the sort had happened in the past; which, Billy told him, would have been before his time. After these 'unrealities', the story of Sylvius continues. The ending is as unlikely as many other parts of the story - the effigy suddenly comes to life, revealing itself as Holmes!

If such events ever took place in Baker Street, I suggest that they were on the premises of other detectives! Fortunately, the inadequacies of 'Mazarin' settled the procedure - Watson was back again reciting the next adventure and he continued so to do at irregular but unbroken intervals - until .....



'BILLY ADVANCED AND DREW AWAY THE DRAPERY.'

*(Illustration by A. Gilbert)*

### UNACCOMPANIED SOLO

The Strand Magazine for November 1926 presented 'The Blanched Soldier' as the first adventure ever related by Sherlock Holmes himself! (After reading the story, perhaps one exclamation mark after the previous statement would seem very inadequate!) As is well-known by C.D. readers, much has been written about substitute 'howlers'; foremost amongst them are the ignoring of traditional behaviours, as well as a disregard for dates. In 'Blanched Soldier' this is very apparent.

The statement that this story took place after the conclusion of the Boer War can be taken with a large pinch of salt! Above all else, what is one to make of the following:

"The good Watson had at that time deserted me  
for a wife, the only selfish action that I can recall ..."

This, of course, is the unhappy passage that has led so many researchers to take for granted that Watson had again undertaken matrimony. It is only near the end that any part

of the story really calls for mention. Holmes, entirely on his own without his good companion, comes to the conclusion that the soldier had contracted leprosy.

The unreality of the whole affair, however, occurs when Holmes is told (Holmes is TOLD - I ask you!) that it is merely a case of pseudo-leprosy or ichthyosis. Perhaps the author would have been wiser if he had given this 'Teller' a different name than Ensworth!

Written by Sherlock Holmes himself indeed!!

## FINAL BRIEF

The last of the four stories in question and the one requiring least in the way of remarks. It is a moderately readable tale, told with perhaps clinical correctness and presumably endeavouring to convey that Holmes, in the fifth year of his Sussex retirement, had not lost his faculties. There isn't really much more to say about 'The Lion's Mane' other than to use that one-time favourite School Report 'get-out' and describe it as satisfactory. How many readers remembered *Cyanea Capillata*?

## THE NOUGHT PER CENT SOLUTION

For the remainder of the Strand stories, Watson was responsible - but there were only three more after 'Lion's Mane'.

So - believe it or not, like it or otherwise - for the life of me I cannot see any other description for the mysterious four stories. They were the work of substitute writers.

We shall never know, now, of course. All details have long since passed. I will say one thing, though - at least none of the four authors attempted to put the events as seen by or in the words of Watson. In that respect, they were not, strictly speaking, imitations.

That was simply 'not done', was it?

## EPILOGUE

I floated on to Holmes' Cloud one day with some news.

"Those people 'down there', Holmes" I started off without preamble, "are referring to THOSE four stories as substitutes!"

"Poof, Watson!" was the reply in the language of former times. "A substitute writer is someone who assumes another person's accepted name. No one ever wrote as your good self, now, did they?"

"True, Holmes", I concurred. "All the same, I don't like to learn of such talk. As you know, my war wound had affected my writing arm to such an extent that sometimes I could not hold a pen. The Magazine was very patient with me, but they had to do something to continue the stories."

"Dismiss the whole thing from your mind", suggested the detective. "It is of no great importance."

"That's all very well", I replied. "Thanks to you, I was allowed to give the impression that you were the cause of so few stories. You acted very generously, Holmes and I was always most grateful. I just don't like to know of all that loose talk below."

"I doubt if it is talk, Watson" Holmes remarked. "To me it seems that one misguided, ill-informed individual is merely starting something for no other reason than controversy. He is, you see, merely an itinerant nonentity, not even a member of any recognised Sherlockian Lodge."

I looked straight at him, fixedly.

"Why did you cease your efforts, Holmes, in trying to get the first break-through from here to earth? So much information could be conveyed by us, if only communication were established."

He gave a slight smile.

"I was ready to achieve the impossible - but then it dawned on me that I might have to visit the place again. Oh, no, Watson, that would never have done!"

"So nobody 'down there' will ever know the truth behind the writing of those four events", I said, somewhat bitterly. "They ought to know the reasons - and the people who took on the jobs."

"Nonsense", retorted Holmes. "Besides, out of respect for the gallant scribes who helped out, not all of them would have welcomed the publicity. Gregson, admittedly, did a pretty reasonable job on my War Service - but think of the people who knew Lestrade and his family - surely, at the least, the fact that he wrote 'Mazarin' shouldn't be circularised?"

"But Holmes", I added, "even though your own brother was responsible for that third thing, that should be made known. Why, in one place it was slanderous!"

"Well, well, Watson" - he half inclined his head - "Mycroft was, in his way, a good fellow. He meant well, mainly - it was just that he was jealous of you. He always felt he should be 'next' to me. I did take him to task and, if you recall, he had to be persuaded to attend my funeral."

"At least, Holmes" I said eagerly, "you put everything right with the fourth story. I felt I could well carry on after that, if my arm would let me."

"Well, I did think that at least one of the sixty items of our Saga should be handed to me. If I may say so", he went on, wryly, "I don't think I made at all a bad fist of it."

"You did not, indeed" I assured him. "Then you think it is - what shall I say - a case of letting sleeping dogs lie?"

"Of course, Watson. So many people are always happier to be blissful in the light of incorrect or insufficient knowledge. Wisdom, believe me, is not always a desirable adjunct."

He rose to his feet and placed a hand upon my now entirely-healed 'Jezail' shoulder. Slipping his Celestial Briar between his lips, he said, quietly:

"The people we left behind haven't our advantages, old friend. After all, THEY are but mortals!"



Merry Christmas everyone. Wanted: Howard Baker Vol. 2, Loder for Captain. Write:  
DENNIS BEEBY, 27 HILLSIDE ROAD, WELLINGBOROUGH,  
NORTHANTS, NN8 4AW

\*\*\*\*\*

Season's Greetings to everyone. I still require Bunter Books, Holiday Annuals, Biggles,  
Schoolgirls' Own Library, Monica Edwards.  
GEORGE SEWELL, 27 HUMBERSTONE ROAD, CAMBRIDGE, CB4 1JD

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Best Wishes Everybody, and Good Health.  
JIM COOK, NEW ZEALAND

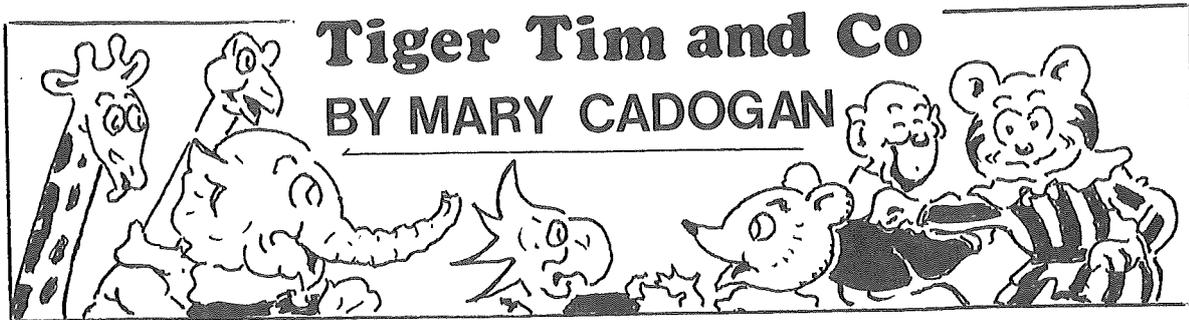
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Christmas Greetings and a Happy Healthy New Year to Eric, Mary, The Staff and all  
Readers of Collectors' Digest from  
JOSEPH P. FITZGERALD OF MANCHESTER

\*\*\*\*\*

The compliments of the Season to all Hobby Friends.  
DR. JOHNNY AND BETTY HOPTON, 79 SCALPCLIFFE ROAD,  
BURTON ON TRENT

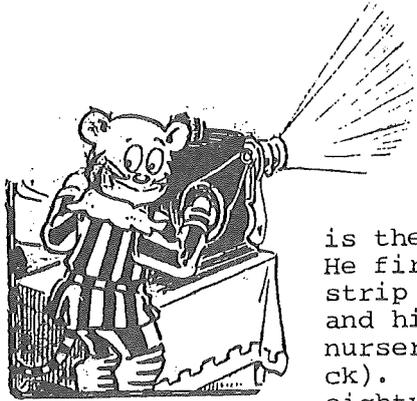
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# Tiger Tim and Co

BY MARY CADOGAN

*(This article was originally written for BRITISH COMIC WORLD No. 3 in 1984 to celebrate the eightieth year of Tiger Tim. This engaging character regrettably is no longer featured in a regular weekly strip, although he and his chums crop up from time to time in various comic 'specials'. Let us hope that - as in the past - the Bruin Boys will one day again become regular, weekly stars!)*



**B**OUNCY, beaming and benevolent Tiger Tim is the longest running character in British comics. He first saw the light of day in a DAILY MIRROR strip by Julius Stafford Baker on 16th April, 1904, and his engaging exploits continue today in IPC's nursery comic JACK AND JILL (drawn by Peter Woolcock). There have been one or two gaps during this eighty year run when Tim and his strangely assorted group of animal friends have been 'resting' from regular publication - but these, happily, have been very brief. Several generations of Tiger Tim fans now exist, of course, and the RAINBOW's claim during the 1930's that it was read and enjoyed "from Palace to Cottage" had its basis in truth. The vast numbers of appreciative letters from widely different homes throughout the country, Commonwealth and Empire included one from 'the little Princesses' (Elizabeth and Margaret Rose) which was for a period framed and displayed in RAINBOW's editorial offices.

It is interesting to consider just why the charms of Tiger Tim and the Bruin (originally Hippo) Boys have such wide and long-standing appeal despite the fact that over these eighty years their 'Co.' has been subjected to changes in personnel (if that word can accurately be applied to animals!), and drawn by several different artists. Always, however, they have retained their original sense of lively but unmalicious mischief, of sheer good fun, and innocence. Animals with human characteristics (either real or symbolic) have been prominent in fiction and pictures from AESOP'S FABLES to ANIMAL FARM and WATERSHIP DOWN. They have sometimes been horrific distortions, occasionally vulgar, decadent or 'twee', and sometimes comically robust and endearing. Tiger Tim, of course, fits firmly into the last category.

The story of his origin is intriguing, and possibly apocryphal; Brian Doyle relates it in his book THE WHO'S WHO OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE in a paragraph on J. Louis Smythe, a prolific Irish illustrator born in the 1880's:

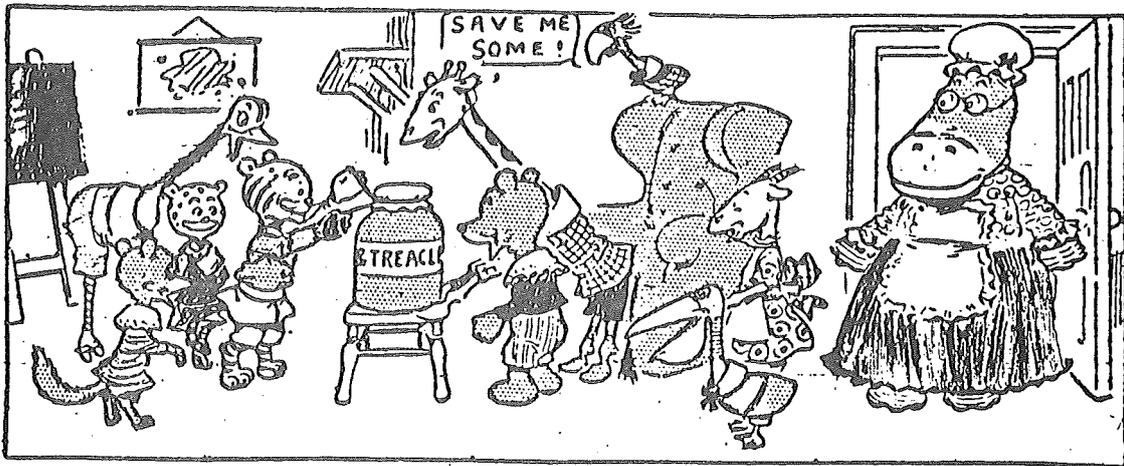
## THE MAGIC MILESTONE



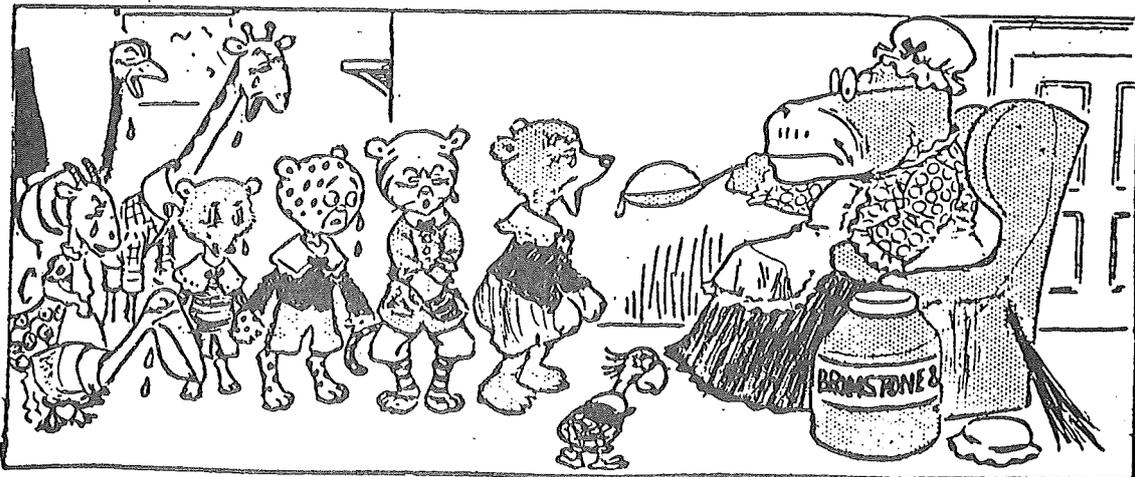
MRS. HIPPO'S KINDERGARTEN.



"Hooray! Mrs. Hippo has left the schoolroom! Now is our time to peep into that treacle-jar," cried Tiger Tim, jumping up on to a chair to reach the goodies. You may be sure the other pupils didn't mind - in fact, Willy Giraffe's mouth watered at the thought of so much happiness. And as for little Peter Pelican, he eyed the jar with rapture in his gaze.



"Please, let me have the first taste," piped Master Peter Pelican. "Don't you trust him," squeaked Freddy Fox. "Look at his big beak! There would be nothing left for us if he had a mouthful." Tiger Tim, being the ringleader, was allowed the honour of opening the jar. "See how easy it is, boys," said he. "I just pull the string, and -"



Then Mrs. Hippo came in! Oh dear, how very awkward! "So you want some spring-medicine, do you, my little darlings?" Mrs. Hippo remarked. "Well, you shall have it. This jar contains brimstone as well as treacle." "Ugh," sobbed Billy Bruin. "I don't want any brimstone. I'm quite well, thank you, Mrs. Hippo!" But, all the same, you may be sure that Mrs. Hippo served a spoonful to each pupil. And for many a long day after that no one wanted treacle.

Above: Tiger Tim's first appearance in strip format (DAILY MIRROR, 16 April 1904)

'Smythe was called upon to picture an incident from a story. The passage chosen was one in which the heroine stepped from her carriage and entered a house... "followed by her tiger, Tim." And Smythe, unaware of the fact that in this instance 'tiger' signified a page-boy or youthful attendant, drew instead a small striped tiger promenading serenely upright upon his hind legs!'

According to Brian Doyle, the editor who had commissioned Smythe's drawings, gasped, laughed and mentally noted for future use this new and attractive character, who would one day become known as Tiger Tim.

But in fact it was not Smythe but another popular artist, Julius Stafford Baker (the creator of 'Casey Court' in CHIPS), who first drew Tiger Tim commercially. Baker used Tim and some animal chums when he was asked to produce a children's strip for the DAILY MIRROR in 1904. He made three drawings, under the heading of 'Mrs. Hippo's Kindergarten', and these appeared in the kiddies' section ('Our Children's Pictures') of the women's page ('Housewives' Bureau').

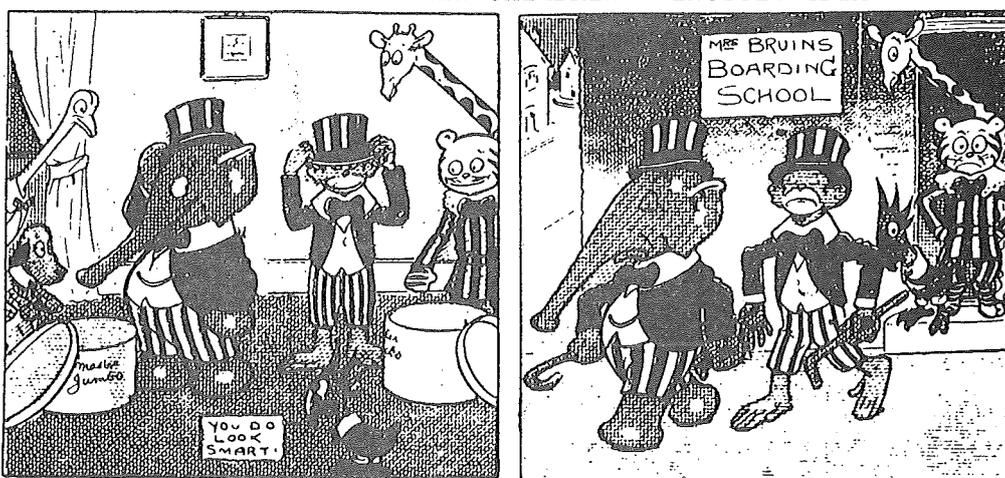
These first Tiger Tim pictures are approximately 3 inches by 7, in the horizontal format that Baker often favoured for his subsequent Hippo Boys strips. In black and white, the pictures have great vitality; Mrs. Hippo, in the mob cap, glasses, flowery blouses and long skirts that were to become so familiar to young readers is shown as an extremely large lady. Tim, mischievous from the beginning, finds an enormous jar marked TREACLE on a shelf. He gets it down onto a chair to open it, while Mrs. Hippo is out. But she returns before he can do so - and then insists on giving each of her pupils a very big, heaped spoonful of the contents of the jar, which actually contains BRIMSTONE AND TREACLE. (Tim & Co. hadn't turned the jar round enough to see the rest of the label.) Ugh! Ugh! Shock! Horror! etc. 'And for many a long day after that no-one wanted treacle.'

It is appropriate that this very first episode should have food as its theme; in subsequent adventures, food (Mrs. Hippo's or Mrs. Bruin's special spreads for the boys; large hampers on their birthdays, and Porky Boy always trying to get more than his fair share) was a recurrent motif. Ringleader Tim, of course, figures in every episode of the saga, but it is interesting to note the changes that have occurred over the years in his group of chums. In addition to Tim, the eighty-year-old MIRROR strip included the following un-named animals: an ostrich, a leopard, a parrot and a girl goat (who didn't survive for very long), plus four named animals, Peter Pelican, Freddy Fox, Billy Bruin and Willy Giraffe (the last two, of course, changed their names later on to Bobby and Georgie respectively). Incidentally Tim, though having the striped head, hands, tail, legs and feet that we always associate with him, wore a plain jacket and trousers then, and not those stripey outfits that he sported later in the series.

Despite its vigour and perkiness, the April 16th 1904 MIRROR strip was only a once-off affair. Later that year, however, Baker featured Tiger Tim & Co. in THE PLAYBOX, a juvenile supplement to a monthly magazine, THE WORLD AND HIS WIFE. They appeared in Arthur Mee's part-work THE NEW CHILDREN'S ENCYCLOPEDIA in 1910, in his later CHILDREN'S MAGAZINE and MY MAGAZINE, which were really continuations of Mee's Encyclopedia. The goat character soon shed its femininity and became male - so our heroes became known as the Hippo Boys. By 1913 (when S.J. Cash had for a time taken over from J.S. Baker) the group had settled down into 8 of those who have survived to this day - Tiger Tim, Jacko the monkey, Jumbo the elephant, Joey the parrot, Fido the dog, Georgie Giraffe, Bobby Bruin and Piggy Wiggy (not known as Porky Boy for some time to come). The Ostrich had temporarily faded out, but the ranks of the Hippo Boys at this time were swollen by Dicky Duck, Master Lion, Johnny Bull and the goat mentioned above.

A strange period in the history of Tiger Tim & Co. was to follow. When Harmsworth's RAINBOW was launched on February 14th 1914 they became its regular stars, in a J.S. Baker full colour strip that occupied the front page. However, their adventures continued in Mee's MY MAGAZINE (also a Harmsworth publication) in the hands of S.J. Cash. In the RAINBOW they had become the Bruin Boys (attending Mrs. Bruin's Boarding-School) while in MY MAGAZINE they were still the Hippo Boys, attending Mrs. Hippo's Kindergarten and living in Hippo Town! All this must of course have been extremely confusing to any child whose family bought both publications. (Similarly during the 1930's it was confusing for girl readers to find that Bessie Bunter of the SCHOOLGIRL, written about by John Wheway, as 'Hilda Richards', and drawn by T.E. Laidler, was very different from the Bessie Bunter character in the contemporary MAGNET, who was authored by Charles Hamilton ('Frank Richards') and drawn by C.H. Chapman or Leonard Shields.)

The Hippo Boys were still going strong in MY MAGAZINE during 1916 and '17, although during this period J.S. Baker was the artist! (It is probable that all these strips were repeats of some used earlier in THE PLAYBOX section of the NEW CHILDREN'S ENCYCLOPEDIA - but the



2. And what do you think? The boxes contained two high hats, for which Jacko and Jumbo had been saving up without saying a word to anybody. They did look smart, too, when they put them on.

3. But that was no excuse for them getting very haughty all of a sudden, and refusing to have anything to do with Tim and the others, was it? "Don't speak to us," they said as they went out. "We're gents, we are! H'm!"

Above: Extract from Tiger Tim in No.11 of THE RAINBOW (25 April 1914).

parallel existence of Tiger Tim & Co. as Bruin Boys and Hippo Boys was bizarre, to say the least. By the way, the ostrich had crept back into the Co. in the 1916/17 MY MAGAZINE episodes just mentioned, and there was then also a rabbit chum.

Once the RAINBOW saga got under way, the ostrich ('Willie') became a permanent member of the Bruin Boys, but the pelican - who suddenly cropped up again - was dropped after the fifth issue. The piggy character was not featured in RAINBOW until issue no.6, when 'Peter Porker' - soon to be known as Porky-Boy - arrived to join the established 8 Bruin Boys - Tim, Jumbo, Jacko, Georgie, Willie, Bobby, Joey and Fido. This group has survived without additions or depletions ever since, and still makes up the 'personnel' of Peter Woolcock's strip in our present-day JACK AND JILL.

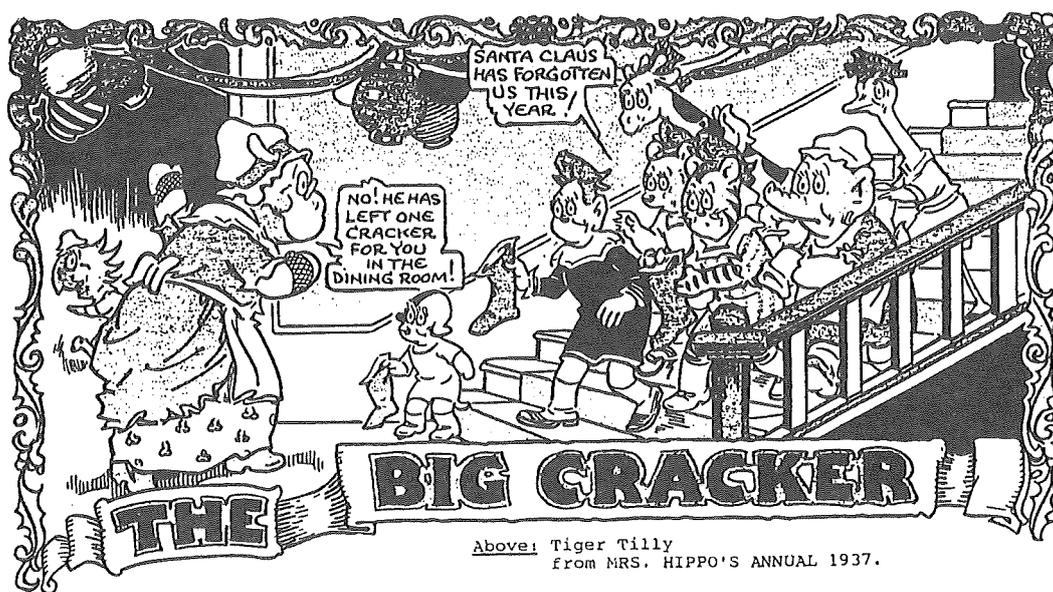
The cosy charm of J.S.Baker's drawings in the RAINBOW rapidly increased the popularity of the Bruin Boys who, by no.7, had begun to take over the heading of the comic as well as its front-page strip. Frequently too they featured in a special cut-out model section at the back of the comic. The Editor's Chat took over a regular space on page 3 from no.31, with a black and white heading picture showing the Bruin Boys 'helping' the editor, and Joey finding a place of his own at the foot of the letter, adding something pithy to the editor's comments.

In these early issues of RAINBOW J.S. Baker firmly established a style and mood that were to last for 80 years, with chuminess over-

flowing between normally warring and predatory animals. Although we do not literally see the Lion lying down with the Lamb, we have the even happier vignette of a tiger pulling a cracker with a bumptious little parrot (who has always - by every artist who depicted him - been illustrated only in profile!). Of course, life for the Bruin Boys is not just one long party or picnic; they are supposed to be at school and the long-suffering Mrs. Bruin tries to make them do sums or learn history; she is usually kind and motherly, but quite prepared to deflate their naughtiness by firmly wielding her cane, and sending her charges to bed for the day when necessary. But, with india-rubber resilience in abundance, good humour is always soon restored (except sometimes in the case of Porky Boy, whose greedy villainy adds a welcome note of astringency to the stories).

The highly gifted artist Herbert Sydney Foxwell took over the illustrating of Tiger Tim & Co. in the early RAINBOW. At first, to maintain continuity, he closely imitated Baker's style so it is not easy to be absolutely sure which strip marked Foxwell's debut into the series - but it appears to be RAINBOW no.25 (1st August 1914). The Bruin Boys are engaged in yet another of their sunny seaside exploits (one wonders just how much time altogether they must have spent digging sandcastles, rowing boats and falling into the sea!) as pierrots, in an episode entitled 'How They Almost Got Rich'. Looking back at this period of the RAINBOW's history there is a special poignancy about the date mentioned above; with hindsight we know that the world of innocence and serenity that the Bruin Boys then symbolised was three days later to see the beginning of its own end when the Great War of 1914/18 started on 4th August. Fortunately, however, Tiger Tim & Co. were fairly untouched by the terrible disillusion and destruction of the War, and indeed by all of the more negative aspects of our between-the-Wars society. The Bruin Boys seemed able always to create their own perky, uncomplicated and glowing world; in this perhaps lies some of their charm and resilience.

Foxwell beautifully rounded out Baker's more spiky originals. He gave the strips more movement, exuberance and - eventually - more detailed backgrounds. His touch was always masterly, and child readers wanted even more adventures of the Bruin Boys than the RAINBOW could accommodate. So Tim & Co. became the stars of another extremely attractive weekly, which was a cross between a comic and a fairy-story paper. This was TIGER TIM'S TALES, a small page publication which ran from 1st June 1919 to 24th January 1920. In this, as well as adorning the cover and the cut-out model section, the Bruin Boys were featured in a lively 4 or 5 page text story, in which several pictures of them were inserted.



Above: Tiger Tilly  
from MRS. HIPPO'S ANNUAL 1937.

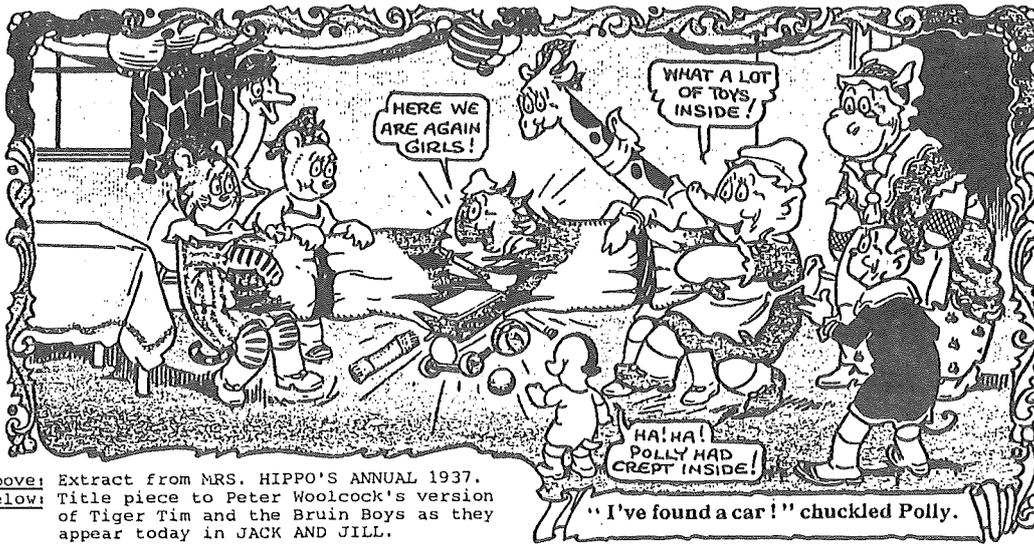
Foxwell drew Tiger Tim and his chums for this paper, as he continued to do when TIGER TIM'S TALES was succeeded on 31st January 1920 by TIGER TIM'S WEEKLY, which started with a small page format but became full tabloid from the end of 1921. Although resembling the RAINBOW in mood and style, this comic continued to feature the long text story of the Bruin Boys that TIGER TIM'S TALES had instituted. They also appeared in one big, dominant picture on the coloured cover, but shared cover space with other characters who had their own strip - the Bumpy Boys. The comic ended in the paper shortages of the Second World War on 18th May 1940, when it was incorporated with the still indestructible RAINBOW.

Foxwell also created the sisters of the Bruin Boys for another RAINBOW-inspired comic, PLAYBOX, which started on 14th February 1925 and ran until 11th June 1955. PLAYBOX was, in a sense, a revival of the early Arthur Mee supplement, but now vastly different from this in feeling and presentation, even though its dear old Mrs. Hippo was resurrected to become school-mistress and surrogate mum to the girls - Tiger Tilly, Gertie Giraffe, Olive Ostrich, Polly Parrot, Baby Jumbo, Jenny Jacko, Fifi (the dog), Betty Bruin and Pearl Porky. Unlike their bare-foot brothers, the Hippo Girls wore crisp white socks and shoes, and, on their heads, mob caps or large ribbons (which could never really have been threaded successfully through their short fur, hair or feathers). A nice touch was that the female giraffe, as well as wearing a ribbon on the top of her head, sported a large one half way up her long, long neck!

The Hippo Girls had their day, but it was shorter-lived than that of the Bruin Boys. I as a child adored them - but by the fairly early 1930's they had been removed from the cover spot to the back page. By the '40's they no longer starred in the Editor's Letter (which had been for many years written by Mrs. Hippo), and they occupied only one or two small pictures on the centre page spread of the comic.

Before the mid-thirties, Foxwell was lured away from RAINBOW,





Above: Extract from MRS. HIPPO'S ANNUAL 1937.  
 Below: Title piece to Peter Woolcock's version of Tiger Tim and the Bruin Boys as they appear today in JACK AND JILL.

TIGER TIM'S WEEKLY and PLAYBOX by great financial inducements from the publishers of the DAILY MAIL. He became the successor to the Folkard brothers on their celebrated TEDDY TAIL strip, which he enlivened with his customary ebullient style. Fortunately, the Amalgamated Press found excellent successors to Foxwell in Bert Wymer and others, and Tiger Tim, Tiger Tilly & their Cos. continued in the happy and heart-warming Foxwell tradition. Although the Hippo Girls were never revived after the demise of PLAYBOX in 1955, the Bruin Boys didn't come to an end when RAINBOW finished on 28th April 1956. The comic was incorporated with TINY TOTS, and Tiger Tim & Co. ran in this for a period from 1956. TINY TOTS ended and merged with PLAYHOUR on 24th January 1959, and Peter Woolcock carried on Tim's saga then in that publication. In 1964 his version of Tiger Tim and the Bruin Boys began in JACK AND JILL that continues to this day. It is good that, eighty years on, we can still enjoy their exuberant adventures - even though there has been some updating. Mrs. Bruin, for example, no longer wears mob cap and mittens - and now we actually see several inches of her legs, which were always completely hidden in RAINBOW! She is a little more spirited than the 1914 version - confiscating the boys' toys occasionally and playing with them herself, or taking part with relish in some of their outdoor activities which are not entirely ladylike. But the boys have changed very little in their garb except, of course, when they wear scout uniforms which have had to keep up with the changes of the times. They seem comparatively untouched by the jet, space and telly age; their mischief is still unsophisticated and their pleasures simple. One of the highspots of their life is still to be at the receiving end of Mrs. Bruin's home-made cakes, jam-tarts and lemonade! They still love their visits to the seaside, their skirmishes with Porkey-Boy, their picnics and parties.

This article is my tribute to the unquenchable charm of Tiger Tim and the Bruin Boys, and to the editors and artists who have perpetuated their saga - particularly Julius Stafford Baker, Herbert Sydney Foxwell and Peter Woolcock.



# PLAYBOY

1937 ANNUAL 1937





1938

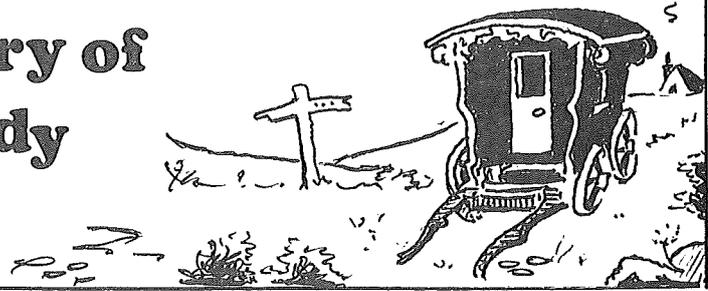
ANNUAL

# THE HIPPOS

MRS

# The Mystery of Jack Nobody

By Derek Adley



Similarities have often been suggested between Charles Dickens and Charles Hamilton, one example being that they both left behind an unfinished work which offered no clues to the conclusion. Dickens left his *Mystery of Edwin Drood* and Hamilton his *Jack of All Trades*.

There were three *Jack of All Trades* books, each with a cliff-hanger ending, and with a somewhat remarkable publishing history. The saga of these books started in 1950 with the issue of *Jack of All Trades* by Mandeville Publications.

The story commences with Jack, called Jack Nobody, endeavouring to avoid yet another session of bullying at the hands of Bill Hatchett. For years he has accompanied the rascal Hatchett around the country, pushing Hatchett's pedlar's cart and always at his beck and call. Jack dearly wants to gain some education for himself and get away from his life with this boozy, dishonest, bullying scoundrel. At every opportunity Jack mugs up on any book that he can get hold of, even including a Latin Dictionary. This of course does nothing for his relationship with Hatchett.

This latest beating is the last straw and, after a skirmish, Jack takes off for good. On his way he comes into contact with Lord Cortolvin who is obviously startled at Jack's resemblance to his son, the Hon. Cecil Cortolvin. The mystery deepens when, shortly after, there is a meeting, previously arranged, between his lordship and Bill Hatchett. It transpires that the former has an arrangement with Hatchett to keep Jack under his control and out of the way. Lord Cortolvin is furious at the boy's escape and orders Hatchett to go after him and get him back. Meanwhile Jack is fortunate to meet up with the Misses Hilda Brown and Elizabeth Hunt who are on a caravan tour. He is engaged to assist them with odd jobs during their travels.

At this time Denver, Lord Cortolvin's ex-secretary is on the run after stealing £1000 of his lordship's money. He too on meeting Jack is struck by the boy's likeness to Cecil Cortolvin. After holding Jack a prisoner, Denver is finally overpowered and captured by the boy, with the assistance of the two ladies. Lord Cortolvin makes it known that as a reward to Jack he will have him educated at a good school when he takes his leave of the caravanners. In fact, his real intention is to return him to Bill Hatchett once he has parted company with his new friends.

Jack has two further meetings, first with Augustus Brown, Hilda's nephew and a pupil of Coombe School, who proves himself a thoroughly nasty piece of work, and then with Cecil Cortolvin, a fellow pupil of Brown's and a really nice chap. The two boys are amazed to find they look like twins, but apparently that's as far as it goes. Lord Cortolvin eventually sends his valet Jervis to collect Jack and supposedly take him to one of his lordship's country seats and then on to a public school. The story ends with the train taking Jack and Jervis to their destination. It is worth noting at this stage that the year is 1950!

## BOOK 2. *Jack's the Lad.*

The year is now 1955, drawing to a close, with Jack and Jarvis still on the train! This is not meant to be facetious, but simply looking at the situation from the readers' point of view because by this time many will have put juvenile reading behind them.

When they leave the train, Jervis delivers Jack straight into the hands of Bill Hatchett and once again he reverts to being something of a ragged urchin and Bill's lackey. It is at this point at last that Jack realises there must be a very good reason for Bill wanting to keep him under his wing, and that Lord Cortolvin is somehow at the back of this. Escaping

JACK  
OF ALL  
TRADES

by

FRANK  
RICHARDS



MANDEVILLE

# JACK OF ALL TRADES

by FRANK RICHARDS

Author of "BILLY BUNTER"



from Bill's clutches yet again, he joins up with Pippers Travelling Circus and is befriended by the circus clown, Montmorency Cyril Chipmonk, and other circus performers. But he also makes an enemy in Dick Kenney, the ring rider who is the circus main attraction. Kenney hates Jack because of his ability in the ring and his skill with horses. Many adventures follow, concerning Jack's efforts to keep clear of Bill Hatchett.

Jack is subsequently confronted by Jervis who claims he has been misunderstood and wishes to take him to meet the Lord, but Jack, who now has a deep distrust for him, declines. In the closing stages of this book Jervis is pondering on other ways of luring Jack away.

### BOOK 3. *Jack of the Circus.*

Jack, who now calls himself Jack Free, is still with Pippers Circus, and as the title suggests the entire book has this circus setting. Interestingly the narrative of the book slips back to Jack Nobody at one stage.

Jervis enlists the help of Jack's enemy, Dick Kenney, known as the Handsome Man, in order to trap him and restore Hatchett's control over him. There are a number of attempts to disgrace Jack at the circus and get him thrown out, all of which fail, thanks to the friends he has made. When the circus is booked to appear at the London Hippodrome Jack is eventually lured to a house in Shepherds Bush, London, and kidnapped.

*Jack of the Circus* concludes with the kidnapped youth aboard a Dutch ship heading out to sea and bound for an unknown destination.

And there we have it! There was no Book 4 and we still do not know why Lord Cortolvin wanted Jack kept out of sight, nor what was the reason for his twin-like resemblance to the Hon. Cecil. Charles Hamilton must have envisaged the conclusion to the story, but was there a script? It is a fact that in the late 1940s Hamilton was desperately trying out new characters and stories to augment his flagging income. He had experimented with a number of new schools, but none appealed like Greyfriars and St. Jim's. "All they want is Bunter" he once lamented, but he was forbidden to write of him by the Amalgamated Press until Charles Skilton came on the scene.

With Jack of All Trades there were seemingly obvious drawbacks. As long as there was a mystery surrounding Jack's origins, the tales could be successful, but once this became resolved then he would have no story. It seemed as if Hamilton would have been able to go on indefinitely with this mysterious origins theme. On the other hand, was Hamilton going to try a 'Rags to Riches' theme, with Jack revealed as a long lost heir, and set up at a brand new school? Could this overworked motif from his golden years be brought to life again with a whole new generation of readers?

If he had planned a quartet of books and sold these to Mandeville (who published just the first) possibly the series was not successful. After all, they had ample time to publish the others before Spring Books took over (see Bibliography below). When the latter company did commence publishing the Hamilton books they possibly had the scripts of the next two books in hand, purchased from Mandeville. By publishing the Jack Stories alongside the Tom Merry books they were probably optimistic that they would sell, as they were under the Frank Richards by-line. Perhaps they *did* sell, but Spring Books could have been more keen to issue Tom Merry books. Or again, they could have proved non-viable. Whatever the answer it still left an Edwin Drood situation to which we will never know the answer. Who really was Jack, and what his relationship to Lord Cortolvin and, of course, the Hon. Cecil? Surely he couldn't have been the latter's twin, but could he have been the true heir to the estate, kept out of the way - possibly the son of a very close relative?

Charles Hamilton also wrote a number of short stories featuring Jack of All Trades which were published in Tom Merry and Billy Bunter Annuals, and there is a likelihood that these were published out of sequence. The reappearance in 1961 of the character in a short story in *Billy Bunter's Own Annual*, over 10 years after his debut, would seem to suggest that there was no chance that we would ever read the solution to this mystery.

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**(EDITOR'S NOTE:** Like Derek Adley and many other Hamilton enthusiasts, I have often felt frustrated at the irresolution of Jack's problematic situation. After reading this article I consulted Hamilton's niece and literary executor, Mrs. Una Hamilton Wright, whose answer is most interesting. She says:

'I have looked up the 'Jack of All Trades' typescripts; there are five of them as follows:

- No. 4. Jack on his Own.
- No. 5. Jack goes South!
- No. 6. Jack in Africa.
- No. 7. Jack in Danger.
- No. 8. Jack on the Treasure Trail.'

It is good news that Jack was not left to the dismal fate which the end of the third book suggested, and certainly the last of these titles holds the promise that Jack finds prosperity in the end. Let us hope that some enterprising publisher may decide to publish these books so that everything in Jack's saga can be revealed.)

# JACK and the CARAVANNERS



by FRANK RICHARDS



A Merry Xmas and A Happy New Year to one and all. Still wanted: 1947 and 1959 C.D. Annuals.

ALAN DACRE, 7 LEOPARD STREET, WALNEY ISLAND, BARROW-IN-FURNESS, CUMBRIA, LA14 3QL

\*\*\*\*\*

Season's Greetings to Mary Cadogan, Normans Shaw and Wright, Roger Jenkins and Joe Marston. Still wanted: Old S.O.L.'s and C.D.'s.

MARK STAFF, 6 ROCKFORD CLOSE, BOURNEMOUTH, BH6 4AZ

\*\*\*\*\*

Seasonal Greetings to all readers.

DON AND ELSIE WEBSTER

\*\*\*\*\*

## Just William and Rex Diamond



I would like to begin by saying I was agreeably surprised to learn that there were so many people like yourselves still interested in the Just William books and their author Richmal Crompton, which has brought back quite a few memories of the times in the past when, I myself, was personally connected with both. I don't suppose many people would remember my name today, although it must have been mentioned five or six hundred times in the credits of many a radio programme so many years ago. (The reason for this was that I became one of the few original comedy script writers for the B.B.C. as far back as 1942 and was writing for such popular comedians of the time as Tommy Handley, Jack Warner, Arthur Askey, Will Hay and many others during and after the war.)

It was in late 1945 that I was called in to help out on the scripts of the Will Hay show on radio. Although Will Hay became better known in his comedy films in later years, he was also popular for his Music Hall sketch as the bumbling schoolmaster with his three young pupils. In this he tries to cover up his own ignorance by relying on the knowledge of his brightest young student, while trying to evade being shown up by one of the others during the school lessons. This type of sketch was transferred to the medium of radio as *'The Will Hay Show'* in which the two pupils mentioned were John Clark as D'arcy, the clever knowledgeable boy, and Charles Hawtrey as Smart, who kept unmasking the Schoolmaster's ignorance.

At this time John Clark was only twelve years old and, though Charles Hawtrey was much older, he sounded like a younger boy. Being one of the script-writers I, of course, became closely associated with all the cast and especially the Producer, Alick Hayes, with whom I worked for the next twelve years or so. It was after the Will Hay show ended that Alick Hayes and I were discussing the Just William books and he suggested the possibility of radio adaptation. Having read quite a few of the books in the past I realised he had hit on a great idea if only we could find the right boy to play William. The Alick pointed out that we already had a 'natural' William in John Clark, who was already experienced in radio with Will Hay.

The next and most important step was meeting Richmal Crompton. To our relief, she agreed to our idea of a *Just William* radio show, and, further, she would be collaborating and giving final judgement on the way her characters were portrayed for radio. Our final hurdle was the B.B.C. Programme Planners. At first their reaction was one of doubt but they eventually agreed to the production of six programmes as a try out, with Alick producing and myself as the main script-writer. As well as for suggesting John Clark as William, I gave full marks to Alick for the way he cast the supporting characters of Mr. and Mrs. Brown, elder brother Robert, sister Ethel and, more important, Ginger, Violet Elizabeth and Hubert Lane. Especially the latter - portrayed by Charles Hawtrey, who, after the first series had other commitments and was replaced by Michael Dear as Egbert Huggins.

For the first three programmes of *Just William*, Alick and I chose and adapted the radio scripts as closely as possible to the original written stories from the books, particularly to please and satisfy Richmal Crompton. However, as I had feared it needed a different approach, and we managed to convince her that radio broadcasting was quite a different medium of expression from that of the written word, and she agreed to the working out of new and original stories and plots, some of which were based on the book tales. The reason for this was that, in the first three programmes, we found the supporting characters of the Brown family were so good on radio that new stories and plots had to be found which would feature them more than the books did. This applied to Ginger, Violet

Elizabeth and Hubert Lane, who had to be projected more in the radio versions. So from a rather faulty start we finished the first six programmes on such a high note with increasing listening figures that the B.B.C. gave us another seven or eight programmes to conclude the first series. By then of course, *Just William* had an enthusiastic listening audience of a few million, which by the end of the second series rose to about ten million, with even more at the end of the fifth and last one. Many were the articles written in newspapers and magazines on the *Just William* broadcasts, with critics acclaiming the series as one of the best radio features of light entertainment.

As a comedy script-writer, I found working on the William scripts a welcome change from my previous comedy series in which the biggest headache was having to supply gags and jokes to make sure of laughs and applause from a studio audience. I was thankful that Alick Hayes agreed with me that a studio audience was not necessary for the eventual recordings, so we had the satisfaction of spending a whole day, and often two days, for the rehearsal and final recording of one of the programmes, more or less as a film is completed in various separate actions. Here again I gave Alick Hayes full marks as the Producer for the way he handled the juvenile actors of William, Ginger and Violet Elizabeth, as in the breaks between recording the studio became almost Bedlam, with John Clark, Tony Stockman and Jaqueline Boyer running up and down, playing games with a tennis ball and shouting with excitement. Not only was it tolerance on Alick's part, but as he shrewdly explained to me, it kept them in the right mood as natural children for the actual recordings. Although the scripts were the result of team work, with Alick and myself collaborating with Richmal, the main responsibility lay on my shoulders, more so as Alick relied on me to work out ideas for original new plots and stories. In between the *Just William* shows I was also working on other radio series, and eventually I had to reduce my contributions to *Just William* and was kept on as Script Editor, bringing in another writer, Ian Smith, to help out.

The appeal of *Just William* on radio was so great that it naturally made many fans for the individual characters. John Clark himself at one stage had more than two thousand letters and many more were sent to the Brown family, as well as Ginger and Violet Elizabeth. Among those sent to Charles Hawtreys, who played the nasty boy Hubert Lane, was one from Parkhurst prison. In fact Charles recounted that once when he was resting in the front room of his house one Sunday afternoon, he heard two boys outside discussing their triumph in having found where that rotter Hubert Lane lived, and throwing a stone through his window pane before running away.

When we first began the series it was broadcast at 6.30 p.m. on the assumption that children would make up most of the listening figures, but letters from adults protesting that it was too early and that many missed it, meant we eventually moved it to 8 p.m., then 9 p.m. Again, at first we broadcast the Sunday repeat at 2.30 p.m. with the resulting protest from children who had to miss it because of afternoon Sunday School, so we had to alter the time to 4.30 p.m.! Personally I was not surprised that *Just William* would appeal as much to adults as to children, because I was well into my twenties when I first began reading and enjoying the books. The radio show made such an impact on the millions of weekly listeners that, apart from those who were already fans of the books, it brought *Just William* to the notice of many others, and almost certainly resulted in a greater demand from new readers.

It is a sad fact that the B.B.C. did not keep the original recordings of the programmes, apart, I believe from just one, as I am sure they would have been a popular item among the cassettes of past popular radio shows now offered for sale. I must confess to being guilty in that respect, because although I still have about eighty original broadcasting scripts of other shows I was connected with, most of the *Just William* scripts were lost many years ago, apart from three or four still left in my possession. I suppose that our radio show of *Just William* was the forerunner of what we now call Situation Comedy, which has developed so much on present day television.

As well as writing short stories, mostly of a dramatic nature, some of which were published many years ago, I began writing a children's book which I completed a short while back. After re-reading it a couple of times it dawned on me that the story owed a lot to my past experience with *Just William!*

Besides my having had the satisfaction of being part of the success of the radio series, it was also a pleasure and a privilege to have become a working colleague of Richmal Crompton herself. I never ceased to marvel at her accomplishments. Here was a Lady, and I emphasise *Lady*, of genteel breeding and kindly nature, unassuming, almost hiding from any sort of limelight and acclaim, who through her observations of her brother's and her nephew's boyhood activities, had created a practical form of entertainment for so many. I counted many of the big stars of the past with whom I worked as personal friends, and, happily, among these, of course, was Richmal Crompton.



Christmas Cheer to all readers and special thanks to the editor and contributors to the 'Digest'.

REG ANDREWS, LAVERSTOCK, SALISBURY

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Wanted: Weekly issues Girl 1963-64 and some 1956.

SUSAN CHAMBERS, HOLLY HOUSE, BLEASBY ROAD, FISKERTON,  
NEWARK, NG25 0XL

\*\*\*\*\*

Books from Richards' Library. Signed St. J. Hamilton offers?

LAURENCE S. ELLIOTT, "BOOKS", 17 LANGDON CRESCENT,  
LONDON, E6 2PW. Tel: 01-472 6310

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A Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to friends and readers everywhere.

BILL BRADFORD

\*\*\*\*\*

Season's Greetings to all Friars and C.D.A. readers.

ARTHUR EDWARDS

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Season's Greetings to all readers, especially Bob Whiter and family.

C. WALLIS, 64 OAKWOOD PARK ROAD, SOUTHGATE, LONDON, N14 6QA

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Greetings to Hobby Friends. Keen to buy Biggles, Blyton, Artwork for my collection.

NORMAN WRIGHT, 60 EASTBURY ROAD, WATFORD, HERTS

\*\*\*\*\*

Wanted: Books by Berkeley Gray, Victor Gunn, Edwy Searles Brooks. Also S.O.L.s, B.F.L.s, Thriller, Detective Weekly, Sexton Blake Library, Union Jacks.

A. McKIBBIN, 1 HUDSON CLOSE, LAMMACK, BLACKBURN, LANCS, BB2 7DQ

\*\*\*\*\*

Happy Christmas everybody. W.E. Johns' Books, Comics, Story Papers wanted.

P. GALVIN. Tel. 0226 295613

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Christmas Greetings all Hobby Friends.

JOHN BARTHOLOMEW, ROCKHAMPTON, QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA

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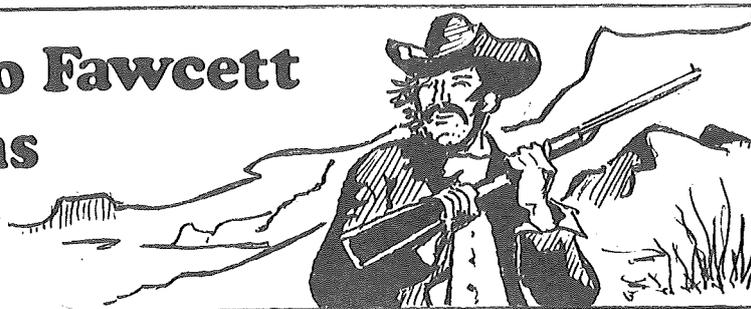
Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all.

DEREK BLAKE, THAMES DITTON

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# A Tribute to Fawcett Publications

By Alan Pratt



In the 40s and 50s names like Roy Rogers, Tex Ritter & Hopalong Cassidy were as familiar to youngsters as those of their closest friends.

The western heroes of the silver screen provided hours of enjoyment at Saturday morning matinées, inspiring countless playground games and many requests for cowboy-style Christmas presents!

Unsurprisingly, the American comic publishers were quick to cash in on the success of the movie stars and it was a poor "hero" who did not appear, in strip form, in at least one monthly comic magazine. At that time, of course, American comics were not imported into the U.K. and it fell to the British publishers to reprint the original strips for the local market. Most, if not all, of the reprints were published in sixpenny monthly magazines and (unlike the U.S. originals) usually in black & white.

At first glance, the British magazines appeared to be much of a muchness. They were nearly all named after a popular star of the day and each magazine carried a movie-style photograph of the hero on the front cover. The discerning reader soon discovered, however, that the contents could vary tremendously. Many of the biggest stars of the day, such as Roy Rogers, Gene Autry and Johnny Mack Brown were featured in Dell comics reprinted in the U.K. by World Distributors Ltd. The content of these magazines was, however, generally inferior to those from the Fawcett stable (reprinted in the U.K. by a small London publisher, L. Miller & Son. Ltd.)

Fawcett boasted an impressive array of western talent with stars like Tom Mix, Ken Maynard, Lash Larue, Rocky Lane, and Gabby Hayes regularly featuring in their magazines. Somehow Fawcett managed to re-create, almost perfectly, the charm and inherent absurdity of the 'B' movies, merging the old and modern west at will and attributing levels of physical and mental prowess to the cowboy stars that might have left Superman green with envy!

In general the stories were imaginative and extremely well constructed. Typically a magazine would run to 28 pages and contain two or three short complete strip stories of the cover star, backed up by a few one page 'funnies' or a feature on western lore. Some titles, such as Western Hero or Six Gun Heroes featured stories of three (or sometimes four) different stars, clearly an attempt by the publishers to reach those readers who had no particular favourite. Despite the frequent use of gimmicks and the diverse style of the different heroes (Hopalong Cassidy stories tended to be 'cosy', Lash Larue yarns usually had some detective element etc.) one thing was constant in all stories. Good would triumph over bad, and the last few frames generally depicted a fist fight in which the black-hatted baddies would be knocked for six before being carted off to jail.

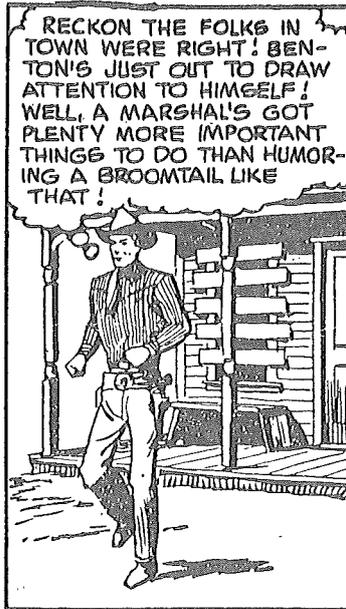
There were certain quaintnesses about the Fawcett publications which greatly added to their charm. Heroes never shot to kill or deliberately wound; they would simply shoot the guns out of the hands of their opponents, thus displaying not only their prowess with a gun but their strong moral fibre. Larger than life feats, such as re-emerging from a bed of hardened concrete or shooting a room full of rattlesnakes without appearing to re-load, were invariably put down to 'the reward of years of clean living'. On re-reading the magazines I suspect that some of the events depicted must have caused some considerable merriment to the authors and artists who complemented each others' work so well. There is no doubt, however, that the magazines were genuinely intended to be wholesome. In fact each edition contained a statement from W.H. Fawcett Jnr. (the President of the company) to the effect that this was "Approved Reading and Wholesome Entertainment".

ROCKY LANE WESTERN

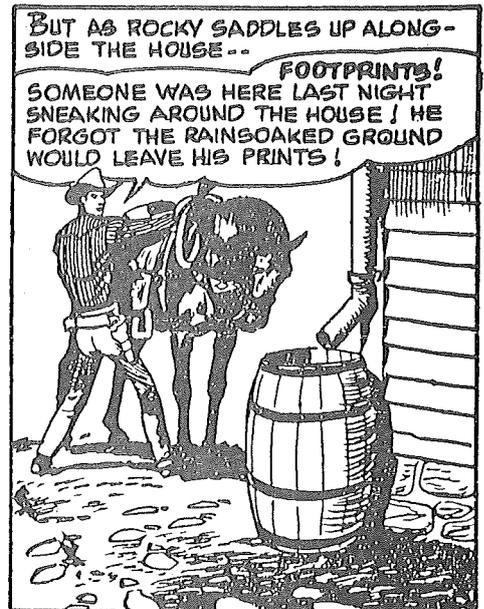


BUT HE -- HE'LL COME, MARSHAL! YOU'VE GOT TO STAY WITH ME! I NEED PROTECTION!

SORRY, BENTON! I'LL HAVE TO BE LEAVING! I THINK YOU'LL BE ALL RIGHT HERE!

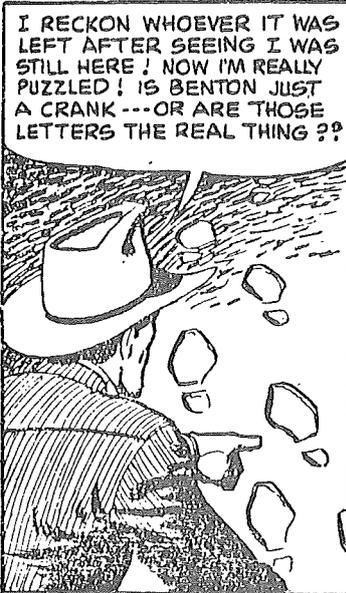


RECKON THE FOLKS IN TOWN WERE RIGHT! BENTON'S JUST OUT TO DRAW ATTENTION TO HIMSELF! WELL, A MARSHAL'S GOT PLENTY MORE IMPORTANT THINGS TO DO THAN HUMORING A BROOMTAIL LIKE THAT!

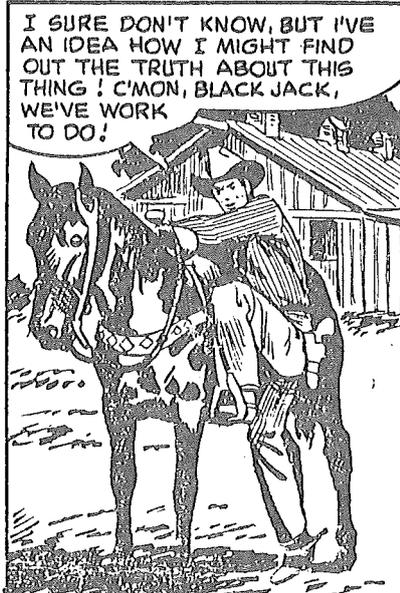


BUT AS ROCKY SADDLES UP ALONGSIDE THE HOUSE --

FOOTPRINTS! SOMEONE WAS HERE LAST NIGHT SNEAKING AROUND THE HOUSE! HE FORGOT THE RAINSOAKED GROUND WOULD LEAVE HIS PRINTS!



I RECKON WHOEVER IT WAS LEFT AFTER SEEING I WAS STILL HERE! NOW I'M REALLY PUZZLED! IS BENTON JUST A CRANK ---OR ARE THOSE LETTERS THE REAL THING??

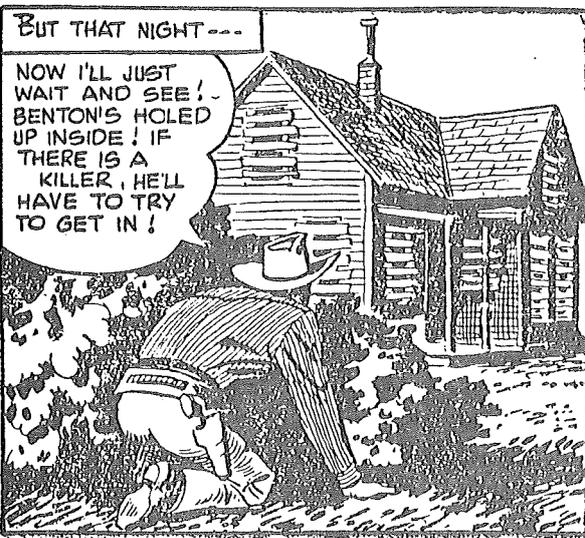


I SURE DON'T KNOW, BUT I'VE AN IDEA HOW I MIGHT FIND OUT THE TRUTH ABOUT THIS THING! C'MON, BLACK JACK, WE'VE WORK TO DO!



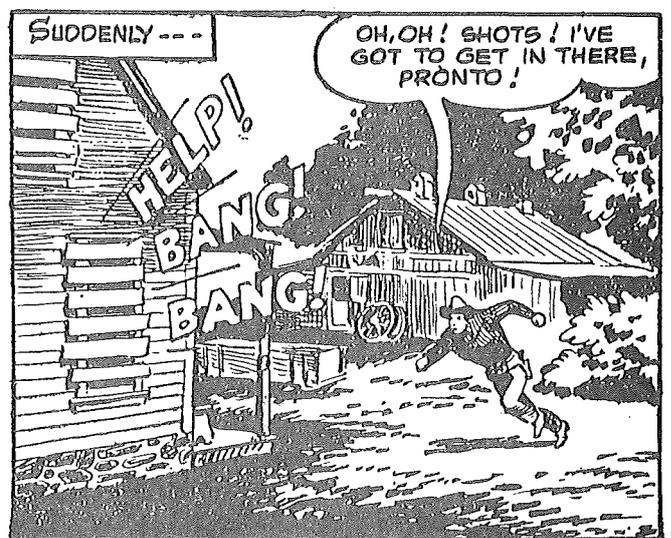
SOON AFTER, IN TOWN --- SO LONG, FRIENDS! I FOUND OUT YOU WERE RIGHT ABOUT BENTON! THE JOKE WAS ON ME! BE SEEING YOU, SOMETIME!

WE KNEW YOU'D REALIZE IT YOURSELF, MARSHAL! SO LONG...!



BUT THAT NIGHT ---

NOW I'LL JUST WAIT AND SEE! BENTON'S HOLED UP INSIDE! IF THERE IS A KILLER, HE'LL HAVE TO TRY TO GET IN!



SUDDENLY ---

OH, OH! SHOTS! I'VE GOT TO GET IN THERE, PRONTO!

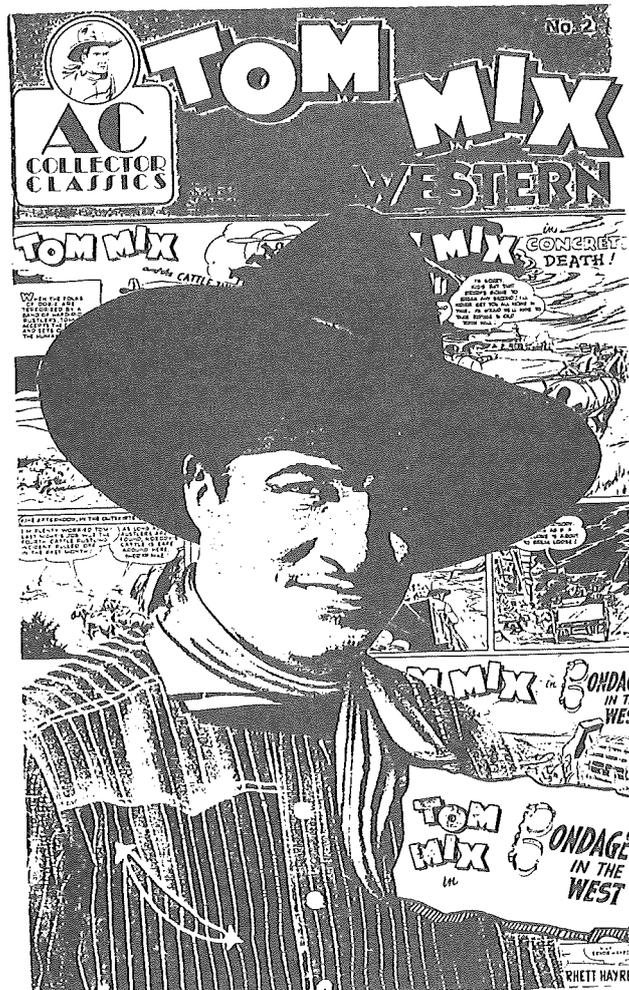
HELP!  
BANG!  
BANG!

Sadly, however, even Mr. Fawcett's efforts were insufficient to satisfy the demands of educationalists in the U.K. who complained bitterly about the substitution of words such as "you" and "here" by "yuh" and "hyar". Later publications had the offending slangy words removed and the correctly spelt words clumsily inserted into the speech balloons. Another Fawcett idiosyncrasy was to start a magazine run at number 50, presumably to create the impression that it was already a firmly established title. This was probably an unnecessary caution on the part of the company as there is no doubt that they were in the forefront of the western comic market.

During the fifties, however, that market was to take a severe downturn. 'B' western movies were not made after 1954 (the spread of television effectively killed the medium) and many of the Fawcett heroes - like the pop stars of today - having had their run of success faded into relative obscurity. Fawcett ran into financial problems also as a result of a legal action taken by the giant D.C. Corporation and Mr. Fawcett's "Wholesome entertainment" sadly ceased to appear on the book stands.

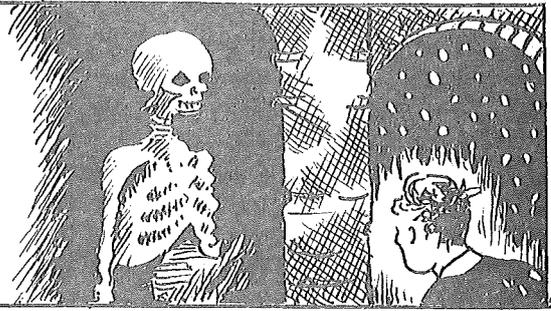
In 1989, an enterprising American publisher, A.C. Comics, resurrected Tom Mix Western and started to reprint the old Fawcett strips. This lasted for two issues, the second containing a message from Bill Black, the editor, regretting the demise of the magazine and advising readers that "orders were so low that A.C. couldn't afford to print even the cover in colour". Clearly A.C. "got it wrong" if they believed that there was a substantial market of old fans like myself, and my hopes of building up a new collection of western monthlies faded with Bill Black's dream.

Nothing can detract, however, from the hours of enjoyment that my schoolboy friends and I derived from these marvellously over-the-top magazines. I salute Mr. Fawcett (wherever he is) and offer him my grateful thanks.



# Last Nelson Lee Christmas Stories

By E. Grant-McPherson



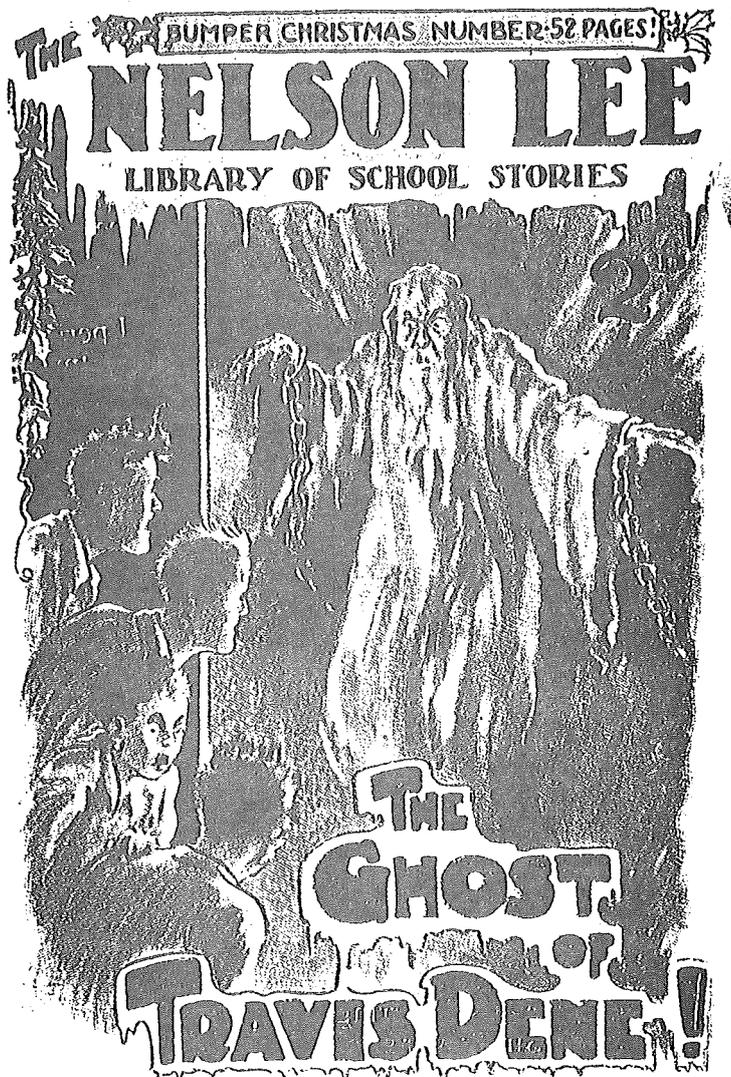
CHRISTMAS 1929

We start with the lads of the Remove just leaving the Cinema at Bannington and about to wend their way back to St. Frank's. Unfortunately the snow that had been falling lightly, when they entered the Cinema, has turned into a raging blizzard. Church suggests that Handy leaves his trusty Morris Minor in the garage, which of course is the surest way of ensuring that he will insist on driving back to the school, so off they go, giving Archie Glenthorne a lift. All goes well until they come to a very sharp bend, where the wind catches the little car and they skid into a ditch.

When the rest of the party who were on cycles, arrive, they help to dig the car out, and, just as they are about to start off again, one of the leaders happens to look down the railway cutting which they are just passing, and sees an avalanche occur. So they take their lamps from the cycles, and run down the embankment, to try and stop the train which is due any minute. However, they are not quite in time.

Watching the passengers descend from the train, Nipper recognises Eileen Dare who is Nelson Lee's Lady Assistant. She is on her way to the School to see him, accompanied by her niece, a little girl of about 12. The boys help them up the embankment, Handy drives them to St. Frank's. When they arrive, Miss Dare tells Nelson Lee that her niece is in danger of being kidnapped, and that she has brought her to the school for safety.

Unfortunately the fact that they were on the train has been reported, and the crooks arrive in the area, and make an attempt on the little girl. Handforth, who is taking a party home for Christmas, says that they could join him, at Travis Dene, where they would not be known. They all agree to this, and Sir Edward Handforth tells both his sons and his daughter to invite as many guests as they like, so that it will be a really



Thrills galore in this magnificent long complete special Christmas yarn of the cheery chums of St. Frank's.

New Series No. 109

OUT ON WEDNESDAY.

December 7th, 1929.

successful affair. Handy, afraid that Willy will bring too many fags with him, goes to the Third Form common room, and tells all the youngsters that the castle is haunted by a hideous ghost, in an effort to keep most of them away.

The party arrives at Travis Dene, and all goes well; Willy, much to the removites' amusement, takes quite a liking to Molly, Eileen Dare's niece. That night there is a disturbance, and some of the boys see the phantom, just as Handy had described it, Handforth takes his fellow removites to one side, and tells them that there is something queer afoot. "Why" they say, "you said there was a ghost." "That's just the point, says Handy, "There isn't. I made it up on the spur of the moment", "That is queer, certainly" says Travers. Nipper agrees, "We will keep watch tonight, and trap whoever is playing ghosts."

So the boys conceal themselves about the corridors and wait. Before long a figure comes creeping silently along the passage. Waiting until it gets into the middle of them, they pounce, and it turns out to be one of the maids who was taken on for Xmas.

She pleads with the juniors not to be reported, saying that she only wanted to play a joke on them. When she is asked about the ghost, she says that she has heard the boys talking about it. They feel that she obviously is in the employ of the kidnappers for, as Willy Handforth says, if she wanted to frighten them, why was she not rattling her chains, and why was she heading for Molly's room?

However they let her go, after she has promised not to leave her room again. Later that night, however, one of the boys, having gone downstairs for something, sees a figure carrying a bundle and leaving the hall, so he raises the alarm.

Being aroused, Nelson Lee gets out his car and chases the crooks' car (it having left clear tracks on the snow covered roads). He catches up with the crooks, he and the boys overpower them, and take them to the nearest police station.

Later, after all has quietened down, Eileen Dare explains that Molly is not really her niece, but the daughter of some friends, and was to be held for ransom: but all is now well and the party ends with a good time being had by all, and, especially, Willy and Molly.

### Christmas 1930

Although this was a really bad period for the Nelson Lee, this particular Christmas number was really first class. While not a true double number it was described as a bumper issue, having 10 more pages than the ordinary number; also it appeared on the 6th of December and not in Christmas week, as was more usual. But, to the story itself! Kirby Keeble Parkington, a comparative newcomer to the Remove, has invited a number of his schoolfellows plus some of the Moor View girls to spend Xmas with him.

Edward Oswald Handforth and his two chums meet K.K. with his brother Vincent and his wife Beryl, accompanied by another lady, on the platform, where they learn that because she had been a chorus girl, Sir Trevor (K.K.s father) has refused to allow his elder son's wife to join them for the holidays. Handy, impetuous as usual, suggests that Beryl takes the place of the other lady, Miss Harrington, who was to have been Sir Trevor's secretary (neither of the ladies being known to K.K.s father), to which plan Vincent agrees. So Beryl arrives at the house as Miss Harrington, the

BUMPER XMAS NUMBER—52 PAGES



A striking incident from the rollicking long Christmas yarn, featuring the cheery chums of St. Frank's, complete inside.

New Series No. 46. OUT ON WEDNESDAY. December 6th, 1930.

secretary, to try and prove to Sir Trevor that she is not really so black as she has been painted.

Soon after they arrive at the house, the party learns that there is a family ghost, a Sir Rufus, who is reputed to haunt the house at Christmastime. This gives Handy an idea; he decides to dress up as the phantom and haunt Sir Trevor into accepting his elder son's wife. Unbeknown to him Baines, one of K.K.s chums, has the same idea, and when they both meet at midnight, you can imagine the result! Fortunately however, Nipper and Nick Trotwood, the ventriloquist of the Remove, have rather better luck, when Nick makes a painting of Sir Rufus talk, at dinner on Xmas Eve.

On Christmas Day Sir Trevor is beginning to waver. Then, while skating on the frozen lake after lunch, he falls through a weak patch of ice, and Beryl, who happens to be nearest, rescues him. He finds out who she really is, realises his antipathy was unfounded, and takes her to his bosom so to speak. All is well, and a very happy Yuletide is enjoyed by all.

### Christmas 1931

By now the Nelson Lee was struggling a bit. This Christmas offering was not really very good, and terribly involved, lasting over four weeks. Jimmy Pott's Uncle Ben arrives from China under threat of death from a Chinese Tong which he has displeased. The agents of the Tong trace him to St. Frank's where he is attacked. So Handforth invites them both to join his party, who are spending the Xmas holidays at his home Travis Dene. Unfortunately, the Tong members follow them there, so the whole party goes to Treggellis Castle, where Sir Montie also has a party, and had previously invited them.

Again, the Tong arrives, so the entire party changes house once more, this time joining the Duke of Somerton's party at Somerton Abbey. Would you believe it, yet again the Tong turns up, but this time so does Lord Dorrimore, who asks the entire assembly to come to Dorrimore Castle with him. When they arrive there; Nelson Lee appears again (unbeknown to all except Nipper, he has been following the party, in various disguises, ever since they left St. Frank's).

The Tong agent is caught. He turns out to be "Uncle Ben", who is not really Uncle Ben, but the leader of the Tong, who is after Sir James Potts inheritance!

Not a very good story; much too long and involved.

### Christmas 1932

Once again, a not very impressive series, lasting three weeks this time. Archie Glenthorne's Aunt is in the clutches of a charlatan named Nerki, so Archie takes a party of his school chums down to her house in the New Forest for Christmas, in the hope that he can cure her.

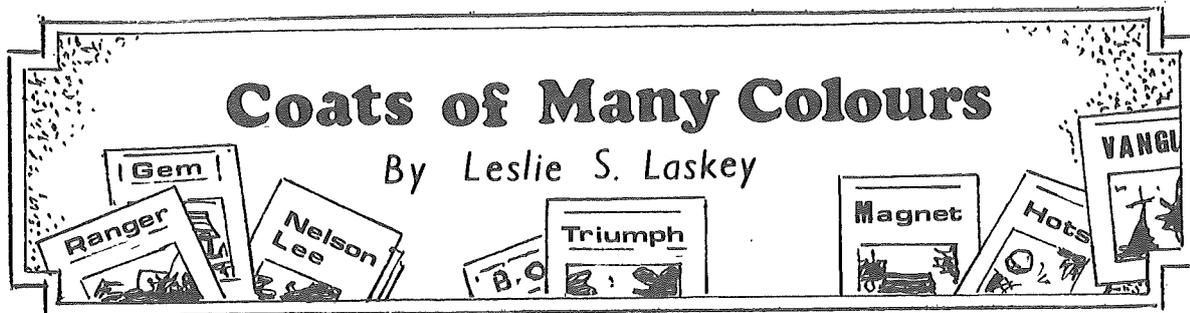
Again, a very involved story, full of ghosts, goblins and secret passages, plus a gigantic Russian, who spends most of his time throwing tables and chairs about. Of course, in the end Nelson Lee, with the assistance, again, of Lord Dorrimore and also Umlosi, the giant Kutana, sorts it all out. The crooks are sent to prison, and all ends happily. Quite a good cops and robbers' yarn, but not really a seasonable story.

This was the the last Christmas that the Nelson Lee would see; the last number of the poor old Lee was published on August the 23rd, 1932.



Yet again, Seasonal Greetings and Good Health to all C.D. readers from  
LEN HAWKEY, 3 SEAVIEW ROAD, LEIGH-ON-SEA, ESSEX, SS9 1AT

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Probably most readers of the COLLECTOR'S DIGEST will clearly remember those long gone popular magazines PICTURE POST, THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS, EVERYBODY'S and JOHN BULL. Even when their contents have long been forgotten, a clear mental image remains of their front covers when they were displayed on the bookstalls. If they reappeared today, in their same covers, we would recognise them instantly.

Their covers were the magazines' "overcoats", as it were. They were all that was visible on the bookstall racks. They were all different. Each magazine created a visual image different from the rest. That was what the publishers intended, of course. An attractive and eye-catching cover would appeal to potential buyers more than a dull and uninspiring one.

In our youth, our sharp eyes were able instantly to pick out that favourite story-paper or comic in the paper-shop. We know exactly what its cover looked like, and it was expected to have its familiar appearance every week - always. Thus it would come as something of a shock when the favourite weekly's appearance suddenly underwent a complete change. Children are basically very conservative, and they tend to resent and distrust sudden changes.

Readers of the MAGNET received a bit of a shock one day in November 1937 when the familiar blue and orange cover was exchanged for one of a strange pink shade, which I had vaguely associated with racing papers. The Editor has told us that readers had complained that the MAGNET was not as distinctive in its two-coloured coat as it had been in its original orange cover. Frankly, I had been puzzled. As far as I could see, the cover was already orange and blue. When the new one arrived it wasn't orange - it was pink, and I didn't care for it at all.

The Editor had been right, of course, when he had said that the two-coloured cover made the MAGNET less conspicuous on the bookstalls; but this was largely because two other Amalgamated Press weeklies, MODERN BOY and the SCHOOLGIRL, were dressed in the same colours, blue and orange. The new MAGNET certainly looked different from the other papers now, in its salmon-pink overcoat.

The issue blew up all over again, a few weeks later, when they did the same sort of thing to the GEM. This time the page size was reduced, in addition to the change of cover.

The Editor assured us that we would find the new page size more convenient, and he emphasised that we would be getting eight extra pages. Then there were to be two new (minor) features as well. The Editor was obviously trying very hard to sell this new GEM to us. Perhaps he had some misgivings about how we were going to take it all. The new buff-coloured GEM cover turned out to be rather dull and drab-looking. However, its contents were as good as ever. That was what mattered most.

A good deal of thought must presumably have gone into the designing of the covers when the story-papers were launched. The more magazines there were on the market, the more difficult it would become to put out a distinctive cover that would set a paper apart from all the others.

The introduction by the A.P. of two-coloured covers for their weeklies provided more scope for variety. Before 1914 most story-magazines had tinted paper for their covers, with black or dark blue print. A few were printed throughout on tinted paper.

Pink appears to have been the most popular choice of colour. Wearing pink coats, at various times, were the BOYS' REALM, the HALF-PENNY SURPRISE (published by Edwin J. Brett), the VANGUARD LIBRARY (Trapps, Holmes and Co. Ltd.), the BOYS'

MAGAZINE (E. Hulton & Co.), the UNION JACK and CHEER, BOYS, CHEER; also the BOYS' JOURNAL, this paper, containing stories by such writers as Capt. Charles Gilson, John Finnemore and Horace Phillips, being a paper of distinct quality which deserved to have had a longer life-span.

The BOYS' FRIEND (weekly) was printed throughout on pale green paper, while the DREADNOUGHT had similarly-coloured covers.

The GEM was blue, the early (half-penny) UNION JACK was straw-coloured, but PLUCK's cover was simply printed blue on white paper.

There were some multi-coloured covers. Aldines' various Libraries had full-coloured covers. Cassell's NEW BOYS' WORLD also sported a multi-coloured one.

After the Great War ended, two-colour covers soon came into general use, and it became easier to provide a magazine with a distinctive cover. However, the A.P., for some reason, adhered largely to just two colour schemes, either blue with orange, or blue with red, with the result that many of their magazines had a somewhat similar appearance.

The MAGNET, the SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN, MODERN BOY, the TRIUMPH and the FOOTBALL AND SPORTS FAVOURITE all appeared in blue and orange. Later, the SCHOOLGIRL adopted the same colours, while SPORT AND ADVENTURE was blue and yellow.

There were even more papers with blue and red covers, including the Nelson LEE, the MARVEL, the SCHOOLGIRLS' WEEKLY, the GEM, the CHAMPION, YOUNG BRITAIN, the POPULAR and, later, the RANGER and the GIRLS' CRYSTAL, while the TRIUMPH eventually changed over to blue and red. George Newnes Ltd. put out their BLACK BESS LIBRARY in the same colours.

The SCHOOL FRIEND, coming out in 1919 to publish the first stories of Cliff House School, had a front cover which was printed in blue and red in some weeks, and blue and green in the others.

One paper whose cover was strikingly different was the BOYS' WEEKLY (James Henderson and Sons Ltd.). This weekly had large pages like the BOYS' FRIEND. The cover was white paper with the title and illustrations on both back and front covers printed in black and bright red.

D.C. Thomson and Co. quite cleverly manipulated the three basic colours of red, blue and yellow to give all their boys' papers a distinctive look. An exception was their VANGUARD which was printed in black and red on orange-tinted cover-paper. The title "WIZARD" was printed in bold red lettering on a yellow background. ADVENTURE used the same two colours but had its title in an arch-shaped panel. The ROVER's title was red on a white background, while the SKIPPER'S was yellow on blue. The HOTSPUR's name appeared in blue lettering, edged with white, on a red background. Each of the Thomson covers could be instantly recognised, even from a little distance. The same designs remained in use for many years, although from 1938 the ROVER made some changes to its cover design and introduced some green into its colour scheme.

When the A.P.'s PILOT arrived on the scene, in 1935, the publishers gave it a mainly red and yellow cover and title. The addition of brown helped to distinguish it from the WIZARD. It was quite an attractive cover but, unfortunately, the PILOT's contents made no great impact and it closed down in 1938.

The CHAMPION became a four-colour paper in the 1930s when yellow and green were added to the red and blue, the unusual combination of red with green giving the CHAMPION's cover a sharp identity. However, the CHAMPION was no longer the excellent paper that it had been under the Editorship of F. Addington Symonds in 1922-24. Then its authors had included Eric W. Townsend, Henry St. John, Alfred Edgar, Allan Blair and Michael Poole, while various sports and hobby features were included as well.

(Collectors will be interested to see the following reader's advert. which appeared in the CHAMPION (No. 132) in 1924:- "For Sale:- 55 MAGNETS, 110 YOUNG BRITAINS, 60 GEMS, 45 POPULARS, 100 BOYS' FRIENDS and 30 mixed books, all in good condition. Price 8d. per dozen or would exchange 200 for a good cinematograph".)

By the late 1930s there was little to distinguish the CHAMPION's contents from those of the D.C. Thomson papers, for the stories were often of a similar type. The tales of "Fireworks" Flynn, the Shake-'em-up Sports Master", could have come straight from the HOTSPUR.

Wartime conditions decimated the A.P. story-papers in 1940, leaving the CHAMPION as the sole-surviving boys' story-paper at Fleetway House, while Thomsons closed down their SKIPPER in 1941. The wartime magazines progressively shrank in size as their page numbers were reduced. The GIRLS' CRYSTAL shrank to such a degree that, by 1943, the first story was being printed on the front cover. The green and yellow disappeared from the CHAMPION's cover, leaving it just red and blue once more.

The austerity measures dragged on for some years after the War had ended. By 1950 the CHAMPION had a rather tired look about it. For many years it had relied a great deal on its stories of "Rockfist" Rogan, R.A.F., and its resident detective, Colwyn Dane. Now it seemed that the CHAMPION no longer had anything new or original to offer its readers. It was a paper which appeared to be just coasting along towards an inevitable demise.

When the long-running CHAMPION had finally faded away, few of the bright galaxy of pre-war front covers any longer graced the bookstalls. In the television age, the new breed of picture-papers was taking over. The GIRLS' CRYSTAL, the only girls' paper during the War years, eventually succumbed. In turn, ADVENTURE, which had begun in 1921, the WIZARD and the HOTSPUR all disappeared from the Thomson House output by the early 1960s, leaving only the ROVER, which then took on a new lease of life.

The ROVER's pages had expanded to 32 in number, four more than pre-war. Its type-face was enlarged and set in four columns instead of three. The stories were up to date and well written. A space-travel story, set in the year 2169, owed a good deal more to known scientific fact and possible future developments than the story, "Last Rocket to Venus", in the 1940 HOTSPUR. In the light of current knowledge of the surface conditions on the planet Venus, the latter story would be so utterly unbelievable that no editor would publish it in 1989.

The ROVER printed some interesting stories of wild-life, readers' letters, and sports articles. On the back cover an interesting feature presented historical or scientific facts, illustrated by full-colour drawings. The paper sported a bright new cover in red, blue and green, with the title "ROVER" once again printed in bright red on white as it had been forty years earlier.

The ROVER completed its half-century in 1972, the only pre-war boys' story-paper to reach the age of decimal currency. Its price in 1972 was three new pence, and it appears to have been good value for money.

When the ROVER closed down in 1973, it was the end of an era which had begun in 1893 when Alfred Harmsworth launched the HALFPENNY MARVEL.

The era of the juvenile story-papers.... We shall not see their like again.



With Xmas in sight  
A gift to excite  
is "C.D." all right  
so, Try as you might  
Get "C"adogan's "D"elight.

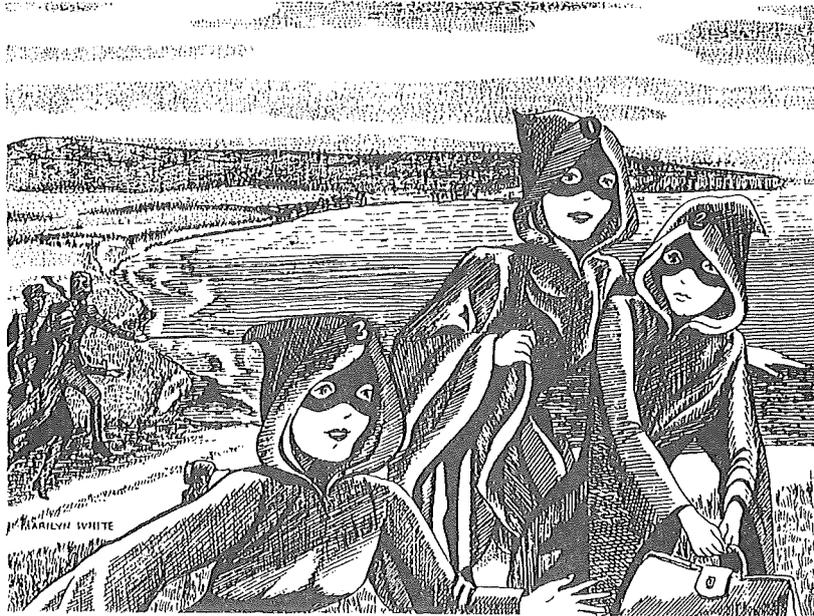
HAPPY CHRISTMAS - JOHNNY BURSLEM

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# The Silent Three and the Captain's Gold

by Marion Waters

( ILLUSTRATED by MARILYN WHITE )



It was a pleasant spring day in the early 1950s. In her study at Island School, Betty Roland re-read the letter she had just received:

"Dear Betty,

An old friend of mine, Captain Bristow, has suffered a serious theft from his home. It would be embarrassing for him to report the matter to the police, so I think it is a task for the Silent Three. It is a baffling problem, but I think that you may be able to solve it. I have arranged for the three of you to meet the Captain at my home on your next half-holiday.

Love, Rose".

Betty passed the letter to her two chums, Joan Derwent and Peggy West, so that they could study it for themselves. Joan's attractive face creased into a frown as she studied the document.

"Captain Bristow, isn't he one of the school governors?" she asked. "The seniors call him 'Captain Nemo' because of his black beard", chuckled Peggy.

"Rose says that it is a task for the Silent Three", reflected Betty.

The three friends fell silent for a few moments while they considered those fateful words. Some years earlier, while pupils at their previous school, the girls had formed a secret society known as the 'Silent Three' to fight an unscrupulous prefect. Since coming to Island School, they had taken part in a number of adventures wearing the green robes and hoods which they used to conceal their identities while acting as a secret group. Rose Molloy had been a member of the school's domestic staff, falsely dismissed for theft. Her good name had been restored, and a scheming mistress exposed, thanks to the efforts of the Silent Three. The activities of the secret society had on several occasions mystified Island School. No one on the island except Rose knew the identities of the girls who made up the hooded group.

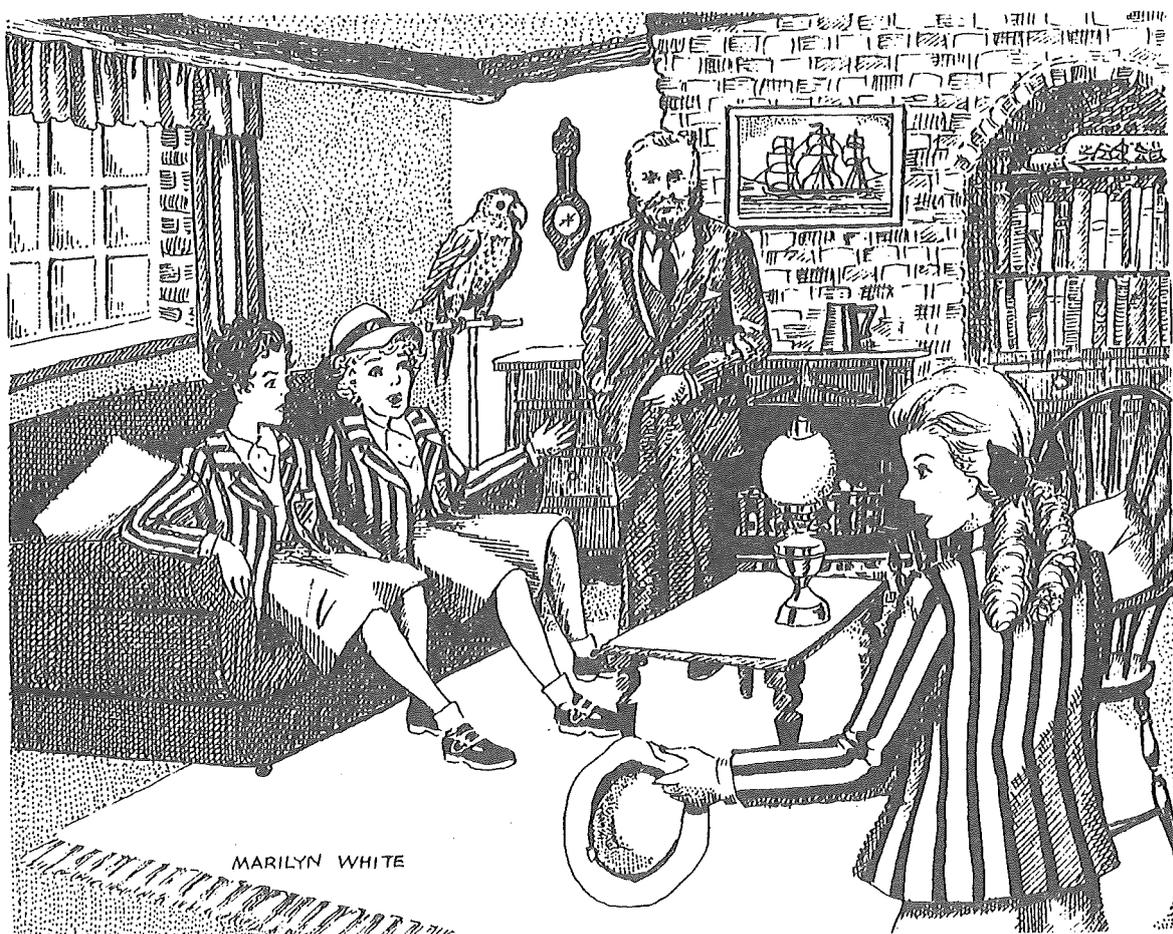
The chums exchanged puzzled glances. "There is nothing we can do until we meet the Captain at Rose's home", said Joan. "I'm still puzzled as to why Rose thinks that we

can solve the mystery rather than the police," commented Peggy. "We will just have to wait and see", replied Betty, with a thoughtful look on her attractive face.

Later that week the Silent Three travelled across to the mainland to meet Captain Bristow at Rose's home. The chums alighted from the ferry, and made their way through the tiny fishing village of Langthwaite to Rose's cottage, which was located on the cliffs above the village, with a view over the sea and of the island where their school was located. Rose greeted them warmly, and ushered them into her sitting room where her guest was waiting. Captain Bristow, DSO and bar, DSC and bar, RN (retired), was a small stocky man, with a naval style beard that was beginning to turn grey. His manner was courteous, but it was obvious that he was a very forceful character. Rose retired to the kitchen to prepare tea, while the Captain spoke to Betty and her friends.

"I'm not sure what you will make of my story", he said. "Also I'm not certain that I should get you involved in what may be a very serious business. But Rose has told me how you cleared her name last year, so I'm going to place the facts before you, and leave you to judge for yourselves". The three friends listened carefully while the Captain continued. "I served in the Navy during the Great War, and decided to continue my service in peacetime. I travelled all over the world during the inter-war period, being commissioned just before the outbreak of war in 1939. After Dunkirk I was given command of the 'Richmond', which was an old American 'four stacker' class destroyer of WW1 vintage. A hideous looking ship, but well suited to convoy duty in the Atlantic".

"Like the 'Cambelltown' in the film 'Gift horse'?" asked Peggy. "Exactly", replied the Captain. "Like many of her sisters, the Richmond had wretched engines, we had frequent breakdowns, but she never let me down in an emergency. She was a lucky ship..... Early in 1942, we had become separated from the convoy, due to the usual breakdown. We had patched up the trouble and were hurrying to regain our station when we encountered a large U boat, in a badly damaged condition, wallowing on the surface. Her crew didn't put up much of a fight, having been badly knocked about while attacking a convoy the previous night. They were glad to be rescued, but, before she sank, I put a search party on board".



"To search for code books and similar things?" asked Joan. "Correct", replied the Captain. "We found no intelligence material; obviously the Germans had dropped them over the side. But we did find six boxes of gold bars". "Gold!" gasped the Silent Three. "Yes, girls, pure solid gold", said Bristow. "As you can imagine, we hauled it on board and locked it away safely". "But what was it doing there?" asked Peggy.

"We never discovered the real reason. All the submarine's officers had been killed or wounded in the first engagement, and the enlisted men had no knowledge of their secret cargo", answered the Captain. "Some Nazi bigwig building up his secret hoard in South America?" suggested Joan. "What became of the gold?" asked Peggy. The Captain's face was grim as he replied. "When we returned to Liverpool, the gold was handed over to the authorities. But I retained one gold bar from each box for myself". The girls gasped at this revelation, and he added: "I know that you may consider me a thief. But consider the matter from my point of view. I had given all my adult life to my country's service. I knew that once the war was over there would be no place in the peace-time navy for a lower deck man like myself. I would be on the beach. I had no money of my own, and the pension of a Captain RN isn't exactly generous". There was a pause, and then Peggy said in her blunt, outspoken way. "I would have done the same myself". The Captain continued with his narrative. "When I retired from the Navy, I used the gold as a security in buying my farm. When I had paid the debt, the gold remained in the bank's strong room. Only the bank manager knew of its existence, and even he didn't know the full story." "What happened next?" asked Joan.

"In recent years my affairs have prospered. I didn't need the gold any more, so I decided to return it. I have been in touch with the West German embassy in London. The gold was to have been returned to Germany. If its original lawful owner could not be traced, it would have been donated to a worthwhile cause. It was stored in the safe of my home. Then my house was burgled, and the gold was stolen".

"Obviously someone knew all about it," said Betty. "Could the bars be identified?" asked Peggy. "There were markings on them - lettering in Hebrew and the Star of David. I guess that the gold had once belonged to a Jewish banker", replied Barstow. "Why don't you report the matter to the police?" asked Joan. The Captain gave the fair haired girl a stern look. "Can you imagine the outcry --'War Hero steals German gold' -- there would be a great deal of fuss. I am a prominent man in the neighbourhood; my reputation would be harmed by the affair".

Betty looked thoughtful for a moment, then she spoke up. "It would appear that someone is trying to blacken your character. Have you any idea who it could be?" "A man in public life always makes enemies", he answered.

"As you know, I hold several public offices; a number of people dislike my 'no nonsense' attitude. However, what really put the fat in the fire was when I was elected to a seat on the county council. There was a lot of ill-feeling, not so much from the other political parties, but from a failed candidate within my own party, who didn't consider me to be a 'gentleman'."

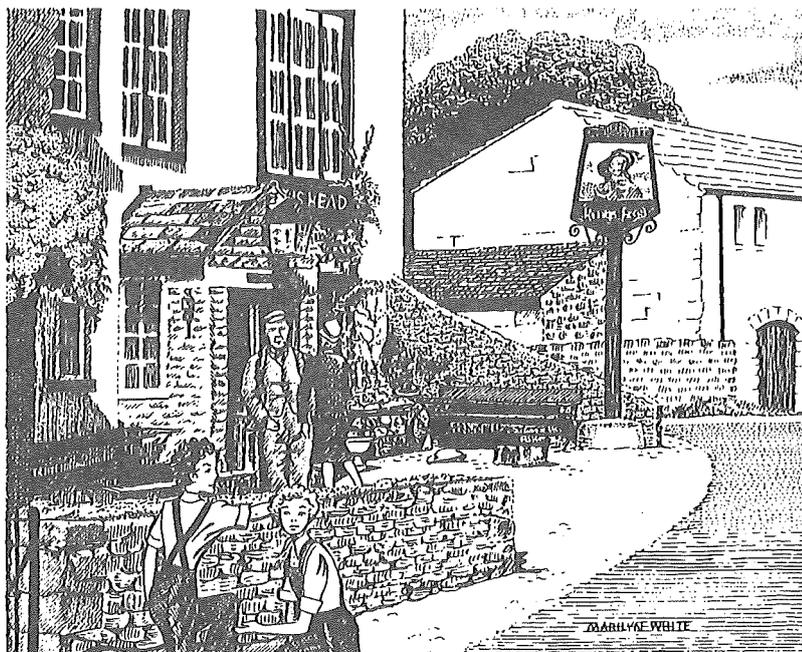
There was an interval while Rose served tea. Then Betty outlined a plan of action. "We would like to spend some time in the vicinity of your farm, so that we can make enquiries", she said. "Could we spend our next half term holiday working on your farm? That would give us a reason for being in the area". "Leave the details to me", replied the Captain, as the girls prepared to return to school.

A couple of weeks later, Island School broke up for the half-term holiday. Instead of travelling to their respective homes, the Silent Three made their way quietly to the vicinity of Captain Bristow's farm, where accommodation had been arranged for them in one of the farm cottages. They dealt with their own shopping and housework, and spent the remainder of their time exploring the area, keeping their eyes and ears open. They paid particular attention to the estate which adjoined Captain Bristow's farm. This was the home of Mr. Loder, a prominent man in the district, who had been the Captain's rival in the council election and obviously bore him a grudge. On occasion the girls saw Mr. Loder exercising his horses. He seemed a stern-looking, arrogant man..."Real friendly looking type", muttered Peggy.

At first, the Silent Three had no success in their mission. However, luck came to them one evening, when Betty and Peggy had made their way into the village of Robin Hood's Bay to buy fish and chips for their supper. The girls paused for a moment to admire the view over the sea when Peggy's sharp ears picked up a conversation coming from the walled garden of a nearby pub.

"Just think", said a man's voice, "all that lovely gold hidden safely away. We could nip off to London and enjoy ourselves for a long time on that lot". "Not so fast", hissed a woman's voice. "We pinched the gold for 'His Lordship'. He would soon shop us to the police if we tried to double-cross him". Peggy could hardly believe her ears! At the mention of the word 'gold', she gripped Betty's arm in tense anticipation. Carefully, Peggy made her way towards the garden, and positioned herself so that she could see over the wall without attracting attention to herself. A middle aged couple were there. The man was rough, but the woman was of smart appearance, though rather hard faced. Peggy made careful note of their appearance, hoping to identify them later.

At the earliest opportunity, Peggy described what she had seen to the Captain. His face creased into a scowl. "The man would be Ben Shaw, a local ne'er-do-well and a petty criminal", he replied. "He has served a term in prison, and is suspected of burglaries in the area". "But what about the woman?" asked Betty. "There you have surprised me", remarked their host. "She appears to be Mrs. Hatton, a respected figure in the neighbourhood. A rather prim and proper type, much too upright and honest to mix with a shady character like Ben Shaw".



"They spoke of 'His Lordship'", said Betty. "Who would that be?" "I think they were referring to my old rival, Mr. Loder", the Captain with a grim smile. "He has a very high opinion of himself, and likes to act the part of the local squire. He considers me to be a vulgar upstart. I understand that he spent the war years in a reserved occupation. You know the type".

The girls chuckled at this, then Joan asked, "Is Mrs. Hatton connected with Mr. Loder at all?" "Not as far as I know", replied the Captain. "Loder owns a lot of property in the area, so it is possible that he is her landlord, but that is just a guess". "It seems that Ben Shaw has stolen your gold, and that it is hidden, awaiting Mr. Loder's instructions", said Betty. "But we have no proof whatsoever", responded their host.

The Silent Three kept a close watch on both Ben Shaw and on Mrs. Hatton from then onwards. Ben lived in miserable lodgings in a shabby part of the village and it seemed unlikely that the stolen gold was hidden there. Mrs. Hatton lived in a neat villa overlooking the sea, which appeared a much more likely subject for their investigations. That evening,

three robed and hooded figures made their way through the twilight to the rear of the house. The Silent Three were able to observe Mrs. Hatton and her rather dull looking husband through a chink in the curtains, but they learned nothing useful from their conversation. Peggy gently tested the rear door of the house, and found it to be unlocked.

"Would you like me to have a look around inside?" she asked. "Not yet", replied Betty firmly, "we will wait until we have something more definite before we look round the place".

The following day, Betty was keeping watch on Mrs. Hatton's house on the outskirts of the village of Robin Hood's Bay. Shortly after mid-day, Mrs. Hatton left her home, and walked briskly towards the railway station. The woman was smartly dressed, and it appeared that she intended setting off on a journey. Keeping a discreet distance behind her. Betty hurriedly checked her purse to make sure that she had enough money to purchase a ticket if necessary. Her handbag was a large, old-fashioned one, large enough to contain her secret society robe which was folded neatly within the bag.

Mrs. Hatton didn't enter the station, but she continued along the lane, past the church, and left the village. Betty was forced to keep well behind her, otherwise she would have been spotted, and her mission would have failed. Luckily Betty could easily hear Mrs. Hatton's shoes 'tapping' on the road surface, so she knew that her quarry was ahead of her, even if she couldn't actually see her. "High heels always give the game away", chuckled Betty to herself, as she moved noiselessly in her soft soled shoes. When clear of the village, Mrs. Hatton turned down a lane, her pace slackened and it was obvious that she was intending to meet someone.

Betty took refuge in the gateway leading to a field, quickly slipping on her robe. She always felt a thrill of excitement as the romantic garment enfolded her body. She fastened the sash, and then drew the hood over her head, adjusting the mask so that she could see clearly. "At least if she sees me, I won't be recognised", said Betty to herself.

The hooded girl crept quietly forward. Mrs. Hatton was waiting beneath an oak tree situated a short distance from the edge of the lane. As Betty watched, a large car drew up, and a smartly dressed man got out. This was Mr. Loder, the rival of their friend Captain Bristow. The two adults were soon engaged in an animated conversation, and they failed to notice Betty creeping closer. The hooded girl soon learned that they were discussing the subject of the stolen gold.



"Ben and I want a bigger payment for looking after the gold", said Mrs. Hatton firmly.

"You will have what I promised you, and not a penny more", snapped the man. "In that case we will keep the gold for ourselves", said the woman. "Ben has friends in London who will dispose of it for us". "You wouldn't dare", replied Mr. Loder angrily. Mrs. Hatton's tone was jeering when she replied: "You can't do a thing about it, you can't tell the police, or we would drop you right in the soup".

The conversation continued in the same tone, but Betty was able to learn that the gold was concealed in the cellar of Mrs. Hatton's home.

She decided that she had heard enough, and turned to leave. Then, as bad luck would have it, Mr. Loder looked up and caught sight of her. "Hey, you! Stop!" he yelled, as Betty took to her heels. The plotter set off in pursuit, Betty hitched up her robe and ran as fast as her legs would carry her. She was able to outdistance her pursuers, and managed to avoid a stone which Mr. Loder threw at her. When Betty's robed figure had vanished among the trees, her pursuers stopped to regain their breath.

"Who the devil was that?" gasped Mr. Loder, his face red with anger. "Someone snooping round listening to our conversation", replied Mrs. Hatton. "I've had enough. You must collect the gold from my house tonight, or I shall drop it over the cliff". "I will see you immediately after dark", replied Mr. Loder gloomily.

Having escaped from her pursuers. Betty concealed her robe, and hurried back to the village. As quickly as possible she summoned Joan and Peggy, and related to her chums what had happened. "The stolen gold is hidden in the cellar of Mrs. Hatton's home", Betty explained. "It looks as if the crooks are falling out among themselves".

Later that afternoon, Mrs. Hatton was working in the kitchen at the rear of her house. She was amazed to see a slim figure in a green robe enter her garden, by the gate from the cliff path. "You cheeky young madam", she snapped as she pursued the hooded girl. While the enraged woman was chasing Betty and Joan along the clifftop, Peggy emerged from the bushes and proceeded to search Mrs. Hatton's abode. She made a thorough search of the cellar, but could find no trace of the gold. She was about to search the rest of the house when she spotted a footsore Mrs. Hatton, her face white with anger, returning from her failed pursuit of Betty and Joan. Peggy quickly left the house, and concealed herself in the bushes once more.

For the remainder of the afternoon, the Silent Three kept close watch on the Hattons' home. Later the rough looking Ben Shaw visited the house. "He looks a real nasty piece of work", said Joan. "We shall have our hands full if all three crooks are present", added Peggy. "We had better phone the Captain and let him know how things are going", replied Betty.

As dusk was falling, Mr. Loder made his way quietly to the rear of the Hattons' home. In a sheltered spot by the cliff edge, he met Ben Shaw and Mrs. Hatton, who carried a stout looking briefcase, which made a heavy metallic 'clunk' when it was placed on the ground. In the darkness the masked and hooded figures of the Silent Three were observing their every move. "The gold must be in that briefcase", said Joan, "It looks very heavy". "It's probably filled with scrap iron, just to fool us", smiled Peggy.

It soon became obvious that all was not well with the three plotters, and that a violent argument had developed. Ben Shaw was demanding a much higher payment for his part in the burglary, while Mrs. Hatton just wanted to get rid of the gold at any cost. Ben raised his fist in a threatening manner, while Mr. Loder countered with a gesture from his walking stick. "Time for action", said Betty, her eyes sparkling through the slits in her mask. The two men were so busy arguing that they didn't notice the three figures bearing down on them. Swiftly, Betty seized Mrs. Hatton from behind, pinning her arms to her sides. "Oh, no you don't", said Betty as she held the struggling woman tightly. Mrs. Hatton screamed wildly, but by this time Peggy had snatched the briefcase. Giving Mrs. Hatton a push, the Silent Three fled into the darkness. "Stop, you young hooligans", roared Mr. Loder, as the girls raced along the cliff top path. Their quarrel forgotten, the crooks raced off in pursuit.

In normal circumstances, the Silent Three would have easily outdistanced their pursuers, but they were hampered by their burden. The gold was very heavy, and even the rugged Peggy had difficulty in carrying it. Ben Shaw was an agile man; he soon caught up with them. Roughly he thrust Joan aside, and attempted to wrest the briefcase from Peggy.

"Let go, or I'll throw it over the cliff", warned No. 3 of the Silent Three. "You little varmit", roared the enraged man. Mr. Loder joined Ben and attempted to seize the case. Betty attempted to stop him but she was thrust aside. Suddenly a stern voice called out. "Stop, take your hands off that girl!" The stocky figure of Captain Bristow loomed out of the darkness. "I'm not giving up that gold for anyone", snarled Ben, as he advanced on the Captain. "Stay where you are", ordered Bristow in his best quarter deck manner. He moved his hand to his jacket pocket, making a distinct, metallic sound. Ben's face went pale.

"You wouldn't dare", he snapped. "One false move and you will be feeding the fish", warned the Captain. Ben wasn't well provided with courage. Muttering threats, he slunk off into the darkness. The Captain then turned to Mr. Loder. "I think that your little game to blacken me has failed, Loder", he said firmly. "The gold is back in my possession, if you want to make an issue of it, I shall call the police. I think we can prove your involvement in burglary and attempted blackmail". With further abusive remarks, Mr. Loder also left the scene, accompanied by Mrs. Hatton.

"Your gold", said Peggy as she handed the briefcase to the Captain, "with the compliments of the Silent Three". "I can't thank you enough", replied the Captain. "Tomorrow the gold will be on its way back to Germany. I shall also write to your headmistress, drawing attention to all your help in this matter!" "Oh, please, don't", chorussed the Silent Three. "Miss Garfield mustn't know who we are". Have you a gun in your pocket?" asked Peggy. "No just a waterproof case for my pipe and tobacco", smiled the Captain. "Made of best naval brass, it makes a nice metallic sound when you touch it, and it fooled the ruffians a treat". "It stopped a good rough house", chuckled Betty.

The Silent Three accompanied the Captain back to his car. While the girls removed their robes, he opened the case and displayed the six gold bars. Each was marked with the star of David, and various letterings in Hebrew.

"I'll bet these gold bars could tell a few tales if they could speak", said Joan. "I would think that a fair amount of blood has been spilt over the years in order to gain possession of them", added Peggy with a shudder.

As the girls were driven back to the farm, Betty said. "I wonder how Mr. Loder found out that you had the gold in your possession?" The Captain smiled and said, "I have been making a few enquiries of my own. Mrs. Hatton used to work at the bank where my gold was deposited as a security, so she must have learned of its existence. She owed money to Mr. Loder, and may have suggested that the gold be stolen to give him a chance to embarrass me, and to cancel out her own debt. The gold couldn't be stolen from the bank's strong room, but when it was returned to my own home, they hired Ben Shaw to steal it".

"But the crooks fell out among themselves", said Peggy. "To our advantage", added Joan. The gold was conveyed safely to London, and the Silent Three returned to Island School, with another daring mission satisfactory completed.



Merry Christmas to fellow collectors, particularly Eric Fayne, Norman Shaw and the Editor. Wanted: Champion Libraries by Rupert Hall and Herbert Macrae.

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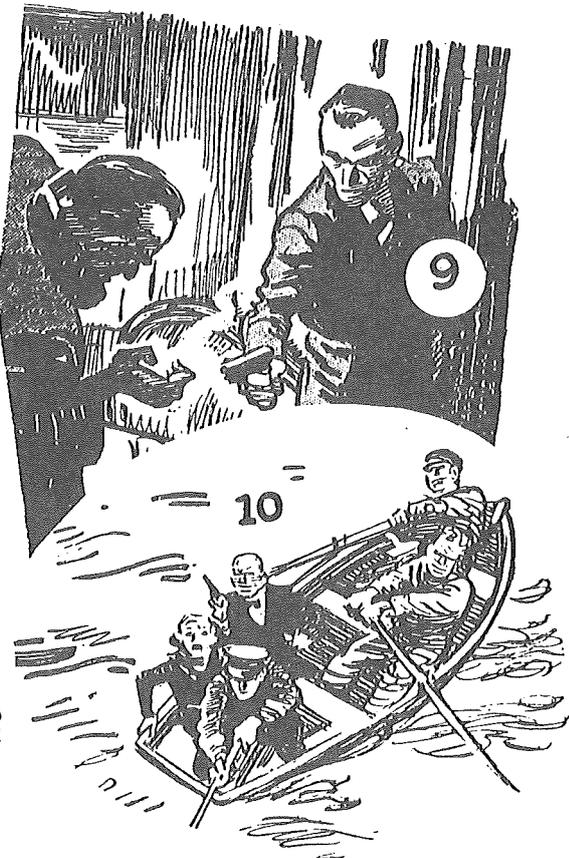
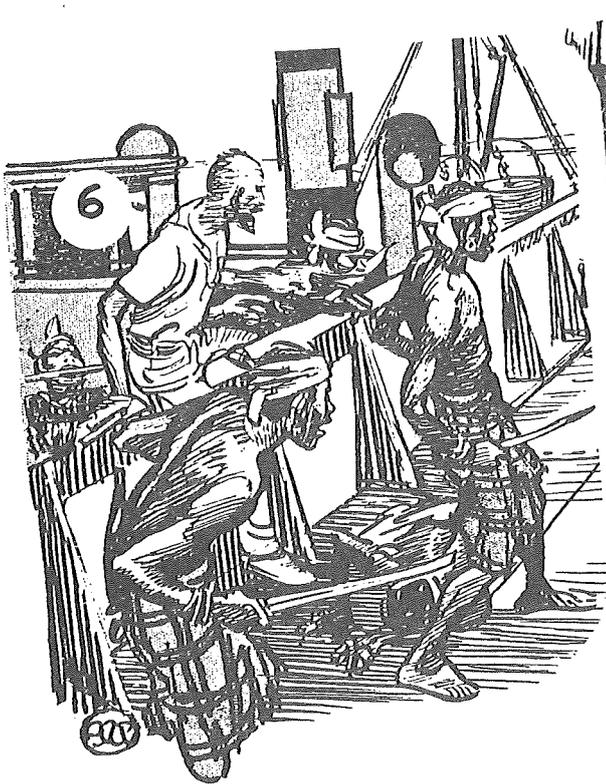
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# SEXTON BLAKE AND THE BAD, THE NOT SO BAD, AND THE BEAUTIFUL: A picture quiz by J.E.M.

How many of these adversaries of Sexton Blake -  
famous and otherwise - can you identify?  
(Answers on pages 85 and 86)





# Cecil Ponsonby, The Cad of Highcliffe

By ROGER JENKINS



Highcliffe was most unusual as a subsidiary school. St. Jim's and Rylcombe Grammar School were on terms of friendly rivalry, as were (at a later date) Rookwood and Bagshot, but it was made clear from the first mention of Highcliffe in Magnet 109 that quite a different situation existed in respect of that school:

The cap belonged to a fellow from Highcliffe school, a college some distance up the coast, beyond Cliff House. Highcliffe was too far from Greyfriars for the boys to come much in contact; but when they did happen to meet, it was not in a friendly fashion.

The fellow in the cap was Vavasour, then junior captain of Highcliffe, and at one stage he went to Dr. Locke to complain about the behaviour of the Removites, although his own conduct would not bear strict examination. The only other Highcliffe junior named in that story was Hilton, but it was not long before Ponsonby himself put in an appearance. In No. 138 the Greyfriars juniors came across Vavasour, Ponsonby, Merton, and Gadsby, but in the following paragraph they were referred to as Ponsonby, Merton, and Gadsby, but in the following paragraph they were referred to as Ponsonby & Co., and it was quite clear that Vavasour was now relegated to an inferior status. It was Ponsonby who challenged the Remove to a football match and then brought along three Old Boys in the team, but Wharton had been forewarned and obtained a local professional footballer to play for his team. Ponsonby's roguery, deceit, malice, and pride were all evident from the very beginning.

Anyone who attempts to compile a map of Greyfriars and its surroundings has to reconcile a mass of contradictions. For example, by January 1914, in Magnet 311, Highcliffe had moved near enough to Greyfriars for Mr. Mobbs to walk there twice in order to make complaints to Dr. Locke. This particular number entitled "Trouble with Highcliffe" mentioned that school in the title for the first time, and a number of detailed scenes were set at that school. Ponsonby was referred to as "The Hon. Cecil Ponsonby", Monson was mentioned as playing Bridge in the study as well as Merton and Gadsby, and Vavasour was also there. There were also a few sentences about their form-master:

Mr. Mobbs, the master of the Fourth, was gifted with infinite tact, and he was not likely to happen along when he was not wanted. Mr. Mobbs hoped for great things some day from the influence of Ponsonby's father, a noble earl; and nothing would have induced him to find out anything that would have got the Honourable Cecil into trouble.

It was never made clear exactly what Mr. Mobbs hoped the noble earl would do for him, but his partiality and his spirited defence of his favourite were always in evidence:

"Then they burst into Ponsonby's study!" exclaimed Mr. Mobbs, "and forced that highly-born and delicate lad to enter into a brutal fistical encounter with a rough brute -"

As a matter of fact, Ponsonby was not a coward, but fair fighting played no part in his outlook on life. Incidentally, this story introduced Gadsby's celebrated gold pocket watch, which was almost as famous as Ponsonby's diamond pin.

By September of that year, Ponsonby's full villainy was on detailed view in No. 344 "Ructions at Highcliffe". He arrived at Greyfriars to pick a fight with Nugent, against whom he had a grudge, and left his diamond pin with the point sticking on the inside of Nugent's jacket. It was the Bounder who noticed that Ponsonby had left without his pin, it was the Bounder who initiated a search, and it was the Bounder who made the sensible suggestion of handing it to Dr. Locke without making accusations against Ponsonby that could not be proved. When Mr. Mobbs came soon afterwards with his accusations of theft and threats of calling in the police, he was astonished to find the pin with Dr. Locke. As Mr. Quelch later said to the Head:

"It seems impossible that a lad of Ponsonby's age could be guilty of such wickedness."

The remainder of the story related the revenge taken. A car driven by Ponsonby's chauffeur at excessive speed knocked down Clare, a new boy at Highcliffe, and he suffered from concussion. Squiff, who was new to Greyfriars, went to Highcliffe pretending to be Clare, and held his own against three of Ponsonby's friends, Merton, Tunstall, and Drury. Mr. Mobbs placed Squiff in a study with Smithson and Benson, two non-aristocratic juniors. Ponsonby was astonished to find himself in all sorts of humiliating situations, and Squiff even caned Mr. Mobbs before he left and before the real Clare recovered sufficiently to take his place at Highcliffe.

These Magnet stories were in a manner of speaking the overture to the two justly famous Highcliffe stories that appeared in the 3d Boys' Friend Libraries, "The Boy Without a Name" and "Rivals and Chums". Clare arrived as a new boy, but obviously not the same Clare who was in Magnet 344, though it is odd that Charles Hamilton should have forgotten that he had recently used the same name at Highcliffe. The new Clare was a Council School boy who was coming to Highcliffe on a scholarship. The most noticeable feature of these two stories, however, is the introduction of de Courcy, the Caterpillar, a remarkable piece of characterisation and never referred to in the Magnet so far. De Courcy had impeccable aristocratic connections, but he was not inclined to support Ponsonby in his objections to the newcomer. An important personage in this saga was Major Courtenay, a very wealthy man who was Ponsonby's uncle and likely to make Ponsonby his heir, a fact very much in Ponsonby's mind, though why such a wealthy young aristocrat should dwell on this is rather a curious circumstance. Ponsonby's feud with Clare reached its climax in chloroforming him and making him appear to be drunk, but Major Courtenay intervened and it turned out that Clare was his own son, thought drowned at sea, and was thus Ponsonby's cousin. The sequel in the second volume was even better than the first story, and Ponsonby's villainy included deliberately attempting to lose a match with Courtenay as captain and conspiring to get de Courcy expelled.

Ponsonby's motivation was never clearly explained. He was one of Charles Hamilton's few evil characters that were quite well-known but scarcely credible in view of his youth. A good deal of background information was supplied, about the dry rot in the school, the snobbery of wealthy boys with aristocratic backgrounds and impressive names, their shady pursuits, and their malicious natures. Ponsonby was always the leader, and occasionally his excesses were too much for some of his less resolute followers, like Vavasour, who crumbled in the investigation about Clare's alleged drunkenness. On the whole, it might be true to say that his activities were of two main kinds: chance spitefulness towards a single Greyfriars character who might fall into Highcliffe hands; and complicated plots to get someone disgraced or expelled.

An example of a minor escapade can be found in Magnet 1215 when Ponsonby catapulted Mr. Quelch, for which he was punished by Wharton:

"Did you - h'm - did you administer a severe castigation to the Highcliffe boy, Wharton?"

"Yes, rather, sir. I mean certainly, sir."

"I cannot, of course, approve of anything of the kind", said Mr. Quelch, coughing.

"But you are sure that the castigation was severe?"

Ponsonby's vengeance was achieved when Wharton was gagged and tied to a tree from which he was not able to escape until the small hours, an incident in the plot of the Lancaster series: Wharton was in a position to overhear the Wizard talking to a confederate, but not able to make his presence known.

The diamond pin was used twice more by Ponsonby in attempts to bring disgrace upon his victims. In Magnet 798, when Levison had returned to Greyfriars for a short while, Ponsonby attempted to persuade him to sabotage the Greyfriars cricket match with Highcliffe and, when Levison refused, the diamond pin, already planted among Levison's belongings, was ready for an accusation of theft, but unfortunately for Ponsonby Bunter had witnessed him planting it. This affair was settled by the juniors themselves, but in magnet 1067 when Captain Marker was attempting to bring Wharton into disgrace, a similar method was used. Luckily Bunter found the pin before the occurrence of the

scuffle that was the alleged occasion of the theft. This time Mr. Mobbs accompanied Ponsonby to Greyfriars and uttered threats of calling in the police against Wharton, only to discover that Mr. Quelch had evidence of Ponsonby's complicity in the plot:

Mr. Quelch picked up the diamond pin from the table, dropped it into a drawer, and snapped the drawer shut.

"That pin, sir, remains here until a constable arrives to take official charge of it!" he uttered icily.

"What? What?"

"You, sir, are at liberty to depart as soon as you please; but the same does not apply to Ponsonby. I shall detain Ponsonby here until a constable arrives from Courtfield Police Station to take him into custody."



Ponsonby & Co. lay about the study in every attitude of limpness and exhaustion.

Despite the fact that Mr. Mobbs always supported him so unwaveringly, Ponsonby had no hesitation in No. 1323 in removing his form-master's beloved stamp collection and burning it in the grate of Study 3 to incriminate Courtenay and de Courcy, despite the fact, again, that Mr. Mobbs had spent over £200 on his collection, a very large sum in those days. His father had to recompense Mr. Mobbs, but the incentive to earn a reward of £50 caused Ponsonby to shadow the hikers in Nos. 1331-40, in a chauffeur-driven limousine. He was attempting to steal Bob Cherry's Holiday Annual, in which the clue to the whereabouts of the bank robbery was concealed. Why Bob Cherry should add that weighty tome to his extensive hiking kit, and why Ponsonby should take all that trouble over £50 is somewhat curious. Incidentally, when Ponsonby was arrested as a suspected poacher, he asserted that his father was a baronet - which indicated that his father had apparently been demoted from the peerage (and similarly Lord Mornington lost his title in the Rookwood stories).

Ponsonby made unwelcome appearances in a number of holiday stories. For example, he haunted the Water Lily crew almost as much as Shifty Spooner in Nos. 1643-50, and he was even to be found outside the pages of the Magnet. When Tubby Muffin's uncle turned his yacht into a floating boarding-house, Ponsonby & Co. were paying guests, but the strange hauntings aboard made them leave the yacht in alarm at Llandudno. Perhaps his least objectionable appearance was in the High Oaks series, not exactly a holiday series but certainly not set at Greyfriars. In No. 1048 Ponsonby disguised himself as an elderly man, Mr. Joseph Buncombe M.A. (Oxon) O.B.E. and answered Mauleverer's advertisement for a headmaster for High Oaks School. It was certainly an amusing episode and because Ponsonby had to play a part it kept him from being quite as obnoxious as he usually was.

If there is one Magnet story that epitomises Ponsonby's cunning more than any other it must be Magnet 1057. The previous week de Courcy's bicycle had been stolen by a dubious character known as Honest George and Bunter had bought it from him - or at least he had paid a deposit! When the facts came to light, Ponsonby was able to hit out at his enemies on all sides: he berated de Courcy for letting Greyfriars get away with a theft from a Highcliffe fellow, and he sent Bunter an anonymous registered letter asking "Who stole the bike?" His sniping was kept up in a masterly manner that could never be proved but only suspected:

Ponsonby's scheme was working. More than once in their little troubles with Highcliffe Harry Wharton & Co. had felt rather dismally that Pon was their master when it came to cunning and astuteness.

In that respect certainly they had no ambition to equal Pon. Still, it placed them at a disadvantage.

A straightforward attack they knew how to meet. But wily treachery was difficult to deal with.

In the end, it was the lazy de Courcy who bestirred himself and managed to extract a written retraction from Ponsonby, and he was able to do this only because he had once shared some of Ponsonby's shady habits, and knew how to catch him at a disadvantage.

Charles Hamilton's villains often reformed, if only to a limited extent: Levison, Lumley-Lumley, Vernon-Smith, Mornington - all were examples of this. As he wrote to me in 1949 "I don't quite know how it is - unless it be my own sweet nature! - but all my bad characters have a tendency to reform, and get there sooner or later, and I always liked to see them on the right path." Why, then, was it that Ponsonby, who appeared in so many Magnet stories that it is impossible to deal with them all, remained a bad character throughout? It is true that he sometimes expressed contrition (usually when faced with expulsion) but this never lasted beyond the particular episode, and after that he was his old self again. The answer to this problem lies in the single word 'conflict'.

All school stories depend upon conflict to keep the plot moving. The heroes always have obstacles to overcome, villains to thwart, evil plots to evade. Ponsonby was so useful to the Magnet plots that his reformation would have robbed Charles Hamilton of countless opportunities to confront his heroes with difficulties and opposition. At St. Jim's and Rookwood, the House system provided a good deal of the conflict internally, but Greyfriars (that strange public school with only one House) often needed external conflict which the nuts of Highcliffe were well placed to provide. In later years, Ponsonby's closest friends were Monson and Gadsby, but even they sometimes jibbed at their leader's excesses. It is rather curious that Ponsonby, alone of the Highcliffe nuts, should have a well-defined character, and all his friends were weaker carbon copies, quite unlike Skinner, Stott, and Snoop who, in the heyday of the Magnet, each had quite a distinct personality. Perhaps it was Ponsonby's persistent spitefulness that marked him out from his friends, a trait most unusual in schoolboy, and it is possible to wonder whether it was a perverted sense of aristocratic honour that made Ponsonby so keen to seek revenge in the Italian fashion. Whilst the readers undoubtedly loathed him, there can be no doubt that any story in which he appeared was rendered particularly interesting, and his devious machinations enhanced the plots tremendously. Detestable as he undoubtedly was, we should never have enjoyed the Magnet stories so much had he been expelled from Highcliffe, as he so richly deserved. Charles Hamilton seldom made overt moral statements, but Ponsonby's actions in No. 1067 moved him to underline the philosophical basis on which all his stories were written:

Falsehood, though never so cunning, can never be made to look quite like truth and every falsehood carries in it, somewhere and somehow, its own refutation. Every wretched dabbler in crime has discovered, sooner or later, that it is impossible to guard all points; that honesty is not only the best policy but the only possible policy if there is to be success.

This is the basis on which Ponsonby's repeated failures could be explained. We can only feel grateful that he was never deterred from continuing his attempts!





It was with trepidation that I considered writing on the subject. Seemed a little like preaching to the converted. Being a life long collector, my conclusions are unlikely to be objective. What is a collector? Why do we collect?

I have always taken the far too simplistic notion that there are only two kinds of people in the world. People that collect and people that do not. I am sure it is more complex than that. My wife has always described my own attitude to the subject even more simply. If it stands still I collect it, if it moves I stroke it. The latter has some truth in it, but I vehemently deny the former.

My first question, what is a collector, poses few problems. A person who looks permanently preoccupied, to the point of appearing as if he is sleep walking, is invariably a collector. They come in all shapes and sizes. I have met tall, short, stout, thin, fair, dark, clean-shaven and bearded collectors. I feel sure, from personal experience, that there are more male than female collectors. I have observed, without drawing any positive conclusions, that women appear less nostalgic than men. As I shall explain in answering question two, nostalgia does play a part in collecting, hence perhaps the smaller number of women. Or is it because they are more practical, not wanting to take up precious space, and being more aware of the very real bother of cleaning and caring for a collection? Only the ladies amongst my readers could give an answer, even then I sense, there would be deep differences of opinion.

I admire collectors for their dedication and devotion to their chosen subject, that is if they take it seriously. It is those who take themselves too seriously that I do not admire. I am afraid I have met several. Admirable as dedication and devotion are, there are dangers. Collectors can be so devoted to their own field that it is beyond their conception that anyone else can be equally interested in a totally different field. It shows an arrogance and narrow-mindedness that leave them the loser.

I have never found any difficulty in appreciating other people's collections, even if my own interest is minimal, for the motives that drive different collectors are exactly the same as my own.

This brings me to question two. Why do we collect? I think the simple answer may well be, the quest for the unique. All collectors would love to have the best collection in their own field. If it is achieved, which is very seldom, then it will be, by the very definition of best, unique.

As asserted before, nostalgia is often the starting point for a collection. In our juvenile days it is more than likely that we collected all sorts of things. I know I did. When I was not busy stroking moving objects, I formed dozens of small collections, sometimes to the despair of patient, but long suffering parents. I remember collecting stamps, cigarette-cards, foreign coins, comics, milk bottle tops, (the old fashioned round cardboard ones with a hole in the middle, each carrying the name of the diary or an advertisement), razor blade packets, souvenirs of the war, books, postcards and many other items. Perhaps my wife was right! None of these collections lasted long or was taken seriously, but they afforded me pleasure while forming, and looked at retrospectively are very nostalgic.

They were, however, obscure; the genesis of my later and current bid to form a meaningful and unique collection. In many respects I feel I have done just that, which rather proves that these earlier and mostly useless collections were not a complete waste of time. The pleasure derived from collecting is very much like walking a tight rope - a sense

of achievement without making too many mistakes and getting financially hurt at the end of the day. It is a very lucky or wise collector who has no regrets. The bargain missed and the bargain that was no bargain at all! We all have been there. Very few of us have enough of the "readys", particularly when a rare and desirable item becomes available. If money were limitless, I think most of the fun would go out of the hobby. The scheming, planning, conniving, swopping, bribing, begging, hoping and praying make the whole business worthwhile.

To end on a personal note, I call my own collection singular, although it covers a couple of subjects, comprising a comprehensive art collection in all mediums, covering most subjects, and a collection of books, most of which are signed by the author, artist or subject. Part of the art collection is devoted to original art work of the boys' papers and comic illustrators. I am proud to have works by H.M. Brock, Herbert Foxwell, A.B. Payne, Leonard Shields, Frank Hampson, Eric Parker, Thomas Henry, C.H. Chapman, G.W. Wakefield, Al Capp, Charles M. Schulz and many others.

My books include volumes signed by the following: W.E. Johns, Richmal Crompton, Frank Richards, H. Rider Haggard, Rudyard Kipling, Edwy Searles Brooks, W. Somerset Maugham, H.G. Wells, P.G. Wodehouse and many, many others.

I am sure that within our fraternity, many can emulate or surpass my efforts, but no one can say the collection is not unique. That, to me, makes all my efforts worthwhile. My book collection I find particularly satisfying, as it enables me to gather together books of a very wide variety. As my interests are of the widest it is an eminently sensible collection for me to have. I have modern authors, aeronautical books - another great love - art books, history, biography and the old boy's and girl's books we all love.

It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the understanding and very great help of my wife, and the unselfish help I have received from other collectors. All in all a good bunch. I have also resisted the temptation of mentioning the profit motive in collecting. It has never been a very important part of my urge, and I feel it is probably the same for most of my fellow collectors.



Season's Greetings to all hobby friends from  
RON AND KIT BECK OF LEWES  
and  
NEIL, SUSAN AND DAVID BECK OF POLEGATE

\*\*\*\*\*

Interested in stories by Henry St. John way back, usually in B.F.L.  
H.E. SALMON, 38 WARWICK ROAD, IPSWICH, SUFFOLK, IP4 2QE  
Telephone 0473 219939

\*\*\*\*\*

Wanted: Modern Boy Annuals and Story Papers.  
PAUL MARRIOTT, 8 THE HEATH, LEIGHTON BUZZARD, BEDS., LU17 7HL  
Telephone: 0525 382669

\*\*\*\*\*

Collector wants Greyfriar's Book Club volumes 4 and 8, and Greyfriars Press volumes 11 and 39.  
F. HIRST, 37 JESSOP DRIVE, MARPLE, STOCKPORT, CHESHIRE.  
Telephone: 061-449-8353

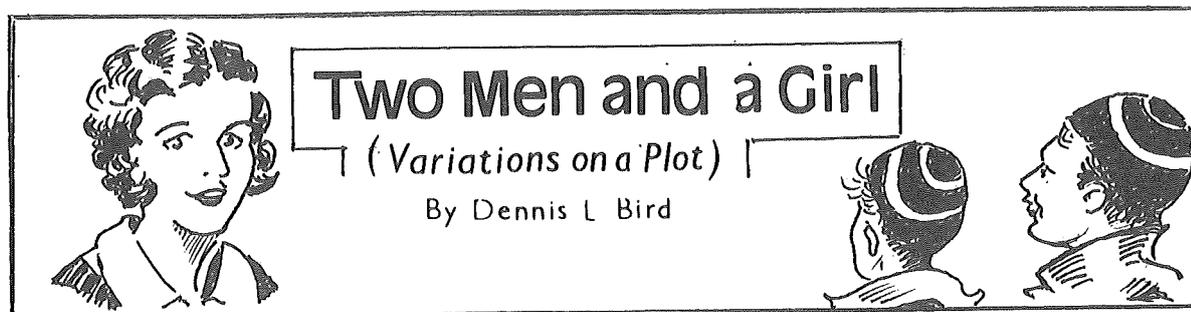
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Guess these

# Characters' Nicknames



Answers on page 94



There was once a Deanna Durbin film called "100 Men and a Girl." My arithmetic is more modest, but my title is a deliberate echo of the film because I am writing about the same period as the charming Canadian singer's heyday: the late 1930s and early 1940s. That was a time when the girls' story papers flourished, devising variants on a few basic plots so ingeniously that the reader was enthused, entertained, and baffled for 16 or 18 successive weeks as a serial spun its yarn.

One popular plot featured the girl who is befriended by two young men, one or both of whom she later suspects is her foe. I have chosen six stories from the "Girls' Crystal" which show how much variety can be derived from that basic theme.

The simplest version reveals the true enemy early on, and the rest of the story concerns his battle with the heroine and her real friend. Such a tale is "*Maureen and the Boy Who Didn't Care*", published in issues dated from December 30, 1939, to April 13, 1940. It seems originally to have been called "Maureen's Forbidden Friendship"; I read it at the time, but now have only the abbreviated edition published under the later title in March 1947, as No. 11 in the post-war Schoolgirls' Own Library.

The author is "*Renee Frazer*", alias Ronald Fleming, who also wrote the Noel Raymond detective stories under the pen-name "Peter Langley." The story has some typical Fleming touches of suspense and detection, although the plot has too many loose ends to be wholly convincing.

The main character is Maureen Eversham, orphan daughter of a famous actor. She is a girl of great spirit ("Maureen - the girl who wouldn't be beaten"), and her courage, determination, and charm make her an unusually endearing personality. She is offered a home by her father's old friend Graham Channing; in return she is to direct an amateur production of a play he has written. She will be helped by Mr. Channing's nephew Vincent Gayford; "she liked this boy. His breezy frankness was refreshing."

The other apex of the triangle is Mr. Channing's scrapegrace son Laurie. He has had to leave home under a cloud, and is outwardly a hard, cynical, and not very attractive character. But on page 18 (out of 96) the story takes a sudden turn; we learn that the seemingly likeable Vincent is in fact seeking to incriminate his cousin Laurie, for no apparent reason. Thanks to him, Laurie is accused of art thefts and forgery. The denouement, somewhat improbably, takes place during a performance of the play, when a casket of letters reveals Vincent's perfidy.

The main flaw in "Maureen" is that we discover the villain's identity too soon. "*Renee Frazer*" wrote a subtler story a year or so earlier: "*The Spectre Marred Their Friendship*" (first instalment dated April 30, 1938). Jean Stirling opens a riverside cafe; a ghostly figure tries to wreck the enterprise, but she has the help of two young fellows - again cousins. "Frank Clinter was the more good-looking of the two, and his easy, engaging air compared favourably with Don Farrel's rather taciturn manner."

It soon seems that Don is engaged in some nefarious plan to ruin Jean, and she relies increasingly on the cheerful Frank. Then he too comes under suspicion. Which is her friend and which her enemy? The successive instalments cleverly keep the reader guessing until almost the last page, when the truth emerges. Frank Clinter and his father had learned of hidden treasure of Jean's land; they tried to force her out of business, and Don, somewhat clumsily, had sought to defeat them.

A third *Renee Frazer* story takes us to Florida: "*The Boy Who Threatened Her Holiday Quest*" (October 19, 1940, to January 11, 1941). This is an enjoyable adventure

# The SPECTRE MARRED THEIR FRIENDSHIP



The Schoolgirls'  
Own Library No. 728

4½<sup>10</sup>  
2

A dramatic  
Mystery Story  
By Renee Frazer

2-5-40

whose exotic setting was a particularly welcome diversion for British readers suffering from the terrors of the London blitz. The sunshine and friendliness and exuberance of the USA come across strongly. It was my first acquaintance with the words "barbecue" and "kumquat."

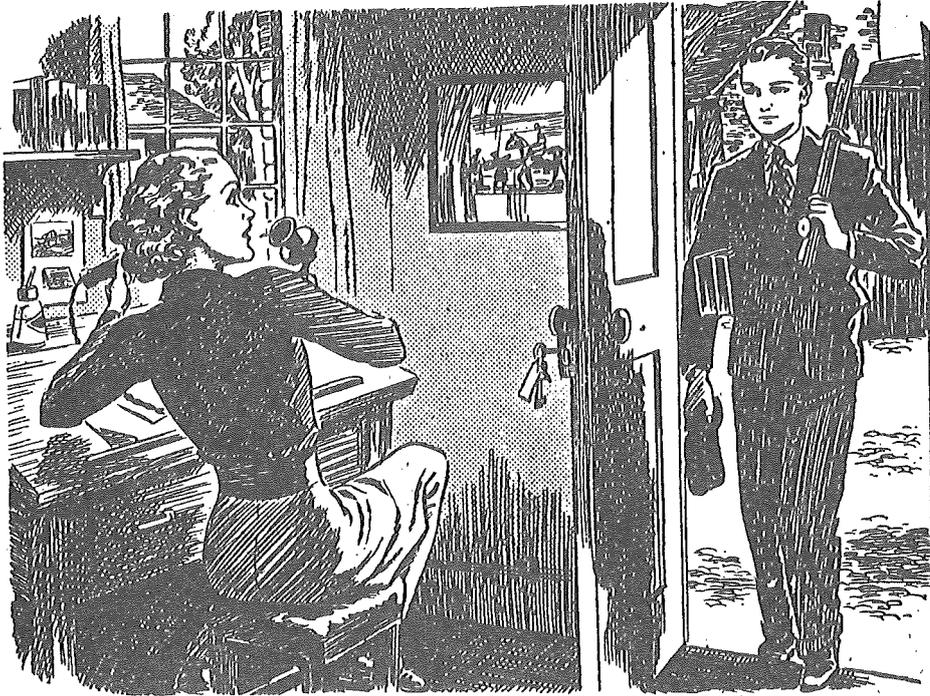
Beryl Owen is an English girl befriended by an American family, the Maynards, who invite her to stay; their son Jack becomes a close and trusted friend. In this twist of the fundamental plot, Jack is true-blue and never under suspicion. All the doubts and fears are concentrated on his mysterious friend Ralph Travers.

Beryl has mystery, too, in her own background. An elderly American invalid, Justin Harker, tells her his friend Daniel Owen - her father - died in prison after being unjustly charged; he wants her help in a search for papers which will clear Dan's name. Ralph Travers - a masterful, over-bearing young man - is clearly trying to thwart her at every turn, yet Beryl is attracted to him despite herself. It eventually transpires that Harker is the villain who "framed" her father - and Ralph's as well. Harker needed her aid in recovering incriminating papers and a fortune in 100 dollar bills. Ralph, quite naturally, assumed that Beryl was a crook in league with Harker.

All misunderstandings over, Ralph and Beryl and Jack are all friends again. Then Ralph quixotically adds a topical note: "I need excitement... My dad was in the last war, Beryl - I guess I'm following in his footsteps, though it'll be the Air Force for me." So he leaves, presumably to join the Eagle Squadron of the RAF - the only way an American airman could fight Hitler in the days before Pearl Harbour.

"Paddy and the Grey Rider" (September 14 to December 28, 1940) was by "Dorothy Page" - Stewart Pride, who in 1950 became editor of the revived "School Friend" weekly. Its heroine Paddy Dare runs a riding school. Things go badly wrong, and she realises that

a wealthy landowner, Mr. Maddox, and his daughter Constance are working against her. But help is at hand in the shape of a mysterious masked horseman, the "Grey Rider from the moors". Then Paddy discovers that he is seemingly collaborating with Mr. Maddox. Constance's cousin Harold Maddox - very different from his unpleasant relatives - becomes her new ally.



**"Harold!"** cried Paddy in delighted surprise. For Harold Maddox stood there, and under his arm he carried—the missing cash-box.

I have cheated somewhat in including "Paddy" in this article because there is a real surprise at the end. "Stilted, awkward, rather old-fashioned" Harold turns out to be the Grey Rider himself: the "Two Men" are one.

Finally, two plot variations from the ever-reliable *"Hazel Armitage"* - John Wheway, who wrote many of the Cliff House School stories as "Hilda Richards". *"Marion of Mystery Kennels"* (May 10 to September 6, 1941) features Marion Bennett who, like Paddy Dare, is fond of animals. In her case, it is dogs and not horses who provide her livelihood. The two young men in her life are rich Rodney Merrivale and enigmatic Hugh Underwood, who become bitter enemies. Each believes the other to be the sinister "Robin Raith", a re-incarnation of an old-time highwayman who is trying to ruin Marion's kennels.

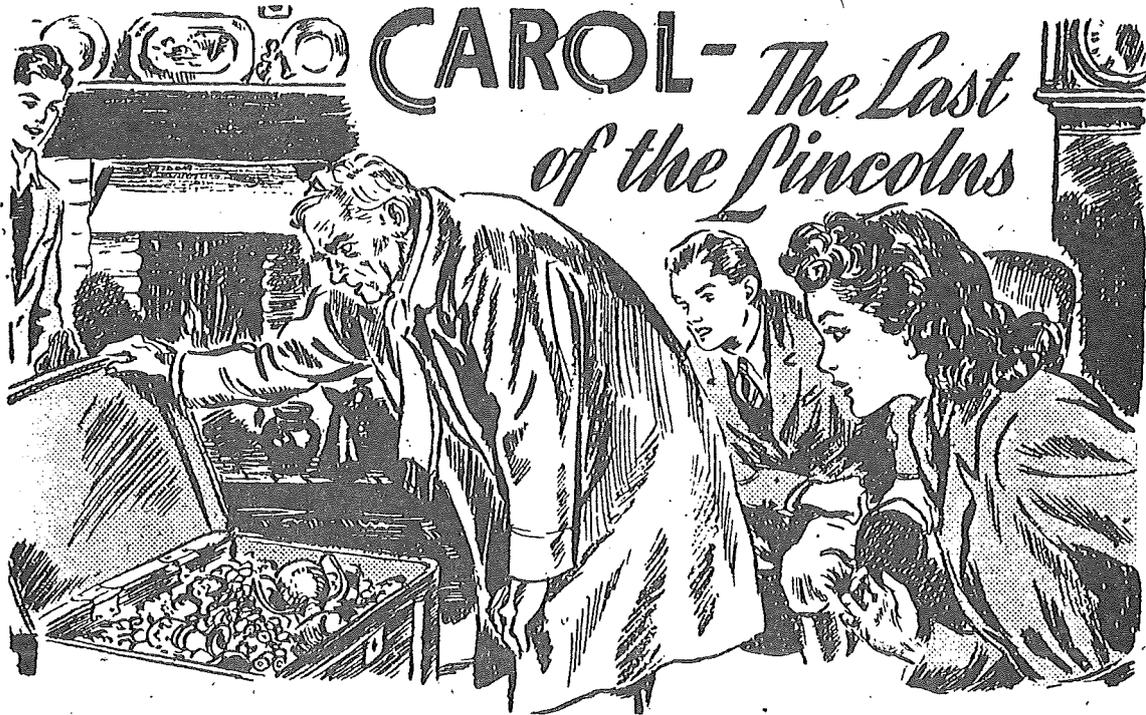
The author adds an extra dimension: Marion's assistant Brenda Gill, a strong character in her own right. Deeply superstitious, she provides moments of comedy; she is also devoted to Hugh, even when he seems to be their mystery antagonist. In the end, neither boy is to blame: the culprit is Rodney's uncle Boyd Todd, who plays very little part in the story until the final episodes.

Lastly, there is *"Hazel Armitage's"* *"Carol: The Last of the Lincolns"* (December 9, 1944, to March 31, 1945). This is really "Three Men and a Girl" because, in addition to Carol Lincoln and her two boy chums, there is a formidable fourth character in her grandfather George Lincoln. "Grandpa George" is a fine creation. His two sons are dead, and there is no one to carry on the family farm but Carol. He makes her his successor, but continues to criticise the way she runs things. There are some strong scenes between them, and a convincing interplay of personalities.

The two young men are Ron Everard, a public schoolboy vacationing on the farm to learn the business, and Andy Felton, who lives a nomadic life in a caravan. Ron and Andy, former friends, are now sworn enemies, and Carol does not know which one to depend upon. The plot develops rather like "The Spectre Marred Their Friendship", but it has greater depth because of the interesting people on the fringes - the gruffly genial Squire

Will Fullerton, for instance, or the farm foreman Dave Mann and the dairy-maid Daisy Orloff (a curiously uncommon name). There are pleasant domestic scenes, at meal times with Carol, Dave, Ron, and Grandpa George.

The Concluding Chapters Of HAZEL ARMITAGE'S Dramatic Serial



The story dispenses with melodramatic spectres, highway men, and Grey Riders. It turns on inheritance - for Andy Felton finally discovers that he is the long-lost infant son of Grandpa George's first born. He is cousin to Carol, who is no longer "The Last of the Lincolns". Ron Everard is disclosed as the wrongdoer who sought to cheat both Carol and Andy; he is frustrated, and Andy (now Terence Lincoln) comes home at last. And perhaps there will be some little Lincolns to take over when Carol's and Terry's time is past?



Very best wishes for Christmas to all readers, particularly Charles, Tim, Eric, Betty and Johnny.

MAC

\*\*\*\*\*

Wanted: "The Truth about Wilson?" believed to be correct title, relates to Wilson, Wonder Athlete of Wizard comic.

PHONE: 0787 71128

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Seasonal Greetings to all. Wanted: S.O.L.s, 32, 66, 94, 258, 260, 308. "Always a Knight" (author unknown).

MAURICE KING, 27 CELTIC CRESCENT, DORCHESTER, DT1 2TG

Telephone: 0305 269026

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# The Best Picture and Story

# Paper for Boys and Girls

# PUCK

By Reg Hardinge

Early in 1920 my parents bought me a copy of PUCK. It was the first children's paper I had ever seen and I was absolutely enthralled with it. Later on I became acquainted with BUBBLES, SUNBEAM, RAINBOW, LOT-O-FUN and various other comics of similar design. But PUCK remained my favourite throughout my early boyhood.

## ANGEL SHOWS HER PLAYMATES—



1. "Three hip! hip! hoorays!" shouted Angel and her merry playmates when they arrived at the farm where Uncle Joe had taken them to spend a happy week-end. "A hearty welcome to you all, and you must make yourselves quite at home," cried Farmer Cheery.



2. Well, you may be sure the merry playmates wasted no time before they started to have a look round. After dinner they all raced out of the house into the farmyard. "Let's have a game of ride-a-grey-mare," cried the little clowns. "Yes, let's," warbled the pets eagerly.

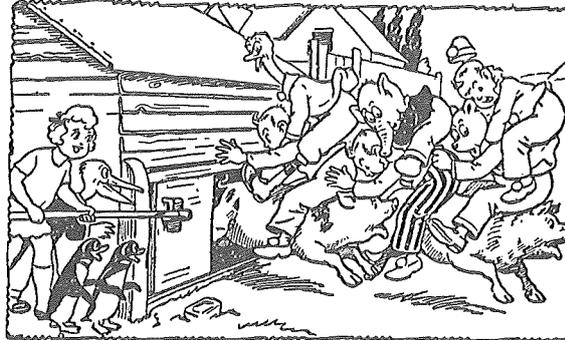


3. "Only the biggest and strongest can play, as it's a rather rough game," said the little clowns. "So Angel and Peter Pelican and the Penguins twins can't be in it." "Yes, we only want six," piped Olly Ostrich. "What a shame," grumbled Angel. "We can't help being small!"

## —A NEW GAME TO PLAY



4. Well, the game started, with the six players having great sport, and Peter, Popsy and Pansy looking on enviously. But though she wasn't taking part in the fun, Angel was all smiles. "Don't look so sad, Peter," she whispered. "We're going to have a game of our own."



5. Then, with the garden hoe she had picked up, she slyly pulled open the door of the sty and let loose the three pigs that were shut up inside. Out they came with grunts of delight. "Hi! Steady on! What's the game?" howled the little clowns, as they were swept off their feet.



6. "Ha, ha, ha! Riding the grey mare isn't a game worth watching, so I'm giving you piggy-back rides instead. Hold on tight, everybody. Gee up, piggies!" laughed Angel. "He, he, he! This is sport worth seeing," giggled Peter, Popsy and Pansy.

The whole of the front page was devoted to *The Amusing Adventures of Angel and her Merry Playmates*. Angel's golden hair was gathered at the back with a black ribbon and a black belt encircled her waist. The three little clowns who lived with her, Claude, Clarence and Charlie were always dressed in white hats with scarlet pom-poms, white ruffs round their necks and scarlet jackets with two white pom-poms on each chest. Whilst Claude and Clarence always wore sky-blue pantaloons, Charlie started with black and white striped ones. Then, for a short spell in 1921, Charlie was depicted, like the other two clowns, in sky-blue pantaloons, but was eventually given a black and green striped variety. Angel's other companion was Jumbo, a male baby elephant garbed in boys' clothes. The menage was completed by Joe Jinks, factotum, whose balding head sprouted wips of black hair, and who attempted to exercise some sort of discipline over the high-spirited company.

Early in May 1920 the household was augmented by the arrival of a group of five assorted creatures - Bertie the bear, Popsy and Pansy the penguins, Pete Pelican and Olly Ostrich. These were presents to Angel from her sailor Uncle Jim. Initially these newcomers were drawn in their natural fur and plumage; but, in a few weeks time, Bertie, Pete and Olly were clad, like Jumbo, in human apparel. Only Popsy and Pansy (the penguins) remained 'uncivilized', with their black faces and backs and white chests. (It is noteworthy that this change to the front page occurred first just a few weeks before the introduction of a completely new feature on page 8 - a black and white strip relating the adventures of Rob the Rover, and entitled *The Picture Story of a Brave Boy who was All Alone in the World.*)

November 17, 1923.

Every Thursday. PUCK Twopence.

JOLLY JINKS IN JUNGLE LAND.—THE SWING ON THE BLACKBOARD.



The other morning Dr. Croc's merry little pupils arrived at school very early, and while they were waiting for the worthy doctor, they fixed up a swing with the blackboard and two ropes. "Come on, boys, all aboard!" shouted Eddie Elephant when everything was ready. My word, there was a scramble as everybody climbed on to the swing. Luckily the ropes were very strong, otherwise they wouldn't have stood the strain of such a heavy load. "Hurrah! this is lovely!" laughed Percy Porker, as Tim Tiger and Bobby Bunny pushed the swing backwards and forwards. There was no room for Harry Hippo, so he amused himself by sitting at Dr. Croc's desk, and pretending he was the doctor. You can guess what a noise there was; the boys quite forgot they were in school. Just when the fun was at its highest, the schoolroom door opened and in walked Dr. Croc. I'll leave you to guess what happened afterwards.

It was Walt Disney who, a decade later, realized the tremendous influence of animal characters in his cartoons to draw the public to watch his productions. The proprietors of PUCK in 1920 were fully alive to this factor, and much of the content of their paper exemplified this. *Jolly Jinks in Jungle Land*, for example, which first consisted of a single ten by five inch frame, depicted a variety of animals in clothes, in a multiplicity of antics relating to one particular theme each week, e.g. *Fun on the Water-fall*, *Clock Repairing*, *Spring Cleaning*, etc. This type of minutely detailed activity was exploited most effectively much later by Giles in his cartoons for the SUNDAY EXPRESS. *Wee Mac and his Precocious Pets* dealt with the pranks of a laddie in kilt and sporran, with his nanny-goat,

terrier and parrot. *Dan the Merry Menagerie Man* and the host of animals in his charge provided much amusement, whilst Clara Crow and her three fledglings were good for a laugh or two. In *The Boys of Fairy Farm* the capers of Neddy the donkey, Percy Porker, Harry Hare, Dicky Duck, Tommy Turkey and Georgie Goat were always mirth provoking.

Other outstanding features from the talented band of artists who contributed to PUCK were Puck, Pot and Pan, the whimsical goings-on of three merry elves, *Fun at Doctor Jolliboys School* (based perhaps on Dr. Holmes of St. Jim's and some of his pupils?), and Mischievous Montague, who with his girls friends Babs and Mabs, Smiler the dog and Nigger the cat provided many a chuckle.

The text stories were first-rate. For some unknown reason it was unusual for authors' names to be included with their published tales. One exception to this was Captain Jack Devon, a serial specialist, who contributed regularly every week right up to 1926.

I recollect that some of his stories were *The House of The Fifty Steps and Magic Island* (described as 'A Tale of Romance and Adventure Amidst the Weed-Grown Wastes of the Mysterious Sargasso Sea'). My favourites were *Only a Little Ragamuffin*, and its sequel, *The Scamp of the School*. Other tales of his were *The Valley of Thrills* (the story of Will Hawke, highwayman) and *Try Hard Terry*.

EVERY WEEK A COMPLETE STORY OF—

## VAL FOX AND HIS PETS

On Tour with his Caravan.



"Oh! my goodness, what a lot of wetness," said Uncle.

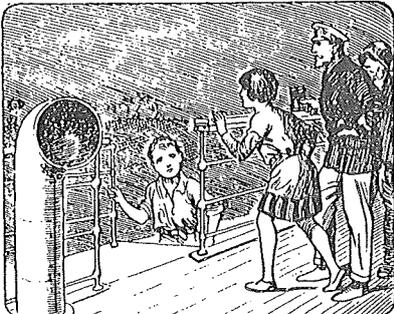
Another serial writer and author of *Dick Dauntless* was E. Newton Bungey, who also wrote for the weekly paper YOUNG BRITAIN. A complete story each week recounted the cases of *Val Fox and his pets*. Val was an amateur sleuth who travelled around Britain in a caravan. Humour was provided by Uncle Pat, his talking parrot, and Micky, his agile monkey. In addition to being a private investigator, Val Fox was an accomplished ventriloquist, and by throwing his voice he added apparent speech to the monkey's abilities.

But PUCK's main attraction for me was *Rob the Rover*, and it was to his adventures that I turned first every week. At the outset Rob was associated with Old Daniel and Dog

Jim, by the sea. Daniel, an old salt, dressed in a sou'-wester and sea-boots, lived on the shore in a cabin constructed from an over-turned life boat (like the Pegottys in David Copperfield). In due course Rob and Old Dan, with Dorothy May, joined a film company, and with Jim the dog in tow travelled to various parts of the globe, including Africa, China and North West America, making pictures and getting involved in a series of thrilling situations. The best adventure, in my opinion, was the one that started in July 1922 and ended in May 1924 - a quest for treasure, in which Rob, Old Dan and Dorothy sailed with her father, Captain May, in his steam yacht to a remote Pacific island, having only one half of a map giving its location. They were matched against villainous Black Jack, a seaman with a wooden right leg and a black patch over his right eye, together with his cut-throat crew in a schooner. Black Jack, of course, had the other half of the treasure map. On arrival at the island Rob and Dorothy were befriended by a castaway - a sort of Robinson Crusoe character - who was referred to as the mysterious old man of the island. The Pacific island episode was followed by a flight round the world in which Rob and Old Dan joined Dick True, the pilot of an 'air and sea' machine. This was a combination of a flying-boat and an aeroplane, and the countries visited were North Africa, India and Japan, amongst others. Needless to say, other exciting adventures were experienced.

**ROB THE ROVER.**

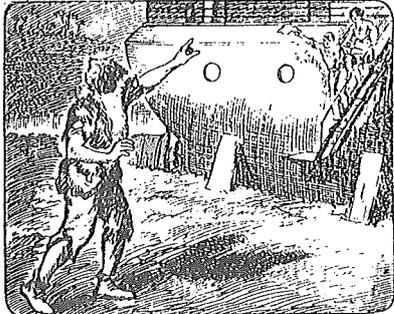
His Thrilling Adventures in Search of Treasure



1. When Rob arrived at the cleft rock in which he thought the stolen plan had been hidden, he was disappointed to find that it was not there. "I wonder if it can be possible that someone has been before me," he pondered. Then he hurried back to the yacht, where Captain May, Dorothy, and Old Dan, were waiting on the deck.



2. Captain May, Dorothy and Old Dan were just as disappointed as Rob when he came back to tell them his search had been in vain. "I will go out again as soon as day breaks, and perhaps I shall succeed in finding the plan tucked away in some other hiding place," said Rob. "It must be somewhere close at hand."



3. At that moment they heard a loud shout. "Whoever can that be?" cried Captain May. Then they all hurried to the side of the yacht, and to their great surprise they saw the mysterious old man of the island hurrying towards them. Feeling ever so excited, Rob and Dorothy ran down the companion way to meet him.

So popular was Rob the Rover that other picture serials appeared simultaneously in PUCK in 1924. Two which I recollect are *The Secret of Miser's Castle* and *Chums of the Road*. In 1920, PUCK's all-picture companion paper was LITTLE SPARKS, priced at three halfpence and published every Tuesday. However, by 1923 LITTLE SPARKS was defunct and SUNBEAM became PUCK's companion paper. Occasionally a free gift such as a toy balloon was given to each reader of PUCK. Every September PUCK ANNUAL came out, and was eagerly anticipated by me as one of my Christmas presents.

PUCK, with its bright and cheerful cover, its superbly drawn human and animal characters and its excellently written stories, gave me a great deal of pleasure in my boyhood. The only other paper of its type that nearly reached the same high standard was LOT-O-FUN.



Annuals wanted: Bubbles 1924, 1925, Chips 1941, Jester 1940, Jingles 1941. Also books by H.L. Gee. Write

HUGHES, 2 DIPROSE STREET, PIMLICO, QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA 4812

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It is not easy to pinpoint exactly when the partnership of Hilton and Price came into being. The last segment of the Pentelow Greyfriar's Gallery lumped several of the lesser lights into the one article; Hilton and Price were among those mentioned, although even then separately and not as a pair. It is also interesting to note that in the 1921 Holiday Annual we find in the feature "Who's Who at Greyfriars" that Cedric Hilton is listed as occupying study No. 6, whilst Stephen Price is the sole tenant of No. 5. In the following year's Annual, there is a somewhat similar article, this time entitled "Greyfriars Who's Who". Whereas in the previous year only names were given, 1922 saw brief pen-pictures included. Once again Hilton and Price are listed in those separate studies. They are described as follows: "*Hilton, Cedric* - a fellow who played the leading part in one yarn. But he carried an unreasonable outburst altogether too far, and spoilt all chances of success." (You notice, it says nothing about him being a dandy!)

"*Price, Stephen* - A dark-haired fellow of uncertain temperament. Once chummed with Bulstrode of the Remove, but gave him up when he was raised from the Shell to Fifth."

I don't have a complete run of *Magnets* so there have to be some omissions. We find a brief mention of Hilton in *Magnet* 981 (December 4th, 1926) entitled "Coker on the War Path", interestingly enough it is also the last mention we get of Reggie Coker. In 1927 in "The Game Kid" series, we have Richard Drury taken up by Hilton, after he had been ostracised by the Remove. Unfortunately the weak side of Hilton's character came to the fore when he asked "Dick" Drury (Game kid) to "throw" a fight. Mention again is made of Price and Hilton in the "Rebel of the Fifth" and its sequel "Who Punched Prout?" (*Magnets* 1084 and 1085 in 1928). 1931 saw Price appearing in *Magnet* 1221 "Billy Bunter's Bargain", Bunter borrowing money from him in return for keeping quiet about an incriminating photograph. In *Magnet* 1292 in 1932, "The Scapegrace of the School", we are given a very good insight into both Hilton and Price's characters. I quote from the seventh chapter as it is one of the best descriptions of Hilton's sartorial splendour:- "Hilton of the Fifth sauntered out of the House, looking as he generally looked, the picture of elegance. It was a rather raw November afternoon, and mist hung over a grey sky. Hilton's handsome hat reflected what sunshine there was; his well-cut coat was the last word in the tailor's art; from his beautiful necktie, to the ends of the well-creased trousers that were turned up over his shapely boots, he looked a genuine knut. Fellows glanced at him, some in admiration, some in envy, a few with a tincture of disdain. Mr. Prout, master of the Fifth, glanced at Hilton with a benevolent smile. Prout liked to see men in his Form well dressed. Temple of the fourth fairly glued his eyes on him. Temple was rather a dandy, and Hilton of the Fifth was his model - Hilton being, in fact, the glass of fashion and the mould of form among the dressy men of Greyfriars School. Temple's dominant wish, at that moment, was to know the name of Hilton's tailor".

Following this description of the tailor's art we find Hilton setting forth to attend a glove fight on his own. This is because his "friend" Price has received a detention for being inattentive in class. This in turn was because his thoughts were elsewhere - namely Love O'Mike for the Wapshot two o'clock!



En route to the Three Fishers, Hilton spies Wharton mooching around on his own. Taking pity, he asks the junior to go with him. "Thanks, I'm going down to games practice soon", said Harry. Wharton was feeling quite cordial towards the elegant Fifth Former, who earlier had helped hide him after the junior had smothered Quelch with flour. But to quote again from the story we have the following:-

"A fellow like Hilton was rather a puzzle to a fellow like Wharton. Handsome, wealthy, well-connected, a good man at games when he chose to exert himself. Hilton could easily have made his mark, and he chose instead to dabble in shady pursuits, and play the "giddy goat" at the risk of being found out and "bunked" from the school. He could have got his colours if he had tried for them, and he preferred to watch two beefy bruisers punching one another in a shed."

Learning that Wingate and Gwynn, suspicious of Hilton, are going to try and catch him at The Three Fishers, Wharton, to repay the favour that he owes Hilton, hastens to the Fifth Form room where Price is in detention.

He soon finds out how much Price's friendship for Hilton is worth - so disgusted is Wharton that they come to blows, Price having refused to cut detention and warn Hilton! It is interesting to note, at this point, that although Price is a Fifth Former, at least two fellows from the Remove have mastered him when it has come to fisticuffs! (Mention will be made later of when the Remove's champion fighting man, Bob Cherry, gave the weedy slacker of the Fifth a licking.) On this occasion however, it is Wharton who sends Price to the floor. It is only the entry of Mr. Prout that saves Price from a complete thrashing.

Still keen to pay his debt to Hilton, Wharton takes it upon himself to enter the precincts of the "Salubrious" establishment, The Three Fishers, and warn the dandy of the Fifth. It is while leaving, that he is spotted by his old enemy, Gerald Loder, who, although he has had his prefectship taken from him, loses no time in reporting Wharton to his form master, Mr. Quelch.

Let us now go to the year 1934, where in *Magnet* 1359 of March 3rd, we have another very good example of the two Fifth Formers' diverse characters. It has the distinction of being the only single story of that year. It deals with Blundel's influence - aided by Wingate - overriding that of Price. This has caused Hilton to take an interest in games and give up smoking (for how long?). Wingate is delighted but incurs the enmity of Price, particularly when a box of cigarettes purloined by Bunter from the study is proved to have belonged to Price. He suffers the indignity of bending over and taking six from the Head prefect - this is made even worse when his failing to suppress a howl causes Coker to look in and witness his discomfort. Of course it is soon all over the school, and, to pay Wingate back in coin, Price steals up behind him in the fog and wallops him with a walking cane. Unfortunately in his flight he knocks over Bunter, also intent on vengeance, who recognises him. It is not long before Wingate finds out the truth and offers Price the gloves, or to be taken to Dr. Locke.

In this story we have Hilton (not wishing to watch his friend's humiliation) walking out of the study (Hilton would have been expelled before bending over and taking six from Wingate). Price just didn't have the nerve to refuse the caning.

Another interesting study of the differing temperaments of the two seniors came at the end of the year. Although there was no hound, "Christmas at Hilton Hall" always reminds me slightly of "The Hound of the Baskervilles", with the convict related to one of the servants, the servant supplying him with food and clothing. At Hilton Hall we have the good fortune to meet Sir Gilbert and Lady Hilton, Cedric's Parents.

Bunter, coming into possession of a letter sent to Hilton from Walsingham the butler, and containing enough evidence to get both Hilton and Price expelled, blackmails the Fifth former into inviting him home for Christmas.

Of course Bunter wants his old "pals" with him. Hilton is really sincere in warmly inviting the Famous Five, but has to prove this to the juniors when they find out how Bunter wangled his invite! He also takes Bunter's possession of the letter more philosophically than Price, who gets up to all manner of tricks to force the fat Owl to surrender it. It is during the last attempt that Bob Cherry thrashes Price. It is no secret that

A Merry Christmas Number!

# The MAGNET

No. 1,401. Vol. XLVI. EVERY SATURDAY. Week Ending December 22nd, 1934.



(A Dramatic Incident from This Week's Grand Christmas Story of HARRY WHARTON & CO. and Convict 33.)

Sir Gilbert, while enjoying having the Famous Five at his mansion, strongly disapproves of Price and, on one occasion, tells him so!

Hilton on the other hand shows his better side more than once, especially when he tackles the convict and receives a severe blow to the head. Later, with Bunter snoring in bed and Price out of the way, we are treated to a pleasant little interlude. The Famous Five and Hilton partake of a late supper of goodies from the side board downstairs in the latter's den, after effecting the convict's capture. The account of Bob Cherry trying to get America on Hilton's super radio is quite humorous!

We must now jump a few years and find ourselves drifting down Father Thames in the famous Water Lily series of September 1939. In "Greyfriars to the Rescue", *Magnet* 1646, the Famous Five and Bunter run into Hilton and Price, when they stop at Tipton Lodge, not knowing that Sir George is Price's uncle. After they render Sir George a service - returning the plunder stolen by Shifty Spooner, he changes his opinion of them. He had called them tramps, but now he invites them to stay and camp. In an altercation with Loder and Walker who are with him, Hilton causes a stand-off by ranging himself on the side of the juniors.

The following week Hilton again demonstrates his peculiar character when realising that Loder has cast adrift the Water Lily - the boys' boat. He sets off in pursuit of it. When Loder tries to prevent him, he throws the sixth-former out of the way, and bids Price adieu with the following: "Good night Steve! - After this I withdraw gracefully from the merry party. You might send my bag after me: I shan't be comin' back. See you next term at Greyfriars."

It fell to the two fifth formers, especially Price, to play an important part in the last *Magnet* of all. Prout had seen Soapy Sanders, a Three Fisher's habitué, pass a letter to Price, who, beating a hasty retreat, comes across Wharton resting on a seat on the road over Courtfield Common. Taking pity on him Wharton takes and hides the letter which he cannot return right away to Price as Prout takes the fifth-former to the school to have him searched! Wharton later falls foul of Coker when trying to return the bookmaker's letter to Price. In the ensuing scuffle Wharton loses most of the contents of his pockets. Of course the Remove's prize busy body - namely Bunter - picks up the letter, thinking it belongs to Wharton. He soon displays it to the juniors and, when chased, drops it at the feet of Mr. Hacker. When Bunter denies that it belongs to him, but lets out that it fell from Wharton's pocket, Hacker is in his element, pleased to be able to report the Captain of the Remove to his form-master. Wharton won't give Price away. He explains this and Quelch assures him that if the boy who owns the letter will come to him and confess it will go no further.

Needless to say the spineless Price won't do so. He can't believe that Mr. Quelch won't tell Prout. Despite Hilton's assurances and protestations, Price is adamant. Wharton loses his temper and attacks Price, who is soon in trouble. Quoting from the story: "Hilton sat and stared as, for two or three minutes, that fierce scrap went on. His lip curled as Price backed away from it. "Lend me a hand here, Cedric, you fool!" panted Price, backing away from crashing fists. "I'd rather lend the kid a hand, in the circs!" sneered Hilton. "But he doesn't seem to need it."

All ends well when Quelch, trusting his head boy, tells him to drop the letter in the fire. What a pity we shall never know what happened in what looked like being a first class series. Did Hilton and Price feature any more in "The Battle of the Beaks" and the rest of that lost forever series? We must all form our own conclusions, but I think you will agree that in the few examples shown in this article, Hilton and Price were first rate characters and deserve more than a little recognition.





# EILEEN ALICE SOPER — ARTIST AND NATURALIST

BY NORMAN WRIGHT

The illustrator's skill and imagination can often add an extra dimension to a favourite character, and when author and illustrator fuse their talents in one of those rarely encountered moments of creative perfection a character can owe almost as much to his illustrator as he does to his author for continuing popularity and literary immortality.

Winnie the Pooh would lose a good deal of his appeal if his mishaps were not accompanied by E.H. Shepard's drawings; Billy Bunter would only be a shadow of himself if his fatuous antics were illustrated by anyone other than Shields or Chapman; it would be unthinkable to read a William story shorn of Thomas Henry's illustrations.

Looking back on my childhood, several such combinations come to mind. The Biggles stories were never quite right if they were not illustrated by Leslie Stead, his bright 'splasy' paintings always added a touch of glamour to the exotic locations traversed by the globe trotting members of the Special Air Police. I was always annoyed when a 'substitute' artist took over Dennis the Menace, Lord Snooty or any other of my favourite BEANO characters.

But the greatest and most inseparable combination of my early boyhood was that of Enid Blyton's Famous Five books and the illustrator Eileen Soper.

The magic began when I was nine years old and eager for adventure. Mr. Fitzgerald, a teacher who took the boys for craft lessons at my school, regularly read aloud to his class while we boys busied ourselves constructing papier-maché pots or balsa-wood aeroplanes. Sometimes I found the stories a little tedious and I must admit to yawning while listening to "Wind in the Willows" and "Lassie Come Home", 'classics' that have still failed to make my list of desert island reading! Things improved with "Hue and Cry", based on the famous Ealing Studios film, and reached a pinnacle with "Five on A Treasure Island", a volume brought in by an eager pupil who implored the master to read it.



*The 'Famous Five' amongst the ruins  
of Kirren Castle, the scene of their  
first adventure*

The story was an exciting blend of all the elements enjoyed by children - hidden treasure, a ruined castle, a sunken wreck and a tiny rock bound island. I listened and was hooked and determined to seek out further books in the series.

Living only yards away from the public library I was already a regular customer making almost daily treks to the children's section. I cannot remember the first Famous Five title I secured from those well worn shelves, but I do remember being impressed by the illustrations and mentally noted the name of the artist displayed on the title page - Eileen Soper.

Eileen Soper was the first book illustrator whose name and style became familiar to me. Her work for the 'Fives' books was always exciting. The dustwrappers promised adventure on misty moors, in mysterious castles and around secret lakes. Her tinted endpapers, present in all but the earliest volumes in the series, added to the expectancy; before I read one word of the text, Eileen Soper always set the scene and the feel of the story for me, and the thirty two illustrations found within the text of each story maintained the visual impact.

Eileen Soper illustrated all twenty-one of Enid Blyton's Famous Five books as well as providing pictures for card games and other 'spin off' items. In the early 1950s the dustwrappers of the 'Fives' books were standardized, and Eileen Soper re-painted the jackets for the earlier volumes in the series. A few of the books were serialised in *SUNNY STORIES* and *ENID BLYTON'S MAGAZINE*, and for those appearances Miss Soper drew completely new sets of illustrations.

Her work always conveyed a great sense of movement. The figures and animals were never static dummies and, although her style had a rather sketchy quality about it, each character in the books was instantly recognisable. George, Julian, Dick, Anne and Timothy the dog owed as much to Eileen Soper as to Enid Blyton for the shaping of their characters. What was sometimes lacking in the text was more than made up for in the lively illustrations, and the members of Enid Blyton's Famous Five became as familiar to generations of children as any flesh and blood friends.



My interest in the Soper style as displayed in the Famous Five series caused me to seek out further books illustrated by her and I soon found that she was a prolific lady!

Eileen Alice Soper was born in 1905, the younger daughter of George Soper, himself a prolific illustrator. George was a keen naturalist and although he drew widely for many magazines including *B.O.P.*, *CAPTAIN*, *CHUMS* and a host of others his real love was the workaday activities of the countryside. He produced a huge number of drawings, etchings and watercolours of heavy horses toiling on the land in the days before the introduction of tractors and other forms of mechanisation. Writing in her book "Muntjac", Eileen Soper described her father's work:

"His pictures are a unique record of work on the land before the advent of modern machinery replaced the horse teams, the plough, the wagons and other graceful implements of the farm..."

She went on to talk of the wild life sanctuary that he created in his huge Hertfordshire garden.

"...He was, too, a keen gardener and student of nature, and the habitat he designed has, through its natural form, proved attractive to a variety of wildlife. His botanical interests were wide and the garden soon contained a fine collection of plants, many of which were rare and difficult in cultivation. But through his knowledge and understanding of their needs they flourished with abandon, naturalising themselves in the semi-wild situations he devised..."

Eileen inherited her father's artistic abilities and from an early age she displayed a quite remarkable skill for etching. She became a 'nine day wonder' when, at the age of fifteen, she had two etchings, "La Barriere Cassee" and "The Swing", accepted for exhibition at the Royal Academy. Her etching needle remained busy while she produced a whole series of wonderfully observed studies of children at play. "Leap Frog", "Scooter", and "The Sea Saw" were typical of her work depicting children totally absorbed in their play; while "Tragedy", "In School", and "Bedtime", showed them in quieter mood.

Writing of her work in THE STUDIO in 1923 Malcolm Salaman observed enthusiastically -

"...Miss Soper's etching-needle has adventured pictorially as none, I think, had ever achieved with so understanding a sympathy among the natural moods of childhood before any self-consciousness has begun to taint them with an imitative grown-upishness, and while the business of play in any form still absorbs the child's whole being..."

Her work has a great quality of freshness and spontaneity. With an economy of line she manages to capture the vitality of her subjects without ever resorting to sentimentality. Her children are always flesh and blood, never animated dolls.

From the time of her father's death in the early 1940s she was kept extremely busy illustrating books. Her long association with Enid Blyton began in 1942 when she illustrated the first Famous Five novel. In addition to the twenty one 'fives' books she illustrated at least another three dozen Blyton titles, tackling everything from fairy tales to the more serious "Enid Blyton Nature Readers".

In 1947 Eileen Soper illustrated "Alice in Wonderland", a book her father had illustrated a quarter of a century before. In the same year she wrote her first book for children entitled "Happy Rabbit", which was followed by "Dormouse Awake" in 1948 and "Sail Away Shrew" in 1949. Throughout this period her interest and commitment to the wildlife that flourished in the garden sanctuary increased. After her father's death in 1942 she and her sister, Eva, carried on his conservation work observing and sketching the wild creatures that inhabited the surrounding countryside. Eileen's favourites were the badgers and 'brock' became the subject of her first serious book, "When Badgers Awake", a book that was selected by Sir Basil Blackwell as one of 'Fifty Beautiful British Books of the Year 1955'. "When Badgers Awake" was followed by "Wild Encounters", "Wanderers of the Field", "Wild Favours" and "Muntjac".

Her work for younger children was continued in the full colour plates she painted for a series of books written by Elizabeth Grant and published by Blackie and Son Ltd. They offered young children an insight into the workings of the countryside as well as an entertaining story. "Fun on the Farm", "Happy Days on the Farm", "Field and Farmyard" and "Country Holiday" were the titles of but a handful of them.

Few children who went to school in the late 1940s and early 1950s can fail to remember the wonderful series of full colour natural history posters she painted for use in the classroom. There were few schools that did not have at least some displayed on their classroom walls. The notes for the series were written by Enid Blyton, though with her intimate knowledge of wildlife Miss Soper could easily have written them herself.

Her books were filled with meticulously drawn sketches of the birds and animals that had become such an important part of her life. Her natural history watercolours were widely exhibited and in 1964 she became one of the founder members of the 'Society of Wildlife Artists'.

Towards the end of her life Eileen Soper became something of a recluse, discouraging visitors and the use of the telephone for fear of frightening the deer and other animals in the sanctuary. Reading her books one sees just how committed she was to the wildlife. The creatures came to regard her as their friend, and birds regularly nested within the house itself. If they chose to raise their brood in a nest constructed in an electric light fitting, then that room remained in darkness for the duration!

Shortly before her death I wrote to Eileen Soper. At the time she was in poor health and being cared for in a nursing home. I was delighted to receive a reply. One line stood out when she said:

"... It is my greatest joy to go out into the fields and study the wild life there, such as foxes and badgers, etc..."

Alas, there were to be no more nocturnal vigils watching for badgers or muntjac deer, for Eileen Soper died on 22nd of March 1990 only a few months after replying to my letter. She left behind a wealth of paintings and drawings in dozens of books, from her exciting illustrations for the Famous Five books to the perceptive drawings of some of nature's shyest creatures.



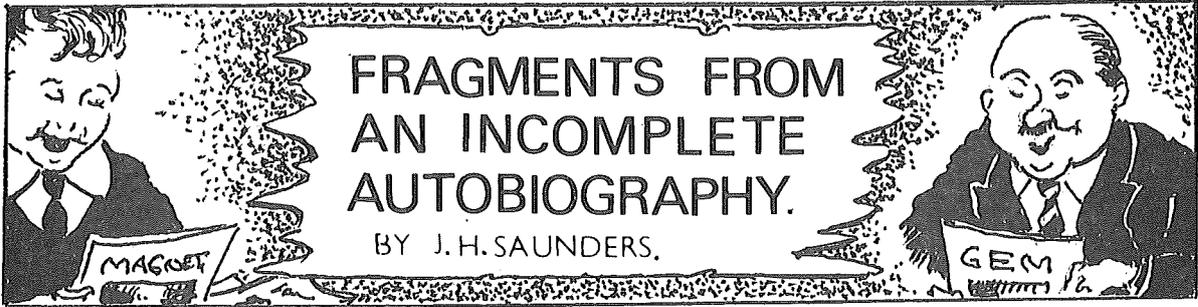
*Pine Marten*



*Harvest Mice and Nest*

*Two of Miss Soper's perceptive wild life sketches*





When you are young the future stretches endlessly before you, unknown territory, awaiting your advance into it. Behind you is the Past, What's That? Nothing, only Yesterday. Who bothers about Yesterday? It's another world, unknown to you. So is the Future others may say, but ah!, that belongs to nobody but you, whereas the Past consists of other peoples lives. The Future is an untrodden, unexplained world awaiting you personally.

As you get older the seemingly endless Future shrinks rapidly, retreats back towards you until a point is reached when there is practically nothing left beyond that which you now create for yourself.

So you look back to the Past and what you see now is not blank nothingness but another world that you lived in, stretching back as far as your memory takes you, and further because now you can understand things that happened before your advent. It is full of happy times and even the bad ones do not seem so bad, as you overcame them in one way or another. Now you look down with affection on all your Yesterdays.

Some people call this Second Childhood. Not so, that is for those with no imagination, unfortunate enough perhaps to have had an unhappy childhood, or just unable to occupy themselves with anything when 'working life' is over.

Recall is sometimes difficult as you get older, times and dates become confused, but, if you think back and concentrate carefully, much that has happened which you thought you had forgotten slowly comes back to you. and what satisfaction you can get from it all. Of course, if you have retained items of the past, they help considerably in reminding you of times and places and people. I have retained much of my past in the shapes of newspapers, magazines, books but mostly Story Papers. When people look at my books and papers and say 'What do you want to keep all that rubbish for? Why don't you throw it all away?', I can only reply 'That's not rubbish, it's my life'. I don't think they really understand.

I was born a year and a day after the end of the Great War, now known as WWI. Richmal Crompton's William had been born earlier and Rupert Bear came a year later. The Gem and Magnet were 12 and 11 years old respectively, and Nelson Lee had been sleuthing for over four years. Sexton Blake and Sherlock Holmes were getting quite elderly. The three Thomson papers, Adventure, Rover and Wizard were on the horizon. Tiger Tim had been around for some time in Rainbow, and the other youthful comics, Playbox, Bubbles etc., were rapidly coming into view.

I cannot really remember a time when I could not read. I faintly recall sitting by the fire in my grandparents' front room struggling through Treasure Island, The Black Arrow and Ben Hur, probably only understanding every other word and mispronouncing most of those. I was given Chicks Own, Tiger Tim, Playbox, Rainbow but my favourite was Bubbles. There was a serial about a Scout in the Rockies of British Columbia called Big Jim Grant - I mispronounced it Giant and was quite disappointed when I discovered the correct pronunciation. Beatrix Potter's stories I preferred someone to read to me at first. However, as I improved I began to read them myself and found that I appreciated them more that way. I still think Mr. Tod and Sam Whiskers are the most exciting of young children's books, The Tailor of Gloucester the most satisfying and Pigling Bland probably the saddest.

Weston House, Bobbers Mill, Nottingham was my birth-place, home of my maternal grandparents. I was the apple of their eyes. I recall how I used to roll up the slip-mats at

the doors in the Hall and take them into the living room and spread them out on the floor for the family to look at and make an offer for them. I must at some time have seen something in a picture book or a film about Eastern Bazaars. My grandfather would shout "Oh! My God! Here he comes - Ali Bo-Bo, the Merchant from Baghdad". This name stuck, became Bo-Bo and finally was shortened to Bo by which all relatives, friends and neighbours have known me. Only at my places of work have I been Joe, my first name after my father.

Bobbers Mill was a sort of village on the outskirts of Nottingham, a farming and mining area mostly. It had a Post Office and two Pubs. There really was a Bobbers Mill on the River Leen but it was then run by Dixons and no longer relied on the river for its power...

There was a small papershop at the corner of Hucknall and Haydn Roads at the bottom of the hill where my father bought me my first Magnet (Silly Man!) saying he read it when he was a boy. I also remember reading Boys' Magazine and Popular, though how and where I got these I cannot recall. It was here that I began to read the Annuals a lot, Tiger Tim's, Playbox, Pip & Squeak, Uncle Oojah and Wilfred's. Most of these went on to be read by my brother and sisters until they fell to pieces during WWII.

I still visited my grandparents almost every Sunday dressed in Eton Suit, St. Jim's style, with that awful high collar, carrying a leather attaché case (with my initials on it) full of books, papers, stamp collections, games and various other things to occupy myself with when my grandfather had his afternoon nap. I always ate so much that usually I could not move all afternoon. Don't suppose that did my asthma much good but on the other hand it must have built me up to withstand the rigours of life to come. Because of my asthma I did not go to school until somewhere between 7 and 8 years of age and then seldom more than a few weeks at a time. Sometimes I was away so long that when I went back, teachers and pupils had changed and I never caught up with the work being done. It all seemed a great waste of time and money. I think my grandmother paid for all my schooling, what there was of it.

My brother was born at the end of 1928 and in 1929 we went back to Bobbers Mill, to live in the big house, Whitemoor Lodge, where my Great Grandparents had lived and died, diagonally opposite where I was born. I was now reading Ferrars Locke in the Popular in bed under the bedclothes with a torch...

My grandfather would take me to Boots Lending Library, a very big one in Nottingham, where I came into contact with Percy F. Westerman and his Sea Scout stories. He also gave me the Boys' Own Annual every Xmas and so the Flying Beetle flew into my life. One of the Boots Books was the Phantom Battleship by, I think, Rupert Chesterman. I cried big tears at the end of it, I did not want it to finish. However, there was a sequel later, and I have been looking for both books ever since. I became very keen on WWI air stories, my favourite being James McCudden's Diary.

My health became so bad (I think it was because I did not care for School much) that it was decided I would be kept at home and my father would set me lessons to do for a while. The Headmaster of the School I was at then (my second) asked my father what qualifications he had. "What are yours?" asked my father. "I am a B.Sc." was the reply. "Well, I'm an M.Sc." restored my father (collapse of stout party) and that was that except that my father never had much time to bother with me, and I never really did any lessons. Life became rather idyllic in our big private garden surrounded by farmland with a farmhouse next door.

I suppose I was something of a lone William in those days. My brother being nine years younger left me with plenty of freedom as everyone was concerned with his growing up. We had a sort of Nanny and a maid living in and an old lady who came daily to do the washing up. Of course there were relations and friends who came fairly regularly on visits usually for the day but on the whole I preferred to be on my own and I never went out alone in the streets. There was no need to but I did occasionally take unauthorised excursions into the farm next door.

I became a member of the Nottingham Mechanics Institution which meant I could use the big lending library there. Jules Verne, H.G. Wells and many others came into my life

now. Martin Rattler was a present from my grandfather and Holiday Annuals crept in from somewhere and in 1931 the moment came. For a long time I could not recall how I came to hear of the coming of the Ranger. Now of course, I realise that it was the successor to the Popular. I was already reading the odd Magnet, Gem, Schoolboys Own, Modern Boy and Skipper fairly regularly but the Ranger changed my life. I adored it. I read it over and over again. When Hell's Angels appeared in it I was ecstatic and when Baldy's Angels came - Well!!

As my brother grew up the Nanny and maids disappeared, I cannot remember when, time seemed much longer then than it does now and I had so much to do. Bored? I was never bored, if I got tired of one thing I turned to another. Meccano, Hornby Trains, Brittain's Soldiers and farmyards, Lotts Bricks, going to the Pictures, tearing round the garden with my brother in his pram and tipping him out of it (that caused a row, I hid in the attic till all had cooled down): shooting arrows into the air and breaking the windows of the greenhouses (we had three of them) and that caused more rows. Hiding on Sundays from my father who wanted me to weed the garden, etc. I think he rather despaired of me towards the end of this period, my health, though much better, was still bad enough to restrict my activities every few months. He tried to teach me swimming but it was no good, I just sank to the bottom, and still do. My parents entertained a lot and went out frequently in the evenings, which gave me almost unlimited time for reading, experimenting with Meccano etc. and listening to the wireless.

In 1932 at the age of 12 I was sent back to school, a Convent School, because it seemed the only one that would put up with me being away ill so often. Strange - my father's background was Jewish, my mother's Protestant and here I was calling my teachers 'Sister', but then religion never meant anything to me. I suppose being so ill and very near to Death's Door at times I had long since lost any fear of the Unknown...

It was a great blow losing my freedom but it had its compensations, and what compensations - I got 4d. a day bus fare, having to take two buses there and two back, so I walked! - and 'earned' 4d. a day, nearly 2/- a week provided I was able to walk everyday. This was probably the only exercise I ever had and must account for the fact that I have always been a good walker. My grandmother was always good for the odd 6d. 1/-, 2/- or even the occasional Half-Crown at least once a week, so the stage was set. I was no longer tied down by poverty and I still managed to wangle the bus fare out of my mother even when I was unable to go to school because of illness.

1932 - a new world opened before me, Free Gifts were the probable link that led me on from one paper to another. Ranger, Magnet, Gem, Modern Boy, no longer thrown away but carefully preserved in the cupboards in my room. Adventure, Boys Magazine, Nelson Lee, just in time for the final series and moving into 1933 - Wizard, Rover, Skipper, Hotspur, starting in September, Champion and Triumph. I caught the last few weeks of Union Jack as it turned into Detective Weekly. The Thriller I only bought if I liked the look of the story or if it was one of my favourite authors, likewise the SOL and BFL. The Boys Cinema and Topical times were only bought for Free Gifts. The Sexton Blake Library was now affordable and I converted my grandfather to Sexton Blake; he loved these stories, and read them in bed at night! I can see him now as he nipped over the road in his old velvet smoking jacket, with snuff down the front, and up our drive shouting 'Got anymore Blakeys?'. He went on reading them until he died. Later in the year I discovered Film Fun and Bullseye, and so on to Xmas 1933.

I was 14, almost as big as my father and he was six foot. He said "You can smoke if you want, I won't object", and offered me a cigarette, but Charles Hamilton still had too much influence over me then and I refused. Not till I was over twenty did I become a smokey fag and then only because I was in the Army. My father was the Fly in the Ointment just before this time. He began to object to me reading so much 'rubbish', and some terrible rows ensued as my mother defended me. An uneasy peace settled over things, and whenever his footsteps were heard coming in at the front door there was much scrambling around putting papers under cushions and settees, etc., and I would be sitting primly reading Jules Verne, the Meccano Magazine or the Sports Pages of the Daily Telegraph. Eventually he lost interest as usual and it all died away into peace and harmony.

I wonder if it is possible for children and youngsters of today to understand what it was like in those days, or anyone under the age of fifty for that matter. Can they appreciate the excitement every week of going to the newsagents for your papers, looking forward to the numerous free gifts therein? Take Xmas 1933 for instance, and think of all the Xmas numbers - The Thomson Big Five, Ranger, Magnet, Gem, Champion, Triumph, Detective Weekly, Thriller, Boys Mag., Bullseye, Modern Boy, Film Fun, SOL, BFL, and SBL - all covered with edgings of holly, snow, robins and Father Christmases.

Oh! It was - it really was the Golden Age.

I made the best of it.

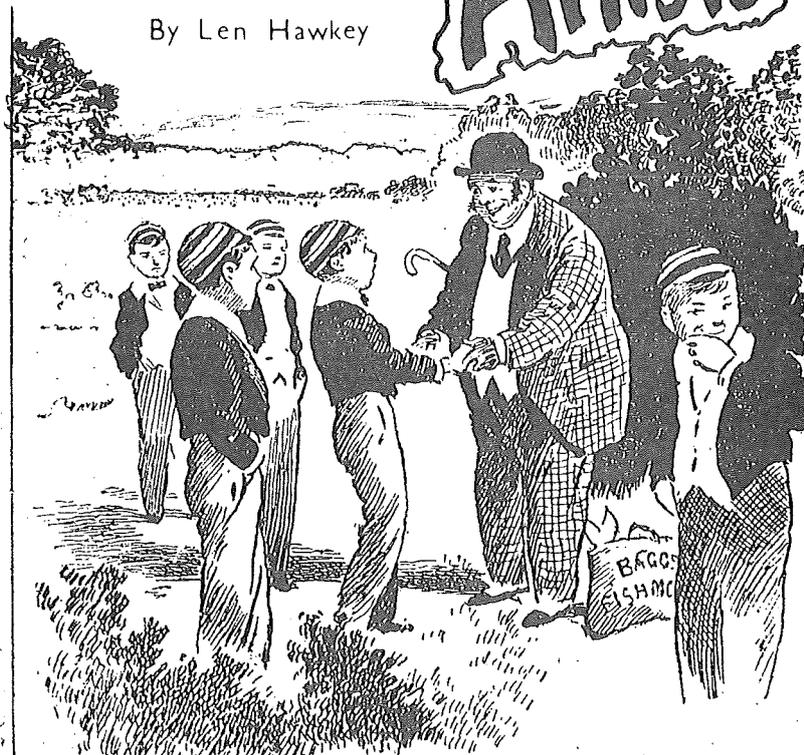


The Christmas Postman

From *Little Folks*, 1910

# The Rookwood Artists

By Len Hawkey



Picture by J. Louis Smythe in *The Popular* no. 271, March 1924

Although we may all enjoy the rich legacy left us by the genius of Charles Hamilton, most of us, I imagine, have a favourite amongst his many schools, and for myself, it is Rookwood that takes pride of place. This, though, I must admit, is as much due to the illustrations of G.W. Wakefield, as to Owen Conquest's cheerful stories. Whatever opinion the great man himself had about his artists, it was they, after all, who were primarily responsible, in many cases, for drawing in the readers. The wide variety of appealing covers displayed on the bookstalls each week by the Amalgamated Press were an irresistible attraction to any youngster with a few pennies to spend, and once "hooked" a big majority - like the writer - came back, week after week, for more.

Quite early on their editors developed the idea of allotting specific artists to specific series - one of the first was J. Abney Cummins (c.1860's - 1919) for Jack, Sam, & Pete stories. Thus, very soon, Macdonald adopted St. Jim's and C.H. Chapman became the Greyfriars definitive artist. In due course, with a little prior experimentation, Wakefield, happily, became Rookwood's! With hindsight, it is surprising how often the choice was a good one, and the artist brought stability and form to the author's characters, adding that extra dimension to the printed word.

For one who did not discover the world of Charles Hamilton until around 1923, it was a surprise later to learn that Wakefield did not arrive at Rookwood till 1918, and that, for over three years previously, other hands had portrayed Jimmy Silver & Co. The very first was R.J. Macdonald (c.1870-1955) - not really a very sensible choice, as he had been drawing St. Jim's in *The Gem* for about 7 years. Inevitably Jimmy Silver & Co. looked strangely like Tom Merry and his chums: only with distinctive characters, like Tubby Muffin for example, was any individuality apparent. Sometime in 1917 Macdonald left on Active Service, and Philip Hayward (c.1880-1950's) took over. Another long-serving Amalgamated Press "workhorse", his style, though competent, was rather wooden. His boys looked younger, almost children sometimes and hardly distinguishable from each

other. This may account for the fact that, in later years, Hayward was mainly used in kiddies' comics. It is nice to know, however, that both these artists enjoyed long and busy working lives, from the beginning of this century until well after the last war.

"Billy" Wakefield's arrival - on October 19th, 1918 - was nevertheless, a "red-letter day". It was commemorated by Danny in his celebrated "Diary" thus: "This issue (of the *Boys' Friend*) contained the first story of a new series with a wonderful new artist". Macdonald & Hayward had accounted for all the Rookwood stories from B.F. No. 712 up to 904, but from now on Wakefield did about 90% of the illustrations, up to 1926. On the rare occasions when either illness or vacations intervened, Hayward or Macdonald resurfaced for a week or so, and once or twice a new artist, Ralph Simmons (c.1900-1978) endeavoured to imitate G.W.W. For some strange reason most of the "Hiking Holiday" series of 1922, when the Fistical Four tramped the country lanes in the company of "Trotsky", the pony (plus trap), were illustrated by Hutton Mitchell, the original Greyfriars artist from 1908! None of the artists they tried had any really distinctive style, however, which made Wakefield's work seem all the more magical. Indeed for the issue just preceding Wakefield, B.F. No. 905, they used rather sub-standard work from a colleague, Sid Pride, making it even more a case of the Lord Mayor's Show following the dust-cart! (One should perhaps mention however, that whatever his shortcomings, Pride did a lot of magazine work from about 1900 to 1930, and, like Ralph Simmons, contributed many illustrations to the Cedar Creek series.)

There is a tale, possibly apocryphal, that Wakefield literally pushed poor little C.H. Chapman (1879-1972) out of the Rookwood job. If this was so, it was no bad thing. Chapman was firmly established with Greyfriars, and the artists employed in *The Boys' Friend* so far had shown that Rookwood needed something a bit different - a fresh dimension and a new style to give it distinction. Wakefield proved just the man. His free-flowing, extrovert work brought youthful gaiety and brightness to the adventures of Jimmy Silver. At times his earlier work may have induced a slightly comic element, but the stories themselves were, in the main, light-hearted, and "Billy" could, when needed produce excellent "serious" drawings.

In the halcyon "Wakefield" years, from 1918 to 1926, it would be impossible to single out any really exceptional period. In the writer's view every new illustration was felicitous, and the artist even improved as the months passed by. The large full-page covers perhaps provided the "icing on the cake". The tabloid size of the old green *Boys' Friend* gave every good artist an immense advantage, and most, Wakefield included, took advantage of this. Time passed, as it inevitably does, and the close of Wakefield's reign was approaching, and, with it, the end of Rookwood in the *Boys' Friend*. Its sad demise was made even more puzzling by the introduction, 4 weeks before the end, of a replacement for G.W.W. The veteran Vincent S. Daniel (c.1875-c.1950) tried to imitate his predecessor, but could not disguise his own style, long familiar from his illustrations of the Val Fox stories, and innumerable others since the turn of the century. Still, of the 584 Rookwood tales, "Billy" had drawn almost two-thirds, and many of those were to reappear in *The Popular*, up to 1931. Their reprinting of the Rookwood yarns, somewhat abridged, started in 1917, but the war brought about its suspension until it re-surfaced with a "New Series" in 1919.

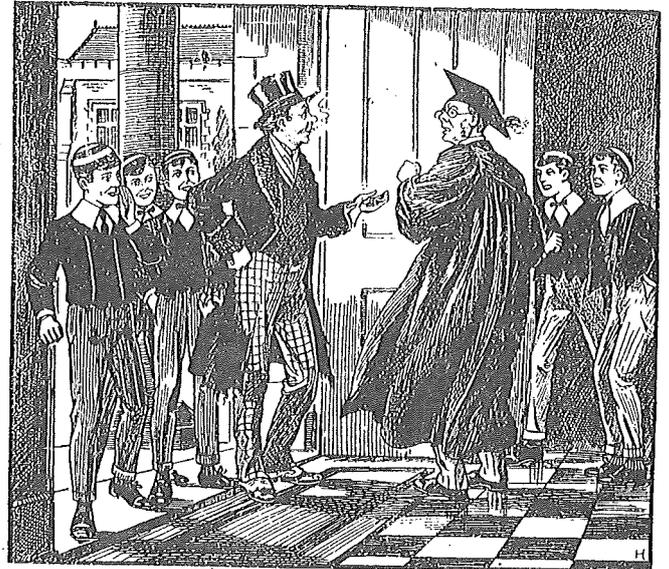
No. 1 of the new *Penny Popular* (now 11/2d!) set off with the first Jimmy Silver tale, again, and for some time used the original Macdonald and Hayward drawings. During 1921 these were unaccountably replaced with illustrations by Wilfred Tayler (c.1880-1940). He had done some good work in girls' papers, but his Rookwood was very poor. None-the-less, he lasted two years or so, and by 1922 Wakefield's own originals arrived. Previously he had done a few new covers, Tayler doing the inside work. The *Popular's* editorial policy, if there was one, was as haphazard with its artists as with its stories. The Rookwood saga was printed in no discernible order and the art-work likewise chopped and changed.

The long "Canadian" series of April-Dec. 1923 in the *Boys' Friend* had their splendid Wakefield illustrations entirely replaced by routine ones from Kenneth Brookes (1897-



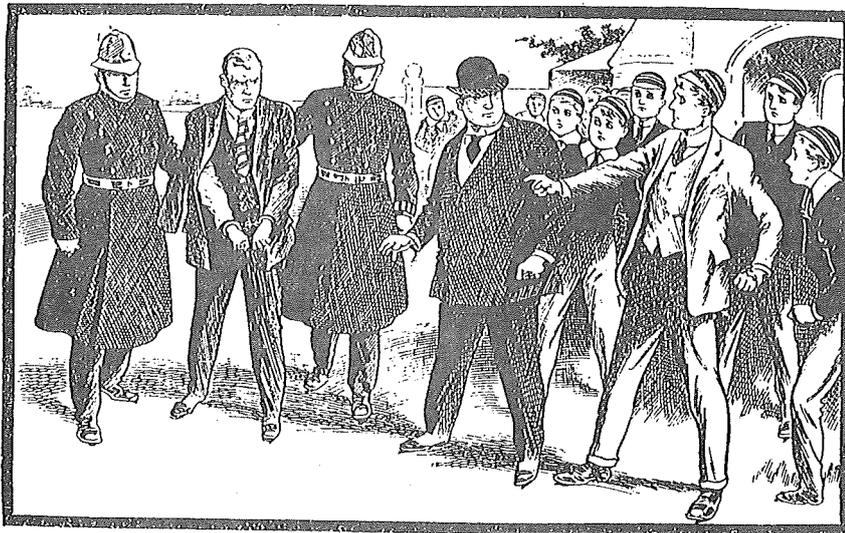
The three Tommies jumped back to escape the shower of crockery and establish Miss Silver caught up the dish of birdlime, and with a look of her hand scattered the fishes over the three astounded Tommies. Then she opened the door and departed. (See page 14)

*Pre-G.W. Wakefield: illustration by R.J. Macdonald, 1916*



"Do you wish to see anyone here?" Mr. Manders asked brusquely. "Sir, you have hit it," said the ready gentleman in a rich, rolling voice. "I have called to see that benefactor of his spectacles, Mr. Manders." (see page 17.)

*Pre-G.W. Wakefield: illustration by Philip Hayward, 1917*

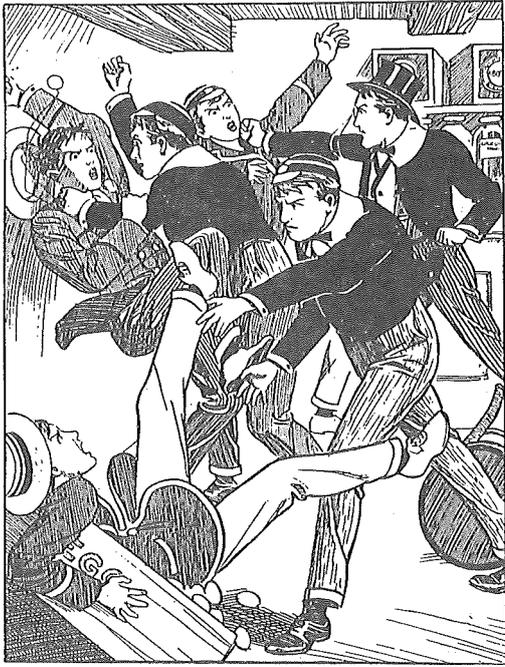


"What does this mean?" exclaimed Bulkeley of the Sixth. "What is Captain Lagden treated like this for?"

*An excellent early G.W. Wakefield picture, 23rd November, 1918*



*By G.W. Wakefield, Holiday Annual 1920*



Smythe and Co. were ingloriously driven into a corner of the fuck shop, where they yelled for quarter.

Picture of Rookwood Boys at St. Jim's  
by Warwick Reynolds,  
Holiday Annual 1920

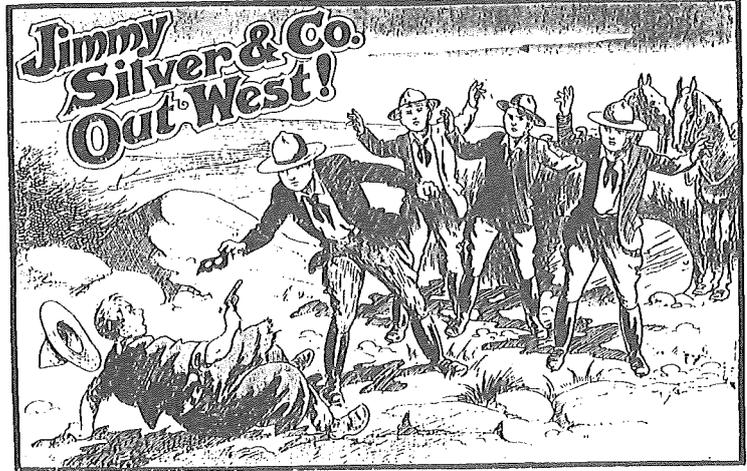
# The BOYS' FRIEND 2<sup>d</sup>

SIXTEEN BIG PAGES!

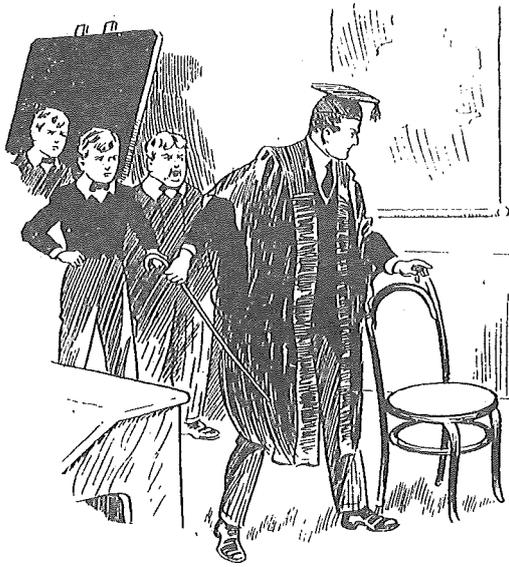
No. 1,441, Vol. XXIII.—New Series.

THE BEST BOYS' PAPER IN THE WORLD!

[Week Ending April 21st, 1923.]



By G.W. Wakefield  
(Canadian Series)



MORNINGTON REVOLTS! Whack, whack, whack! It was "ah," and a severe ah. Mornington uttered no sound, but his face was quite pale when he rose after the infliction. "Dismiss!" said Mr. Dalton. "That does it," said Mornington. "I'm done with Rookwood, and with you, too!"



Picture by Kenneth Brookes,  
The Popular, 1929



By Savile Lumley,  
Holiday Annual 1934

"Boys!" It was Mr. Dalton's voice. "Cave!" gasped Lovell. "Hook it!" As the master of the Fourth came hurrying along the tow-path, the juniors scattered in every direction.

1970) during 1927. In contrast, Hutton Mitchell's drawings for the 1922 "pony & trap" holiday gave way to some lovely new work by G.W.W. in the *Popular* four years later.

For the last few years of its life the *Popular* seemed unable to settle on a regular artist for Rookwood. Apart from W. Tayler, they tried Ralph Simmons and Sid Pride again, plus Kenneth Brookes, Savile Lumley, Robert Laurier and "Jock" McCail to name only those identifiable. Presumably all were told to imitate Wakefield, but their efforts were invariably poor.

In 1931 the *Popular* folded, but in the ever-welcome Greyfriars Holiday Annual Owen Conquest's stories went on till its last issue, for 1941. To the 14 to 15 artists already mentioned, we can add three famous names, at least. E.E. Briscoe (1882-1956) gave us many scenes of the Hampshire school in the olden days, while Warwick Reynolds (1880-1926) and C.H. Chapman both depicted Jimmy Silver & Co., but only in stories dealing with companion schools. Reynolds' cover for the first G.H.A. (arguably the best of all) is in fact, from a Rookwood yarn, with G.W.W. supplying the inside work - he went on to do all Rookwood stories and articles up to 1926. Over the illustrations that followed, a veil is best drawn!

Writing from memory only, many of the blue and red Schoolboys Own Library covers seem to have been Wakefield's, although some later ones were by Savile Lumley, I think. Thus ends the survey of the Rookwood artists. Looking wistfully back through the maze of years, I always picture Harry Wharton & Co., and the boys at St. Jims also, settling down in their cosy studies on a bleak winter afternoon, to toasted muffins and jam tarts, while Nipper, Handforth and chums are aboard Lord Dorrimore's "Wanderer" sailing to adventures in some exotic clime. But thanks to Wakefield I always see Jimmy Silver & Co. tramping along green English lanes, Lovell whistling cheerily as he leads the obstinate "Trotsky" through that sunlit "land of lost content - those happy highways where we went, but cannot come again".

I am sure, then, that those "blue remembered hills" evoked by Charles Hamilton and "Billy" Wakefield will remain with me forever.



By George W. Wakefield - September 1924



## ANSWERS TO SEXTON BLAKE QUIZ

1. The Jap with the gat is Oyani, the faithful servant of Zenith the Albino. In this illustration from *The Gold Maker* by Anthony Skene (UJ 1510), the victim is the super-criminal, Zenith himself, but all is not what it seems. This story featured the albino's last appearance in the Union Jack which had only another 21 issues to run before becoming Detective Weekly. It was an impressive curtain for perhaps Sexton Blake's most colourful and unforgettable foe, though of course he did reappear in the DW.
2. Mlle. Yvonne Cartier, the famous adventuress, is here seen descending from a rickshaw in *The Street of Many Lanterns* by G.H. Teed (UJ 1064), a yarn which impressively evokes The Orient and also features a celebrated and very nasty Chinese villain...
3. Yes, Wu Ling himself, here in a later encounter with *Sexton Blake in Manchuria* (UJ 1494). It's possible that Wu derived from that other sinister Oriental, Fu-Manchu but the stories in which Wu featured were far more credible than the Sax Rohmer tales. G.H. Teed really knew his China and this particular story, set against the 1932 Japanese invasion of Manchuria, has a genuine whiff of realism and is certainly highly exciting.
4. Not nearly as famous in Blakian annals as any of the foregoing, but a most interesting and endearing figure, this is Aristide Dupin, French gentleman crook and adventurer (he no doubt owed quite a debt to Arsène Lupin!). Here, he is face to face with our detective in *The Fifth Key* by Gwyn Evans (UJ 1498). One of the famous "Onion Men" stories, it concerns the hunt for the five keys of Gille de Rais (better known to history as Bluebeard) which, somehow or other, are going to help the French royalist cause - in the 1930's! The debonair Dupin is only one of the hunters for those magic door-openers...
5. Another one on the trail is the leader of The Onion Men, a fervent Royalist named Quirot, a singularly unpleasant dwarf who, with his lavish face fungus and squat figure, looks like a cross between the historic Bluebeard himself and Quasimodo! Here he demonstrates his unfriendly nature in a scene from *The Plague of Onion Men* (UJ 1493).
6. One of Blake's leading antagonists, Dr. Huxton Rymer, distinguished surgeon, and even more distinguished bad lad, here goes in for a bit of piracy on the high seas with a bunch of Malayan cut-throats (to be defeated, of course, by Sexton Blake who happens to have a hose of scalding steam handy). *Doomed Ships* by G.H. Teed (UJ 1465) is a racy yarn with the usual convincing background details its author was so good at. It was also the story which first told me what barratry is.
7. Mlle Roxane Harfield is, perhaps, no more than a reincarnation of the earlier Mlle Yvonne - how exciting and exotic the French address and forenames seemed in those far-off days! - and is here seen doing a spot of (very fetching) burglary in *the Affair of the Missing Financier* by Teed (DW 46).

Sexton Blake's ambivalent relationships with both Yvonne and Roxane, who often operated outside the law, were sometimes the source of heated correspondence to the Editor of the Union Jack - and no wonder!

8. Unless you've read *Planned from Paris* by G.H. Teed (UJ 1474), you are not likely to have identified Sophie Beautemps, yet another ruthless adventuress, "vivid, exotic... There wasn't a trick in the game of which she was not past mistress... capable of anything", as Teed puts it. However, she is no match for Sexton Blake and certainly not in the class of Roxane who, in this story, employs her own charms, not to outwit unscrupulous men, but to defeat the glamorous, scheming Sophie.
  
9. A lesser immortal from the Blake pantheon and another Teed creation: the Baron von Kravitch, here polishing off (no pun intending) a **diamond** merchant in a story entitled *Perilous Pearls* - yes, it is a bit confusing. Featured in DW12, this yarn is memorable not only for some exciting incidents (Tinker and his motor-bike going over the parapet of Vauxhall Bridge, for one) but also for the Baron's daughter, the delicious, devoted and much put-upon Elsa von K.
  
10. The Man of a Thousand Faces (and with no recognisable face of his own), otherwise Leon Kestrel the Master Mummer. Here (he's the one with the gun, naturally) he's escaping with his female accomplice, Fifette Bierce, after the failure of *The Panic Liner Plot* recounted by Lewis Jackson in DW73. Kestrel was another very long-running villain in the Saga and Blake never finally caught up with him. Perhaps, like Zenith, Rymer, Roxane or a dozen others, he just might reappear one day...

(How well did you score? Five or more recognitions will qualify you as a very erudite Blakian!)



Happy Xmas, Prosperous New Year to Old and New Editors, Eric and Mary, and collectors everywhere.

STUART WHITEHEAD, HYTHE, HANTS

\*\*\*\*\*

Greetings from

ERNIE CARTER, 550 GLEBE ROAD, ADAMSTOWN, N.S.W. 2289, AUSTRALIA  
I want Nelson Lee Old Series, to complete 27, 31. High Price Paid.

\*\*\*\*\*

Wanted - Art work by Chapman, Shields, Macdonald, Savile Lumley, Parker. Generous prices paid.

GEOFFREY CRANG, INDIAN QUEENS, CORNWALL, TR9 6LL

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'I'd hate to be shot up or down at this festive season!' Biggles told his brother officers at 266 Squadron, Maranique, one Christmas during the First World War.

Captain W.E. Johns must have at least born these words in mind when he wrote three delightful seasonal stories for 'The Modern Boy': 'Biggles' Xmas-Box!' (15/12/34), 'Biggles' Christmas Tree!' (22/12/34) and 'Biggles Carves the turkey!' (29/12/34). The first two titles are uncollected, but the third is included in 'Biggles in France' and, more accessibly, in 'Biggles of 266'. Yet the best known of these tales is the least merry, for there is no way it can end happily - for the turkey!

In a daring mission to obtain a Christmas dinner from behind the enemy Lines, Biggle succeeds in buying a splendid turkey, the monarch of the flock, from a Belgian farmer. Even at this stage the airman feels squeamish about wringing the creature's neck himself, but before the Belgian can do it for him, some German troops arrive on the scene, and he has to make a dash for his Sopwith Camel. The only way he can accommodate his prize in the tiny cockpit is to stuff it onto the seat and sit on it.

From this point in the story onwards, the turkey rules the roost. It is a large, spirited bird, and not used to such Turkish treatment. It begins its offensive with a convulsive heave that nearly throws its oppressor onto the centre section. Rasping, 'Sit still you fool, do you want to kill us both?' Biggles contrives to take off, and steer a crazy course through the sky, but undeterred, his passenger makes 'a commendable effort to return to its paddock. It managed to get one wing in between Biggles' legs and, using it as a lever, nearly sent him over the side...'

Matters go from bad to worse for the hapless pilot, as a German plane, an Albatross, starts to pursue his machine, whilst the turkey succeeds in pitching him violently against the windscreen. He retaliates with an elbow jab, whereupon his antagonist starts a series of short, sharp jerks that make Biggles and the Camel bob up and down alarmingly. At last the determined fowl gets its head free, and after staring indignantly into the pilot's face, it seems quite pleased with its extra freedom, and looks 'from side to side at its unusual surroundings with considerable interest'.

How could Biggles or Johns ever bring themselves to slay such an irrepressible character? Fortunately, perhaps, the Hun does the deed for them, and the bird dies gallantly, stopping a bullet that would have killed his captor. After avenging his companion's death by shooting down the Albatross, Biggles flies home safely, and with the prospect of a splendid Christmas feast the tale ends festively - for some.

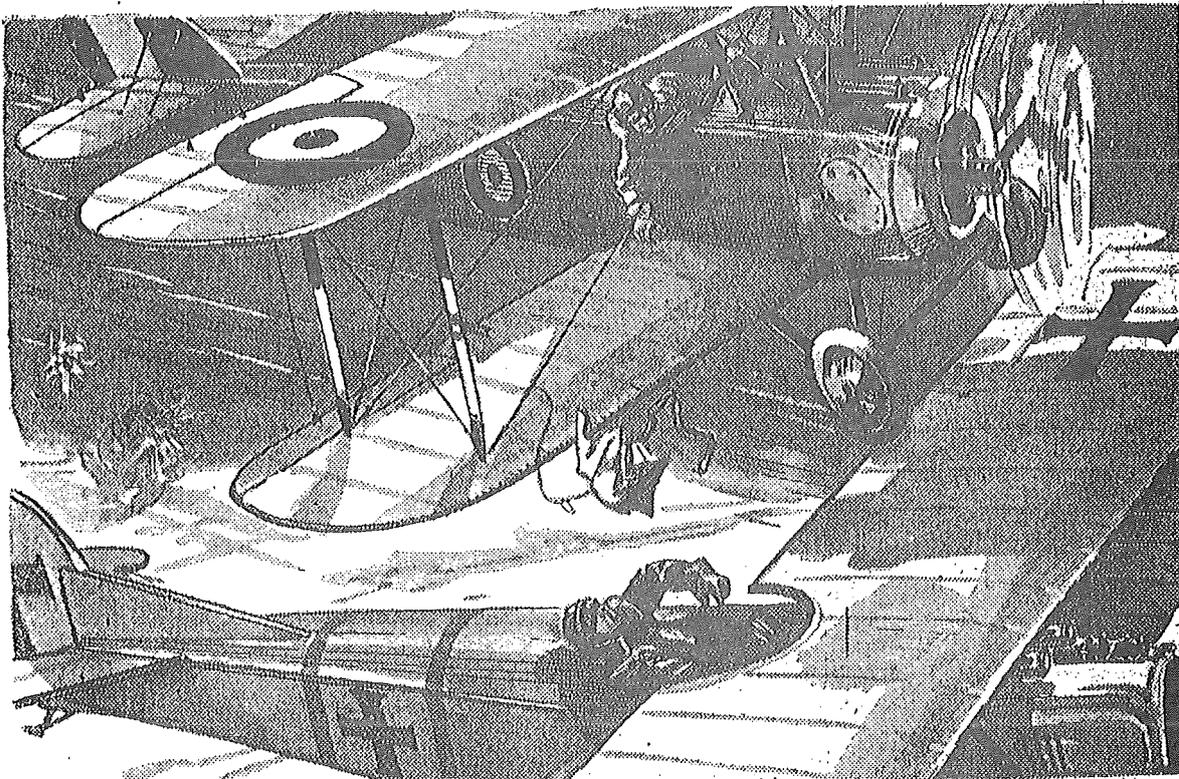
'Biggles' Xmas-Box!' is also an entertaining piece, but it has a serious undertone. It is in this story that Biggles surprises his pals by announcing that not only would he hate to be shot up or down at this time of the year, but he would hate to shoot anyone else up or down either.

He goes on, 'I'm a firm believer in the old motto Goodwill Towards Men - and all that sort of thing... Even Germans, when we are at war with 'em, are human beings and Peace on Earth is the programme for today. This fighting at Christmas is all wrong. There ought to be an official truce declared...'

Warming to his theme, he suggests that it would be nice to send greetings to the enemy, and Mahoney's idea that a nice little Cooper bomb would make a nice little Christmas card is received frostily. Biggles wants to send the Germans a genuine greetings card with an appropriate design: 'What I had in mind was a Camel and a Fokker flying alongside each other, with bunches of mistletoe on the propeller bosses, and a robin

looping round them. Their pilots could be leaning out and shaking hands. Hands across the sea - you know the sort of thing!"

### GREAT WAR AIR-ACE as FLYING SANTA CLAUS!



"Take those with you!" yelled Biggles as, deliberately risking collision, he swept down and hurled his packet at the helmeted head beneath him.

## BIGGLES' XMAS-BOX!

Hankering after Peace and Goodwill, CAPTAIN BIGGLESWORTH delivers the enemy a startling Christmas Present! . . . . By FLYING-OFFICER W. E. JOHNS

Absurd fantasy! But beneath the fun there is historical truth. When Biggles wished for a Christmas truce he was expressing the longing for peace and normality that his creator knew had haunted a generation of young men in real life, fighting a war they had not made and did not understand. Johns may have been thinking of the unofficial ceasefire on Christmas Day, 1914, when he wrote this passage, when British and German soldiers in the trenches laid down their arms, met, exchanged gifts, sang carols and held a football match in No-Man's-Land. Even Biggles' ridiculous card is a reminder of that strange moment in another tale, 'The Great Arena', when Biggles and an enemy pilot fly side by side and wave to each other before gliding off to their own side of the Lines, an incident based closely on an experience of the Canadian Air Ace, Major Maclaren.

There seems to be no historical precedent, however, for Biggles' final decision in the Xmas-box story to give the Germans not a card but a food parcel - 'the poor blighters are short of grub by all accounts'. In spite of snow on the ground and black clouds in the sky, he sets out cheerfully with ten pounds of sausages, hoping actually to land on a German aerodrome for a moment, and dump the packet over the side.

But alas for good intentions! Before he has flown very far a Fokker DVII stalks him through the clouds, he is forced to fight, his guns jam, and he has no choice but to throw the only missile he has at the Hun's head... To his amazement the pork scores a direct hit! He watches with real sympathy as the Fokker lurches earthwards, the pilot desperately trying to regain control. The end comes when a wing-tip crashes against a tree, the machine plunges heavily, and a white cloud rises.

But after all, this is the festive season! The white cloud is not smoke but snow. The German pilot emerges from his wrecked machine unhurt, and surrenders to some Tommies. Ruefully, however, Biggles has to admit to himself, 'I came out on a friendly mission, and it's only by the biggest fluke imaginable that I haven't lost my life or killed someone else. Seems to me this peace and goodwill business doesn't extend to the skies...' On the other hand (like the characters in a Graham Greene story with a similar twist to it) he can't help seeing the funny side: 'Fancy having to admit that you were shot down with a packet of dead pig!'

Back at Maranique, Biggles recounts his adventure and concludes, 'I've just ordered a tener so that I can slip over and fetch the poor blighter. I'm going to bring him back here. I was thinking - if he managed to save the sausages we could give them to him for lunch, just to show there's no ill-feeling - only Goodwill!'. A fittingly ironic ending to a humorous tale that raises some deep questions.

The third seasonal offering, 'Biggles' Christmas Tree!' is very different, a joyous piece of nonsense about the rivalry between 266 Squadron and 287 Squadron. At last Biggles gets his wish, and doesn't have to contend with the Germans - only other RFC officers, but certainly Goodwill is in short supply when the rival squadron, led by the ebullient Wilkinson, or 'Wilks', steals the giant fir tree which was to have been at the centre of 266's Christmas festivities.

To add insult to injury, Wilks, who, as Biggles says, is 'a thieving buzzard with a brass face', bursts into the mess at 266 and cheerily invites all those assembled there to a party at 287 - 'We're having a special dinner and a Christmas tree afterwards!'. There will be presents for everyone, and Major Raymond, from Wing Headquarters, has accepted an invitation to come and distribute the gifts.

Harsh words are spoken, but the invitation is ultimately accepted, and two nights later 'the festive board at No. 287 Squadron's dining-room was littered with debris when the CO announced that the time had come for the distribution of the presents'. The young men make a mad rush for the ante-room, where the Christmas tree 'was ablaze with coloured candles, and its branches sagged under the weight of many packages'.

The great moment comes after Major Raymond has mounted some steps, armed with scissors, and the first gift goes to Biggles. He is delighted with a silver wristwatch, but Wilks is aghast, and claims that it was intended for him! Yet Biggles' name was clearly written on the parcel... Thwarted, Wilks has to accept the next gift, which is labelled as his, and with a forced smile he unwraps a handsome cigar-box; he opens it only to drop it immediately, for it is full of wriggling worms!

Algy comes next, and receives an expensive razor, to the chagrin of Judson, a senior pilot of 287 Squadron, and the rag continues as the 266 officers all acquire splendid gifts, whilst their hosts have to make do with cinders, cleaning cloths and rusty nuts and bolts. Biggles' C.O., Major Mullen, who 'was enjoying the fun as much as anybody' asks his junior officer in a whisper how he managed it, and Biggles replies that he and Algy guessed what 287 were up to, and came over at two in the morning to change the wrappers over. There is only one way for such a jolly evening to end, and soon nuts and oranges are flying between the two sides, and Biggles is looking for a target for a lump of oily rag.

Strange things happen in wartime, and perhaps Biggles' turkey quest and his battle with sausages could have really taken place, but there is no doubt at all that the scene in the mess that Christmas evening could have been enacted in reality in any R.F.C. Squadron's quarters during the Great War. The officers were often very young; their expectation of life was short, and the ragging and schoolboy jokes helped to relieve the terrible tension under which they lived. The great air Ace, Billy Bishop V.C. writes in his autobiography of how he and his friends painted R.F.C. markings on the ducks in the neighbouring farmyard;

Johns himself reports seeing grown men racing each other down hill in a couple of stolen steamrollers.

### THE AIR-FIGHTERS' PARTY GOES WITH A BANG!



In dead silence Wilke opened the parcel which the major had just taken from the tree—then let it fall with a crash, and a roar of laughter went up.

## Biggles' Christmas Tree!

The Young Air-Ace of the Great War is a demon for Merriment—when he can find it or provide it! . . . . . *By* FLYING-OFFICER W. E. JOHNS

It would be pleasant to report that 'Biggles' Christmas Tree!' ends without a trace of real violence, but there is a twist at the end of the tale, when the party in 287's mess is broken up by the bad news that the mess at 266 has just been bombed out of existence - in spite of warnings, the windows were never blacked out after dark. The good news is that the officers are safe, as they are all at Wilks' party, and in gratitude Biggles gives his host the silver watch after all. (It is interesting that the mess at 266 could be pinpointed so accurately by its blazing lights; when it was re-established it must have been issued with curtains or blinds, for otherwise there would have been no need for Marie Janis's espionage in 'Affaire de Coeur' - but that is another story.)

There are no further accounts of Biggles at Christmas, but his creator has put on record a very special experience of his own. Second Lieutenant Bill Johns was shot down in his DH4 on 16th September 1918, and had a tough time in German prisoner-of-war camps, especially after his brave attempts to escape led to his incarceration in a punishment detention centre. He lost a good deal of weight, going down from eleven stone to seven, and he was not repatriated until 23rd December, when he embarked at Calais for Dover.

He arrived at the Rectory at Little Dunham, where his wife and young son were living with his parents-in-law, on Christmas Day. He was in time for Christmas Dinner, which must have been a splendid one for him, in spite of the fact that the maid dropped a saucepan of potatoes on the floor and fainted at the sight of him, when he walked in unannounced through the back door, thin, dirty and dressed in odd pieces of uniform. No wonder he caused a sensation - he had been reported as missing, and given up for dead. What a homecoming! As he wrote, 'I certainly tucked away some pudding that day'.

And what happened to Biggles in December 1918? Although Johns is silent on this point, it is not hard to guess the fate of his hero. Biggles, as we know, was shot down and taken prisoner on November 11th, 1918, actually half an hour after Armistice had been signed. Although he may have been luckier than his creator, it seems more than likely that red tape would delay his release, and that like Johns he would not get back to England until well into December. And then where would he go? No cosy family circle awaited him. He had no wife and the only girl he had ever loved had turned out to be a German agent; his mother had died long ago and his father, once a District Commissioner in India is mentioned once as being in France during the war, but is never referred to again. His elder brother, Major Charles Bigglesworth, DSO, MC, was killed in action in September 1918; his uncle Dick, or Dickpa, the explorer was seldom at home, and he was hardly close to his eccentric godfather, Dr. Duveney. Besides, one wants relations at Christmas.

Of course, Biggles had plenty of friends and comrades - Algy, for instance. Algy! That's it! Algy, or the Honourable Algernon Montgomery Lacey, or Merioneth Towers, Merionethshire, is not only Biggles' best friend, but also his first cousin! It is a certainty that Algy was there to grip his pal's hand when he landed at Dover, and carry him off home to his doting mother and retiring father. Like Johns, Biggles must have tucked into a large helping of Christmas pudding on Christmas Day 1918, and I can state, without hesitation, that at last there was no chance of his being shot up or down or having to shoot someone else up or down to spoil his perfect enjoyment of the festive season.



Puck Annuals 1930s and Puck Comics 1932/3 wanted.

VIC HEARN, 20 WINGATE WAY, CAMBRIDGE, 6B2 2HD

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For Sale: Out of print Howard Bakers 16 and 17, Stacey Series No. 35, Sit in Strike at Greyfriars. Offers above £10 each. Summer Omnibus 1977 £4, Yarook £4. All mint and plus postage.

H. BLOWERS, 25 CHURCHFIELD ROAD, ROTHWELL, LEEDS

Seasons Greetings to Northern Club Members

\*\*\*\*\*

Wanted: C.D.s, numbers 58, 188, 204, 484, 485, to complete collection.

McCALL, 47 THE TERRACE, WOKINGHAM, BERKS

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Happy Christmas Greetings to Eric and all friends of C.D. Urgently needed for research Valerie Drew material.

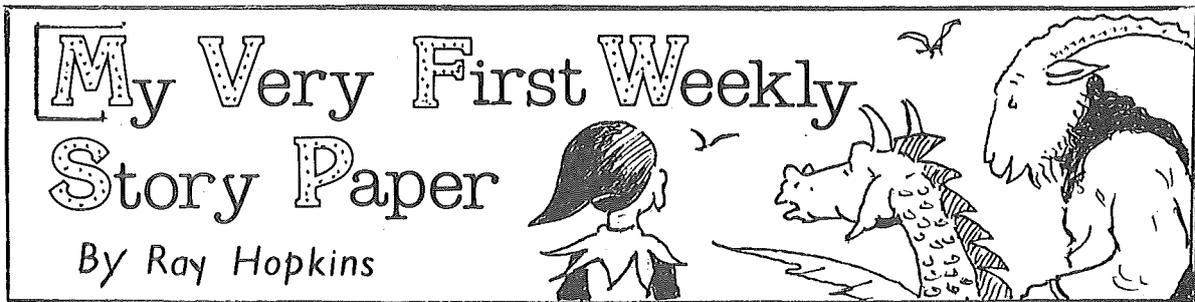
MARGERIE WOODS, HARLEQUIN COTTAGE, SOUTH STREET, SCALBY,  
SCARBOROUGH, YO13 0QR

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Wanted: Any post War Bunter hardbacks, early Scout Magazines.

ROSEMARY KEOGH, 78 Greenvale Road, Eltham, London, SE9 1PD

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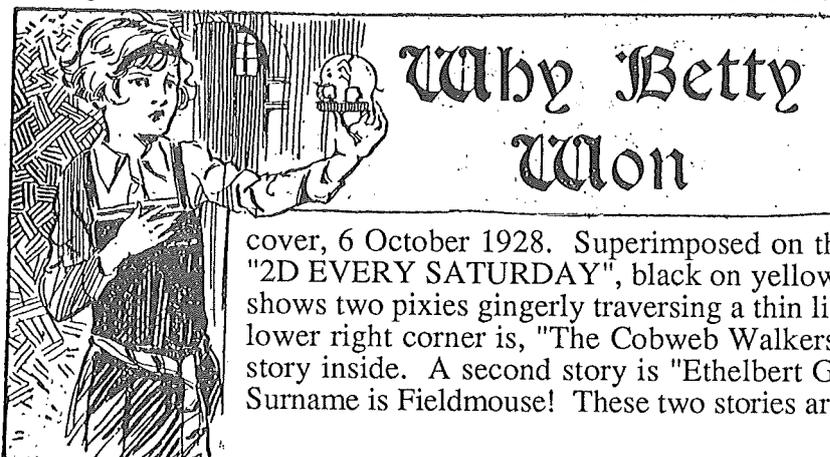


The vast span of years between moving from one address to another can bring to light objects unseen for ages and forgotten, but giving rise to reminiscent smiles when discovered, especially when the move has been fifty years since the last one. Deep cupboards in the lower part of the house are often given, as my Dad would say, "glorious turnouts" and thus contain items whose length of life were comparatively short. But attics and lofts are another matter entirely. One has to ascend to a loft by a ladder through a square cut in a passage ceiling, but attics often have a narrow staircase and a proper door. Ours was of the latter variety and deposits made were very often undisturbed and hidden by boxes and cartons piled in front of them.

My Dad was an enthusiastic reader of HOBBIES WEEKLY, a bible for the fretwork brethren, going in for competitions and receiving diplomas for various pieces in which the judges deemed he had excelled. Sometimes these artistically fretworked wooden items were used as ornaments on mantelpieces, occasional tables and knick-knack shelves but, over the years, there became rather a lot of them and too many to display at one time. Some were disposed of and some disappeared into wooden cartons. I found one such in a very dusty corner of the attic. On the sides of this wooden carton was painted in black letters: "SUNLIGHT SOAP - Unscented - Less Labour - Greater Comfort". I wondered about the Labour and Comfort because washing machines had not been invented or, if they had, we didn't have one. Our "Washer" was the cement surrounded "Copper" in the corner of the kitchen with a little squared space beneath which a fire had to be lighted on laundry days in order to heat the water. The painted advert went on to state, "Largest Sale in the World - Lever Brothers Limited, Port Sunlight - Soapmakers to H.M. The King". Crikey, I thought, and prised off the wooden lid.

The fretwork pieces were wrapped in soft brown tissue paper and separated by sheets of old DAILY MIRROR newspapers, also brown. I gained a momentary thrill from glimpses of two sporting favourites of my youth: JACK HOBBS! (deep breath) and BETTY NUTTALL! (deep sight). Incredibly a part of the paper protection turned out to be one copy only (where had all the others gone?) of my very first weekly story paper.

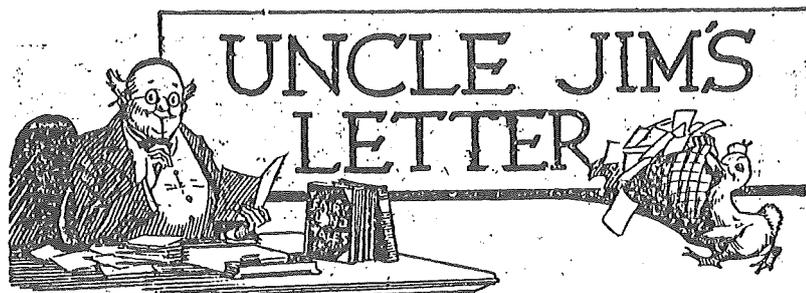
Just marginally larger than the SOL, BFL and SBL, its size is 5 1/2 by 7-2/10ths, and consists of 44 pages, its cover printed in very bright colours on glossy paper, surely unusual for such a publication of the 1920's. Incredibly, the staples, that paper rotting bane of our beloved old papers, have still not rusted in 62 years. The front cover is framed in bright red with the title FAIRYLAND TALES across the top and just beneath, THE



KIDDIES FAVOUR-ITE PAPER printed in blue on a white strip. The number of this particular issue is 321 and the date, printed on the bottom of the back

cover, 6 October 1928. Superimposed on the framed cover picture is, "2D EVERY SATURDAY", black on yellow, and the cover illustration shows two pixies gingerly traversing a thin line. The title, printed in the lower right corner is, "The Cobweb Walkers", which refers to the first story inside. A second story is "Ethelbert Goes to Town". Ethelbert's Surname is Fieldmouse! These two stories are both seven pages long.

There are two further complete stories, both five pages in length. One, a boys' school story, is entitled, "Perky, the New Boy", and the other, for girls, is called, "Why Betty Won". There are three full-page, illustrated



poems, a full-page "how-to" article, "All Made of Raffia", and the following stories in pictures: "The Further Adventures of Jack and Jill", which is a serial, "Peggie, Peter and Nunky Noah", "Billy and Bunny", (a serial with the words in rhyme), "Sammy Snowball's Funny Tricks", and "Wiggie, Willie and Winkie", (a pig and two mice). The Editor's Chat is called, "Uncle Jim's Letter", and is addressed to "My Dear Nephews and Nieces", and he also furnishes three pages headed, "From the Fairy Ring", containing poems and little stories sent in by readers. As if the above were not a good two-pennyworth, there is also a full-page informative article about hedgehogs entitled, "A Winter Hermit", and a painting competition on the inside back cover. An attractive feature of this paper is the back cover which lists the contents of next week's issue. At the bottom, above the date of issue, is the name of the publisher, probably unheard of by most of us

**NEXT WEEK:**

*"Hidden Trees"*  
Competition  
SPLENDID PRIZES



**These Jolly Stories:**



**MICKY MONKEY'S LOST BROTHER**

A Tale of Some Toffee,  
Dozy Flo  
Who Found the Pearls?

Look out for more Adventures  
of Billy and Bunny and your  
other Fairyland Friends

*Have you joined the Fairy Ring?*

**FAIRYLAND TALES**

*On Sale every Saturday. Price 2d*

Printed and Published by John Lenz & Co., Ltd., 186 Fleet Street, London, E.C.4.

0/10/28.

Amalgamated Pressians and D.C. Thomsonites: John Leng & Co. Ltd., 186 Fleet Street, London, EC4.

I wonder under what category of weekly publication this little paper should be listed? Not a comic, not really a story paper as we understand them, almost like a miniature annual in weekly form. In fact, the layout of this particular issue reminded me very strongly of my 1928 PIP AND SQUEAK ANNUAL, described in the 1989 COLLECTORS' DIGEST ANNUAL. A dip into the always fascinating Lofts/Adley OLD BOYS BOOKS: A Complete Catalogue (1969) seemed called for, but no mention of this small size publication under any of the categories came to light. It must have had a six year plus run to have reached No. 321 in October 1928. According to the above reference book, John Leng appear not to have been publishers of weekly juvenalia with the exception of the one under discussion; however, under the Annual section I came across an interesting entry which may have connections with one of the picture stories. The BILLY AND BUNNY BOOK was published by this firm from 1921 to 1940.

Possibly because its distribution was not as efficient as for those papers published by the AP or Thomson, this paper wasn't available everywhere. It was not displayed on the top of the counter interlaced with other weeklies between the cash register and a glass case in which were visible but unreachable loose sweets. I was able only to obtain it at one particular newsagents at the top of Kender Street, New Cross where I lived at the time I began to have my very own weekly to look forward to. It was, in fact, stored but visible through the glass front of a display cabinet beneath the counter. Maybe this is why I never came across any of my age group who also read FAIRYLAND TALES.



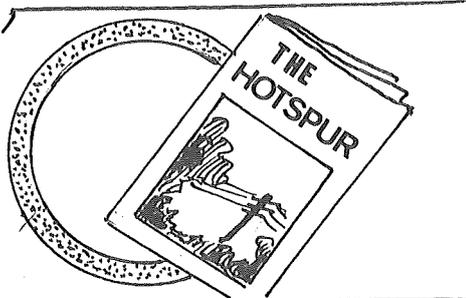
## ANSWERS TO CHARACTERS' NICKNAMES QUIZ

1. "Cherub", Vere Beauclerc, son of the remittance man Lacelles Beauclerc. Cedar Creek, School in the back woods, Canada.
2. "Putty", Edwin (Teddy) Grace, Classical House (Rookwood) Fourth Form.
3. "The Serpent", Reginald Pitt, Study E Remove Form, Saint Frank's. (Originally in the College House, changed to the Ancient House.)
4. The "Caterpillar", Rupert de Courcy, Fourth Form, Highcliffe School.
5. The "Outsider", Jerrold Lumley-Lumley, Fourth Form, School House Study No I, Saint James' (or, as the boys call it, St. Jim's).
6. The "Acid Drop", Mr. Horace Manfred Hacker - sometimes listed as B.A. and sometimes M.A., Master of the Shell Greyfriar's School.
7. The "Owl", William George Bunter, Study No. 7 Remove Form, Greyfriars School.
8. The "Bounder" Herbert Vernon-Smith, Remove Form Greyfriars School (sometimes he is given a middle name of Tudor) Study No. 4.



# An Adventure of Red Circle School

By Desmond O'Leary



Of all the many stories I have loved in the D.C. Thomson story papers none stands higher in my admiration than the Red Circle school stories in the *Hotspur*. This paper specialised in school stories of all sorts, the more "way-out" the better. Schools for outlaws, for giants, for pirates, for space-boys; you name it and the *Hotspur* had it! But two series were different.

The stories of Septimus Green, "The Big Stiff", showed a real grasp of how an imaginative teacher could inspire boys to want to learn. But the series to which I would like to pay tribute here is that centred on the *Hotspur's* best known school.

It is reassuring to know that I am not alone in my enthusiasm. In their excellent book, "The Men Behind Boys' Fiction", W.O.G. Lofts and D.J. Adley pay a generous and well-deserved compliment to these stories. For me and many other boys of the '30s and '40s only the Thomson papers mattered, and we were fortunate indeed to enjoy a long and varied series of exciting school adventures in a setting more "up-to-date" than those schools in the main tradition of the English story (Greyfriars, for example) but one still recognisably part of that tradition.

Let me quote from Lofts and Adley (after considering other Thomson series): "But in view of their almost non-stop run from 1933 to 1958 and their immense popularity, I would say that the greatest series ever to appear in the Big Five (*Adventure*, *Rover*, *Wizard*, *Skipper* and *Hotspur*) was the Red Circle School stories in the *Hotspur*."

Red Circle was a completely new and modern school situated at Lington. One went from Liverpool Street, London, in order to get to it, so one assumes that it lay somewhere on the East Coast. The buildings were made of red sandstone and its houses were built around a quadrangle, hence its name. Boys came to it from all parts of the British Empire, from America, and many parts of the world.

As in nearly all schools, the rivalry between the Houses was very fierce and it

formed the basis of many plots for the stories. What was certainly original and true to life was the fact that the boys did eventually grow up and move to higher forms; then, in time, they left...

It would be foolish to say that the stories were written in such prose as that of Frank Richards of Greyfriars fame, but they were certainly in a style which a boy found easy to read and which made few demands on him. Now, let us look at a fine example of the stories and one especially for this season!

## THE RED CIRCLE ESKIMOS (From *Hotspur* 558)

Chapter 1 - The Plane Crash. Red Circle is breaking up for the Christmas holidays in the face of severe weather conditions. Twelve boys are staying behind for various reasons with one accompanying master. As the last bus pulls away for the station, the absent-minded Albert runs out, too late, and therefore becomes the fourteenth member of the party. The sound of a plane in trouble and then the noise of a crash galvanise the boys and their master into hurrying to the rescue.

Chapter 2 - The Search in the Blizzard. The boys are organised into an efficient line of searchers and, as the light fades, they find the crashed aircraft. The injured airman is freed, but it is now too late to return to the school. They have to spend the night in the plane.

Chapter 3 - Snowed In! In the morning deep snow has fallen and there is no chance of getting back. Firewood is gathered and, with help of petrol and some paper from the wrecked plane, they light a fire. The master consults with the Sixth Formers about the problem of food. Together with two of them he sets off to kill one of the sheep that they have already seen on the moor. Igloos are suggested against the bitter weather. One of the boys has seen them built in the Far North.

Chapter 4 - Eskimo Houses. When the "sheep party" return with meat, and cocoa from a tin discovered in the plane is added to the menu, the boys settle down to a cheerful

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO SPEND YOUR HOLIDAYS STRANDED ON THE MOORS  
IN 10 FEET OF SNOW?



sing-song and story-telling sessions in their cosy "eskimo houses", but in the morning they find the remains of their meat stolen, and footsteps in the snow leading across the moor. They follow these, and see a local old shepherd being threatened by two escaped German prisoners of war.

(End of episode in *HOTSPUR* No. 558)

Chapter 5 - To the Rescue! (from *HOTSPUR* No. 559)

The Germans are overwhelmed with a volley of snowballs. They are locked up in the shepherd's small hut while the boys borrow some oatmeal, and also some hay for the igloos' floors. The old man tells them that it is the worst winter he has known in forty years and there is no chance of them getting off the moor for Christmas Day.

Chapter 6 - Trouble from Deakin. Back at the camp again fishing through the ice has some success, while the pilot and some of the lads work on fixing the plane's radio. Only Deakin, a sulky and rebellious Sixth Former, is not lending a hand in the tasks to be done and is grumbling about his Christmas holiday.

Chapter 7 - The Thunderflash S.O.S. Deakin persuades the Juniors that they could steal a march on the Seniors if they succeeded in getting back to Red Circle before them. They agree to follow the Sixth Former across the frozen Mere to look for the nearest railway line. Once in the middle of the Mere the ice begins to break up leaving them in deadly

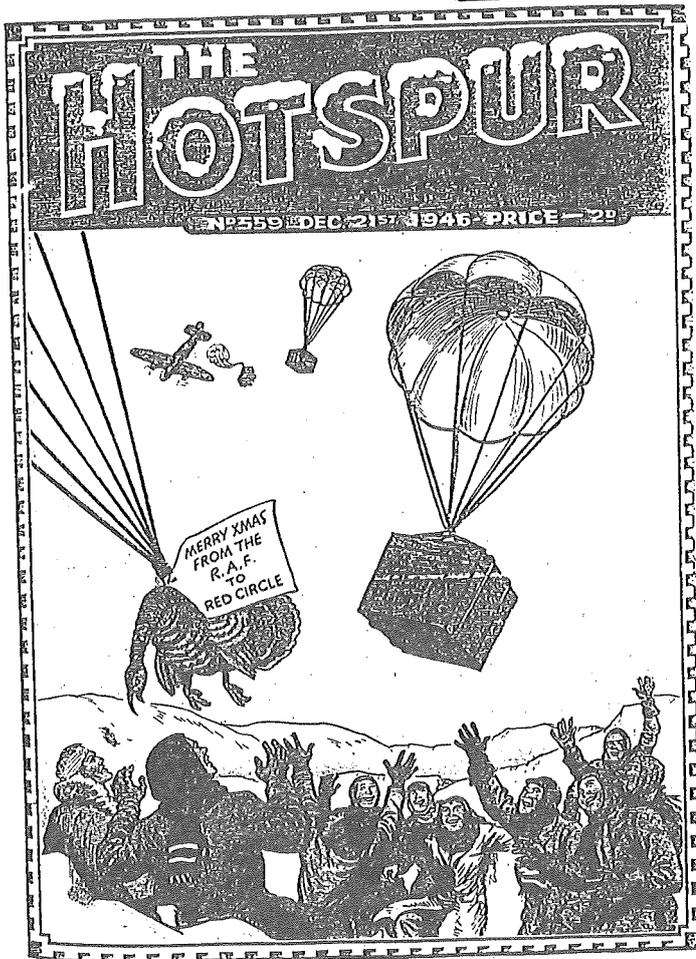
danger. Albert's fire-cracker, still in his pocket is used as an alarm signal.

Chapter 8 - The Ice Peril. In the plane the radio is fixed up sufficiently to send, but not receive, messages. An S.O.S. is sent off before the set "dies" but nobody can know if it has got through. Then the sound of the thunderflash is heard.

A search-party, following the Juniors' footprints, spots the marooned youngsters on a disintegrating ice-floe. The plane's dinghy is used to rescue them in the nick of time and Deakin is dealt with - painfully! - by their teacher.

Chapter 9 - Christmas Dinner from the Skies. It looks like a dismal Christmas for the Red Circle boys - oatmeal porridge, cold mutton and cocoa! But they hear a plane circling, and find that the R.A.F. has heard their S.O.S. and organised a parachute-drop of Christmas goodies! Next day a thaw begins and, when they struggle to a road, R.A.F. lorries pick them up and take them back to Red Circle. The German P.O.W.s are taken away, and the Red Circle Eskimos are back, safe and sound after their adventures!

Let's look a little more closely at the story to see what makes it such an exciting yarn. Published in the run-up to Christmas 1946, in the *Hotspurs* of December 14th and 21st, the whole story is only 9 - 10,000 words long. Swift action is obviously the main concern of the author, anonymous as always with Thomsons, alas! However, if



we are to care about what happens, we must believe in and even, perhaps, identify with the characters. In a continuing series like Red Circle the writer has the advantage of knowing that the characters will be familiar to most of his readers, so he can use their traits without too much explanation. He may just use epithets, such as "Deakin, the Senior with the yellow steak". Or, "Albert Glossop, the inventor of the Fourth Form." When we learn the names of the boys who make up the rescue party we can see a very representative sample of the school. From the Sixth Form: "Cripple Dick" Archer, School Captain; Dave Hardy, "the Moke"; Jim Barker and Greg Deakin. From the fifth: "Pinky" Farrell and "Black" Dawson; From the Fourth: Rob Roy McGregor; Tony West; Spike Dewey; Chaka, the Zulu boy and Chris Tansley, plus latecomer, Albert Glossop. From the Juniors: Sandy Hardy, the "Moke's" kid brother and "Twirpy" Jubb. With "Cripple Dick" Archer the School Captain, and Rob Roy captain of Home House (where the U.K. boys lived), and Spike Dewey, captain of Transatlantic or "Yank" House, not to mention Chaka and Chris Tansley of Colonial or "Conk" House, we have almost a

statistical "sample" of Red Circle broken down by age and geography! It is also worth noting that this is a group with some experience of responsibility. With the School Captain, two House Captains and five other Fifth and Sixth formers, we have a thoroughly reliable set of lads - with one glaring exception - Greg Deakin! (By the way, "Cripple Dick" Archer owes his nickname not to any real physical handicap but to the disguise he adopted on first arriving at Red Circle.) Leader of the party was the master in charge of Junior House, the fat, cheerful but capable and well-respected Mr. Barrell.

The mood at the commencement of the story is jolly and lively. Everyone is looking forward to the Christmas holidays, even the lads staying behind, and even the wintry weather, with heavy snow forecast, adds to the spirit of fun. And the snow that falls from the roof on the pompous and unpopular Mr. Smugg adds to the hilarity!

As the last bus leaves the school, the plane in trouble and then down on the wild common changes the mood instantly. "Cripple Dick" rushes to phone for help (but the lines are down) and grabs a first-aid kit. They all set out for the common, some in Mr. Barrell's car, the others following as quickly as possible behind and keeping up fairly easily in the worsening weather.

From now on the theme of the story becomes apparent - co-operation using everyone's talents will ensure rescue of the crashed pilot and survival for the whole party. On the moor the search party finds the wrecked transport plane's slightly injured pilot. He is freed by Mr. Barrell's "powerful hands" and the boys together right the overturned plane. "Cripple Dick" uses the first-aid kit and then has the brain-wave of using the parachute silk as a warm bed for Pilot Officer Lee. They all spend an uncomfortable night in the plane, but Albert Glossop has a battery in his pockets plus the sandwiches he had packed for his missed train journey. Pinky Farrell has some chocolate and "Twirpy" some toffees. Once again, everyone has contributed what he can. When they awake to find themselves snowed in, Mr. Barrell organises a scouting party - to no avail because of the drifted snow - then sets about organising a fire and boiling some water. Mr. Barrell, as befits an intelligent master concerned about his charges' welfare, calls his Sixth formers together to consult on the urgent problem of food. Jim Barker recalls the sheep seen earlier by the search party. Mr. Barrell, brought up on a farm, knows how to slaughter an animal and, equipped with Rob Roy's large sheath-knife,

sets off with Jim Barker and the "Moke", while "Cripple Dick", in an effort to keep the others busy, suggests building igloos. Spike Dewey, the American youngster has seen them being built in Alaska and has some idea of how to go about it and the boys get to work. So, once again, the talents and initiative of the group, intelligently organised by "Cripple Dick" and Mr. Barrell, produce a worth-while result and maintain the party's morale. Even the youngest, "Twirpy" and Sandy, gather berries to print the names "Home House" and "Junior House" on the two igloos.

With some oil-soaked moss lamps, thanks to P.O. Lee, and parachute silk and plane fabric for floor coverings, the ice-houses protect the boys from the freezing wind as they tell ghost stories and have a sing-song.

The morning led to the hunt for their purloined sheep following the footprint trail. Now there's a mystery. Who could be on the moor and afraid to ask them to share their food? The answer - escaped German prisoners of war - is credible to those of us who remember the post-war days when there were many P.O.W. and displaced persons camps all over Britain. Most of the German and Italian P.O.W.'s were content to stay quietly in camp until they could go home. Many stayed in Britain after their captivity, made new lives for themselves and married British girls. But some did try to escape and were speedily re-captured, like those our heroes snowballed into submission when they caught them robbing the old shepherd, Jem Taylor.

Once again the details of the story hang together. Why hadn't Jem tried to rescue the crashed pilot? Because in his deafness he had not heard the crash. Why don't the lads move into his hut? Not enough room. There is just enough space to lock up the Germans. But he does share what he can spare, and reinforces the message that co-operation in the face of adversity is a necessity for survival.

The biggest crisis of their stay on the moors is about to strike the Red Circle Eskimos. The disgruntled Deakin has a Christmas invitation which he is determined to accept. Besides, "he was definitely of the opinion that he knew better than Mr. Barrell and Cripple Dick, and fancies himself in the role of a successful leader of a break-out. It would secure him a lot of praise when the school re-assembled after the holidays. He could imagine the school laughing at the story of how Mr. Barrell and the Seniors spent Christmas on the moors while his party of Juniors were eating turkey and plum pudding in safety". By using his prestige as a Sixth

Former and cunningly playing on Spike's boast that the Alaskans "had the snow licked", he talks the Juniors into following him across the dangerous ice on the mere.

To counter-point the suspense of the events on the ice, where Spike redeems his foolish conduct by keeping his head when the craven Deakin panics and by remembering Albert's thunderflash, back at the plane work continues on the radio. As P.O. Lee transmits the S.O.S. we note the technical jargon used in the map reference: WL7675 comes out as William Love Seven Six Seven five. (After the thrilling deeds of the R.A.F. in the Second World War, every boy lapped up such details.) Now we have something else to wonder over. Did the message get through to Lee's base? Will the Air Force be able to help? (Actually readers may well have an idea of what is going to happen since the cover of *Hotspur* No. 559 carries a brightly coloured picture of a turkey and a box marked "Plum Pudding" parachuting down to a delighted bunch of youngsters!) Be that as it may, the sound of the thunderflash alarm switches the action to the rescue of the boys in danger. The situation seems hopeless at first but the quick thinking Cripple Dick has the inspiration that an R.A.F. transport plane might carry a dinghy. The pilot confirms that the plane makes cross-Channel flights and is therefore so equipped.

Swift action by Cripple Dick in this rescues the boys from the sinking ice floe and then Mr. Barrell, with a grim expression, sends the other boys ahead while cutting a sturdy willow branch from a tree. "The noise of several sharp cracks and a series of yells indicated what was happening to the mutinous Senior", Deakin.

Now our story is coming to an end. Everyone is safe but it looks as if it will be a bleak Christmas. They are convinced that their radio message cannot have been heard.

But what's that noise overhead? P.O. Lee identifies the plane as it comes into sight as a "Faithful Annie" to the puzzlement of Mr. Barrell who thinks it looks like an Anson. "It's an Anson Nineteen, the modern version of the Anson", Lee explains, thus satisfying again the readers' thirst for technical accuracy, especially in regard to aircraft.

(E.S. Turner in his *Boys Will Be Boys*, that splendid survey of boys' reading, notes amusingly how fantasy is a marked feature of Thomson storypapers but with meticulous accuracy in technical details: "...The young have their own peculiar standards in these matters. Whether a Lockheed Hudson aircraft can be landed on a vast sea monster (on which an asdic team have already erected steel masts, believing it

to be an island), matters less to the boy reader than that the aircraft shall be accurately portrayed as a Lockheed Hudson...")

Down come the parachutes, and containers thud into the snow all round the camp. As the boys cheered, the aircraft banked. A long streamer fluttered out behind the tail, and they read the message: "Merry Christmas to Red Circle from the R.A.F." ... "You can trust the Airforce to look after their friends", said Lee. Turkey, plum pudding ("twice as big as a football", cried Twirpy), spuds, mince pies and all that was needed to eat them. "Fetch the old shepherd along and then we'll get started, said Mr. Barrell. "And, as it's Christmas, we'll spare some grub for the German prisoners." The thaw starts next day and in the afternoon Mr. Barrell leads them to the road where R.A.F. lorries are waiting for them. "We shan't forget our Christmas of 1946 in a hurry", Cripple Dick remarked to Mr. Barrell as they rode back to Red Circle in a lorry. The teacher gave a huge yawn. "Speaking for myself, I think I shall stay in bed till the New Year", he said.

Who could possibly blame him!

I hope I've been able to show in my analysis of this story the reasons why I esteem it so highly. A Red Circle purist might object that humour, which is so characteristic of the stories, is rather lacking in this one. But, in a quarter of a century of almost continuous publication, all types of yarn appeared and I hope my readers agree that at least there's plenty of snow!

A more "weighty" objection - in every sense of the word! - might be that, with very little part in this story, we miss the presence of what Mr. Lofts called "the most famous and best-remembered character at Red Circle". I refer of course to Mr. Alfred Smugg, the master of Home House. Pompous, interfering and nosy, very fat and very unpopular, his misadventures are a constant cause of mirth.

Let me sum up why the "Red Circle Eskimos" is such a fine story.

It has effective characterisation. Apart from the natural leaders like Cripple Dick and Rob Roy, we have the absent-minded Albert, the somewhat boastful but generally sensible Spike, the selfish and irresponsible Deakin. This characterisation is subordinated to the narrative, of course. In adventure fiction the story is what matters first, last and always. But the reader must care about the people in the story, at least the sympathetic ones, if he

is to be interested in their fate.

The weather provides the menacing background. Fine, descriptive writing would slow the action but the sense of white desolation is conveyed concisely with, now and then, a longer passage to re-inforce our impression of the problem posed by the bitter conditions: "The skipper crossed the ice and climbed up the far bank. After a few steps he sank waist-deep in snow and had to throw himself flat forward and crawl on all fours to get out... The sky was darkening rapidly. The snow-mantled earth was becoming a shadowy grey. As Cripple Dick emerged from the cover of some trees the wind caught him in a bitter blast that took his breath away."

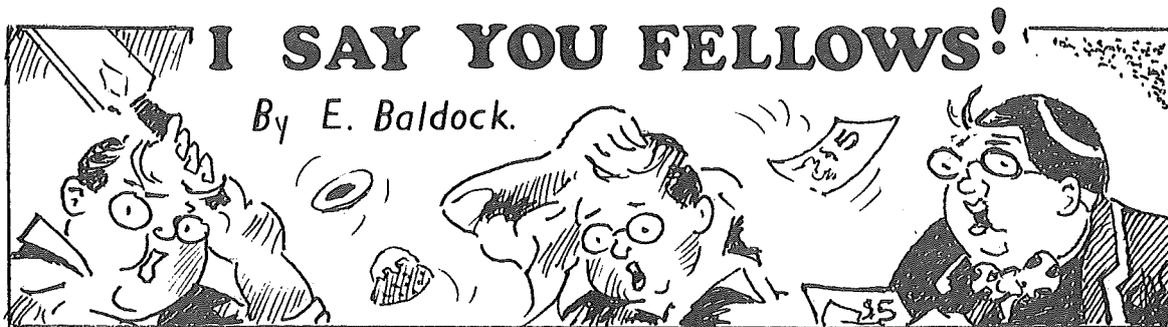
But, if description and character play secondary rôles, the plot, outlined above, and the pace at which it moves ensure an excellent yarn. Let's consider two aspects of it which seem especially successful. First there is the cross-cutting from one scene to another, which adds suspense, and second, the careful plotting which ensures a logical reason for the objects and skills which help the school party survive.

Finally let me put in a word for Mr. Barrell. As a contrast to Mr. Smugg he could not be bettered. He is fat but strong and tough. He has a sense of humour and no false dignity. He is capable of slaughtering a sheep or catching fish through a hole in the ice. He is properly concerned for the well-being of the boys in his charge. He relies on his Seniors to help him and consults them on courses of action. When Deakin lets him down and puts the lives of the Juniors in danger, he does not hesitate to thrash him, Sixth Former or not! As an ex-schoolmaster myself I salute Mr. Barrell, an excellent model for his colleagues.

For those of my generation this story serves, too, to bring back memories of those immediate post-war years. That bitterly cold winter of 1946-7 is still vivid in my memory. Very few houses with central heating then! And food rationing made the few treats saved up for Christmas even more appreciated. No wonder the Red Circle boys were overjoyed by their R.A.F.-supplied turkey, plum pudding and mince pies!

Someone has described the Second World War in Britain as "co-operation under shared stress". That spirit is the theme of "The Red Circle Eskimos", a thrilling example of the British school story.





Much has been written over the years concerning the character and activities of William George Bunter. The computed number of words expended on this fat member of the Greyfriars Remove must amount to a daunting total; yet I feel that there is still much that may be said which hopefully may enlarge our knowledge, and give us an even clearer conception of this much maligned and paradoxically much loved character. Try to visualise the Remove form-room gathered in solemn session under the celebrated 'gimlet' eye of Mr. Quelch, without the podgy presence of Billy Bunter. The void thus created would be little less than devastating. Imagine the absence of the hesitating and hilarious construe of the deathless stanzas of Virgil (which doubtless would be beneficial to the nervous system of Mr. Quelch). Our loss would be - well - almost indescribable. Bunter is certainly not an ornament to that celebrated and much chronicled form, yet he is as integral a part of it as is the old clock tower to Greyfriars itself. Take away either, and the picture immediately fades and becomes less clear and, in a sense, lifeless. Such is the strange charisma of William George Bunter.

Picture the landing in the Remove passage without a familiar fat figure adorning the window seat, spectacles gleaming into the recesses of a bag of jam-tarts, more often than otherwise the property of some unfortunate fellow who has yet to discover his loss. This is 'our' Bunter, with traces of jam on his features and a liberal shower of crumbs adorning his expansive waistcoat. A rotund figure champing happily with not the slightest qualm of conscience concerning other fellows' tuck. Notorious for his instinct for tracking down foodstuffs, Bunter has earned for himself the reputation (unenviable though it be) for having an unscrupulous concept of property: "I see it, therefore it must be mine" is a philosophy which, with all its inconsistent overtones, may well be applied to the fat Owl. All Peter Todd's countless applications of the fives bat (kept for this specific purpose) upon his fat person, and all the bumpings and kickings which are his daily lot fail to destroy this

overwhelming desire for sticky comestibles and plum cake.

Visualise if you will the Bunter family, every member present, gathered round the board at tea-time in the respectable semi-detached villa somewhere in Surbiton. Mr. Bunter, like a Harlequin at home, presides at the head of the table; at the foot, Mrs. Bunter dispenses tea and smiles. At a given word from the head of the house action commences, and there is keen competition for the good things with which the table is so well provided. In no time at all 'our' Billy is two tarts and a wedge of fruit cake ahead of his minor Sammy, but sister Bessie is giving him a good run in the jaw-champing line, while Mr. Bunter, although slower and more sedate as become his years, is doing rather well also. Mrs. Bunter smiles benignly upon her flock and is kept constantly busy supplying their voracious needs. One feels that the Owl would, were he conversant (which is doubtful) with the lines, fully concur with Shakespeare when he says:-

"The feast is sold... 'Tis given with welcome; to feed were best at home; from thence the sauce to meat is ceremony..."

A happy picture, a not unusual picture at this time of year at Bunter Villa. Greyfriars may be, for the moment, far away. But Wharton Lodge will be easily accessible by the nine-thirty train in the morning. Bunter champs stolidly on, his plans are cut and dried as it were, and for him they are as immutable as were the laws of the Medes and Persians. Alas for Harry Wharton and Co.!

Bunter has not been particularly fortunate in his ancestry. Looking back no further than his grandfather one finds from such details as are available that this twig of the Bunter tree was something of an opportunist adventurer who, in his younger days, made a certain doubtful reputation for himself in India, in a civil capacity - the Bunters never being of a warrior or military breed. His was not exactly a glowing reputation to hand down to a grand-son. It may well be that William George could have inherited certain traits of character from this

forebear. Also from his father, Mr. Samuel Bunter who, so far as can be ascertained, is 'something in the city', as indeed are countless thousands of other pin-striped, bowler-hatted gentlemen. With an 'eye to the main chance' in all matters pecuniary he is considered a sharp man by his business associates, and this characteristic is sometimes in evidence in Billy. Honest to a keenly calculated degree, beyond which 'the devil take the hind-most' might perhaps sum up this particular moral attitude. His mother, gentle soul, is however extremely proud of her stalwart offspring. Let no breath or word of criticism be uttered in her presence concerning Billy, which is, all things considered, a worthy stance for a fond parent to adopt.

The Owl having inherited these warm and creditable characteristics from his mother is as a result not such a really bad fellow after all. "Look here Mater, you must take things easy you know...". One may hear him on one of those few occasions in his fat life expressing genuine concern for someone other than himself. A forgotten genius is supposed to have remarked "There is a modicum of good in the worst of us", and this is certainly applicable to William George Bunter as to many another less worthy fellow. Mr. Quelch, a very keen and expert observer of human nature in all its ruggedness and frailty, is well aware of these half-stifled elements in Bunter's make-up,

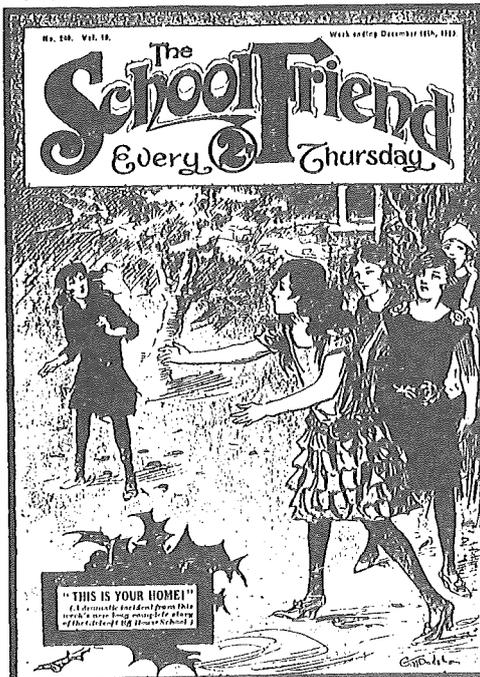
and makes allowance for them. Exasperating to the outside limit though Bunter so often is, this awareness on the part of the Remove Master has saved the fat Owl on countless occasions.

Opinions of the character of William George Bunter will always differ widely. Tot homines - tot sententiae: but one thing is quite evident - he is a winner! Harry Wharton and Co., together with the rest of the Remove fellows, accept Bunter as they find him. He is a podgy fact of life and therefore cannot be ignored. His manners and customs certainly leave much to be desired and efforts have been made from time to time to effect a change in his ways. Most, if not all, have proved short-lived and abortive. We who follow his career with such close interest through its many vicissitudes breath a sigh of relief and tell ourselves that all is well, Bunter is himself once more. Who on earth would care a jot for a pious Owl (the very thought is ludicrous)! even a fairly good Owl would hardly be acceptable. No, he must remain for posterity our basic Bunter, wretched fellow though he may be upon some occasions. May he always remain, to quote the Bard of Avon once more:

"...constant as the northern star,  
Of whose true-fixed and resting quality  
There is no fellow in the firmament."

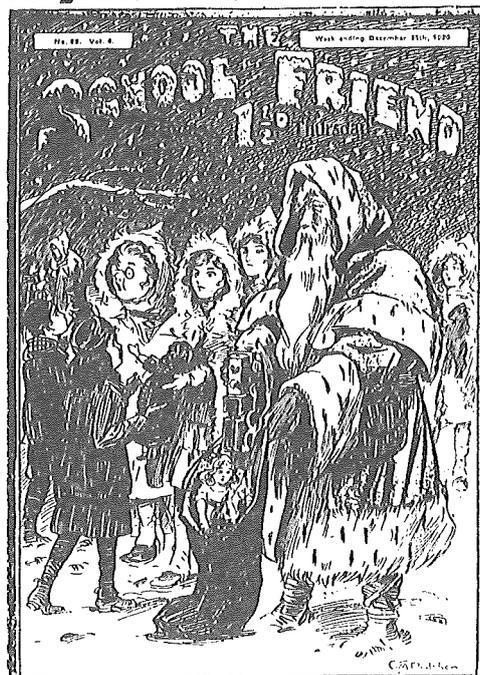


OUR GRAND CHRISTMAS NUMBER!



A Fine New Serial starts in this issue: "Her Friend—with the Secret Name!"

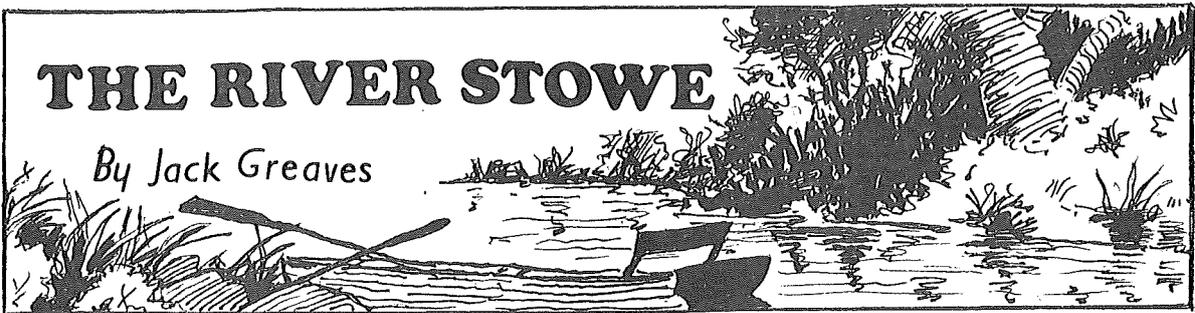
Magnificent Christmas Number!



CHRISTMAS PRESENTS FROM THE CLIFF HOUSE GIRLS!

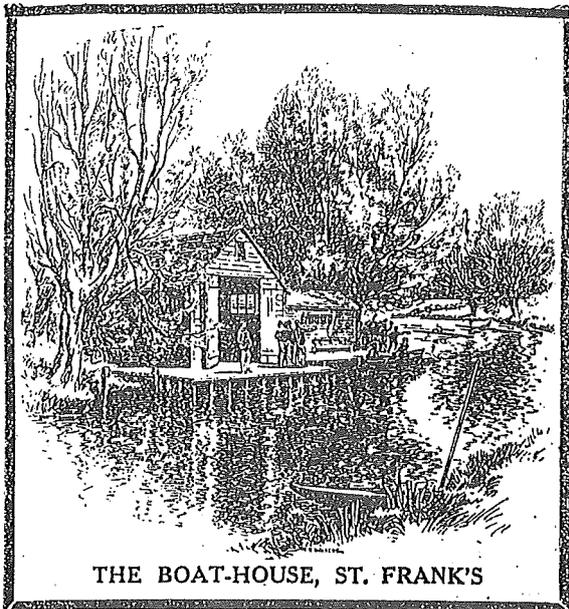
# THE RIVER STOWE

By Jack Greaves



E.S. Brooks mentions about 20 rivers in the Old Series of Nelson Lee, among these are some quite famous ones, but the most important from the St. Frank's point of view was the River Stowe, because of its close proximity to the school, and the fact that many adventures have taken place in and around this area.

The earliest mention occurred in Old Series 112, NIPPER AT ST. FRANK'S (the first school story). In this Richard Bennett (Nipper), having just arrived at Bellton Station after his journey from London, enquires of the porter the way to the school and decides to go via the towing-path thinking that this would be the more pleasant way than the dusty lane on such a beautiful day.



THE BOAT-HOUSE, ST. FRANK'S

Nipper sees three St. Frank's boys enjoying a row on the River Stowe: they were Christine and Co., who have the honour of being the first pupils from the school to be mentioned in the St. Frank's saga.

During the summer months the pastimes of rowing and punting were very popular and, as St. Frank's had its own boathouse, it was quite easy to organise a trip

on the river for the purpose of fishing, picknicking or just finding a shady spot for a quiet read or a nap.

This illustration is a typical example and we see one of the boys doing a spot of fishing, having arrived at the bankside in a punt. A quiet read wouldn't be possible, of course, for Handforth's two chums if they accompanied their leader on the river because an argument would be sure to break out after a short while and this would end up with the boat being overturned and they would all get a soaking. This seemed to happen on every occasion a trip was arranged.

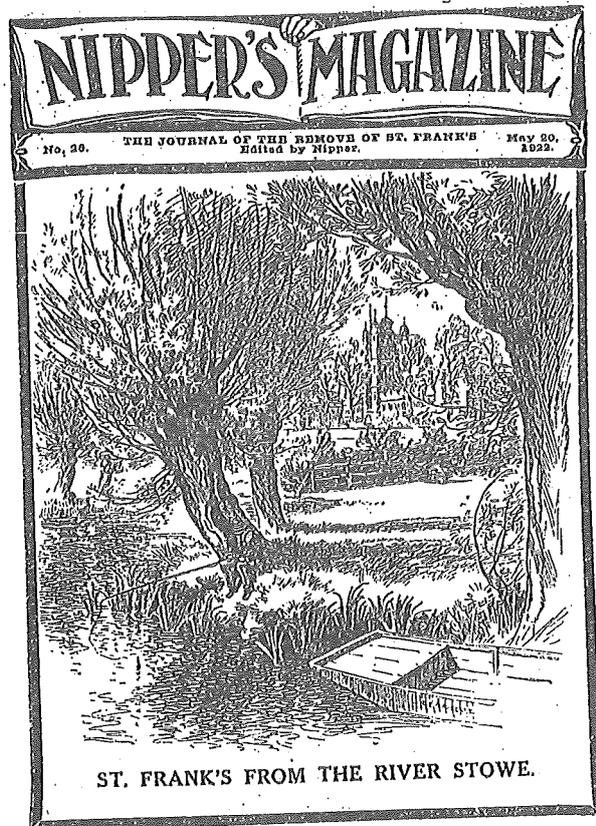
During the winter months, particularly during a severe frost, the juniors would complain that the Headmaster hadn't yet given his permission for the school to commence skating. From an adult point of view, the Head was quite right in being cautious, for there would have been no end of trouble if a disaster had happened and it was later proved at the inquest that the ice hadn't been thick enough at the time. The juniors didn't think of it in this light, however, but when permission was finally granted a great time was had by all. Handforth of course always seemed to end up in trouble, for he imagined himself to be the school's best skater and would start showing-off, particularly if any of the Moor View girls were in attendance. Everyone knew what would happen and, before very long, he would crash onto the ice after trying to perform a figure eight or some similar manoeuvre.

There have been quite a few disasters connected with the River Stowe over the years, particularly when there had been long periods of heavy rain and wind, forcing the river to overflow its banks, and put many areas of Bellton and the surrounding districts completely under water causing much hardship to the inhabitants of this normally peaceful village.

E.S. Brooks was particularly good at describing these disasters, and in Old Series 137, THE FLOOD OF ST. FRANK'S his account is typical of his writing on this subject. Incidentally, during the course of this story, the school is introduced to that

very popular character Tom Burton, nicknamed the Bo'sun.

Willards Island was quite often mentioned in the Old Series and first appeared in O.S.153. It was situated on the River Stowe, was half a mile long and 200 yards wide with a few trees at either end, the centre being bare except for a half completed building known locally as "Willard's Folly". This had been erected 20 years before by an eccentric named Willard, hence its title. It was designed like a medieval castle with imposing turrets and grim battlements. In the summer time this building was photographed dozens of times a week by visitors on the river and was also a favourite subject for amateur painters.



In the barring-out series against Mr. Kennedy Hunter (O.S. 148-157) the island was prominently featured when the ancient House Remove Form took refuge there after Hunter had driven them out of their barring-

out quarters in the old monastery ruins. It was an ideal place to fortify against attack, as the attackers had first of all to cross the river in boats which could be seen quite clearly by the defenders because Nipper always placed guards in strategic positions, day or night.

The first near tragedy on the Stowe occurred quite early in the Old Series in No. 120, THE MESSAGES OF MYSTERY. Mr. Peter Alvington (Nelson Lee's assumed name on his arrival at St. Frank's) is kidnapped by a chap named Frederick Charlson, who several years before had been employed as porter, but had attacked a fellow-servant and nearly killed him. Mr. Thorne, who had been the Ancient House Housemaster at the time, had witnessed the affair from his study window. On this evidence Charlson was sentenced to 7 years penal servitude but because of good conduct while in prison had earned a remission. However, it seems that during this he had nursed his hatred against Mr. Thorne until it had become a positive mania. On his release he returns to the school for revenge and thinking "Mr. Alvington" was in fact Mr. Thorne, kidnaps the farmer, whom he ties to the bridge over the River Stowe with a huge boulder around his feet. Charlson is about to cut the rope when Nipper and Co. come to the rescue.

There are many more adventures which could be related, but space is now running short. The above incidents will no doubt have brought back pleasant memories to the older readers of the Nelson Lee.

The other rivers mentioned in the Old Series are as follows: The Puius (266), River Thames (165), Drake River (322), Colorado (114), Alligator (369), Amazon (263), Ghost (323), Hudson (425), Majarra (266), Mersey (319), Nile (366), Paladus (269), Perth (324), Rio Negro (265), Severn (420), Tyne (448), Worm River (323), Silver River (323), Ganges (294).

Some of the above are of course fictitious but many adventures have been connected with them, particularly when the St. Frank's party were on holiday in various parts of the world.



# CHRISTMAS SCRAP-BOOK

What was the Mystery of the Painted Room? Arthur Augustus D'Arcy Solved It—and then Completely Vanished!



## BABS & CO'S MAGIC CHRISTMAS

by HILDA RICHARDS



A Story of the Early Adventures of the girls of CLIFF HOUSE SCHOOL

4<sup>D</sup>

THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN LIBRARY No 516

5.12.35

## MORCOVE'S CHRISTMAS PROBLEM!

AN EARLY ADVENTURE OF BETTY BARTON & Co

by MARJORIE STANTON



4<sup>D</sup>

The Schoolgirls' Own Library. No 231

**S**OME fellows buy their Crissimus Cards by the dozen, they are orl the same and Have the same silly words on Each Wan, and if you send a Card to a friend or an ennemy, he gets eggactly the same sentiment, to wit—

May orl your days be Jolly,  
And orl your hours be Brito.  
And may there be no holly  
Inshid your bed at nite!

altho, if the fellow is a fo or a cheeky yung bratt, you hoap there will be karilodes of holly in his bedd at nite, and, in fact, you sumtimes put it there yoreself, just to give him beens— witch is hardly honest, after wot was said on your Card.

I don't believe in this believe in this, Oh crikey, I have ritten that twice over, but it duzzent matter. My idea is that Every Fellow shood vite his own curses and the Printer shood Print wim on each Card so that whoever gets each Card will get the curse that was ment for whoever gets the Card, witch seems a bit mixed up, but it duzzent matter, becaus you kno what I mean. I mean, you rite a curse for whoever it is you rite the curse for and whoever it is gets that speshful curse that was ment for whoever it was—see?

Well, that's what I have dun this year, and my Crissimus Cards are recly personal Greetings to whoever it is that gets them, I have made a blott just there, but it stands to reason they can't print a Blott, so it duzzent matter.

Here's the Card I am sending to Mr. Prout, who is my Beck, but very iggerant and duzzent kno mutch about anything in partickyeclar, he makes owt I can't spell, witch is abserd, and I despize him.

Well, heer's a Merry Crissimus, air,  
You don't deserve it, rilly—  
From yore best skollar,—I reffer  
Of korse, to YORE'S SINERELY,  
H. J. COKER.

## Coker's Christmas Cards By The GREAT HORACE Himself.



The masterly beauty of Coker's style, spelling and grammar has been left untouched. I couldn't touch it—I didn't know where to start.—Ed.

I am also sending a Card to Wingate of the Sixth, who is so inkapable of jufing a man's form at phooter, that he ackcheyally refused to give me a plaice among the half-bax in the 1st XI, and then woodn't fite me when I challenged him, hera it is—

A Merry Crissmustide, you Skunk,  
A bonny brite Noo Yeer, you Wurm,  
I'll see you, if yore not a Rhunk,  
In the jimnasium next turn!

To Loder of the Sixth, who is a hudd of the deepest di and a booly and a rotta and a crank rascal, I am sending this :

Here's wishing you a Horrid Time,  
An Orful, Orful, Orful sack,  
Go kwickly to sum forin klime,  
And never think of humming back!

Of korse, at Crissimus it's up to a fellow to berry the hatchit, but Loder is to thick, and I can't bare him, so he gets the abuv. To Wharton, on the uther hand, I shall send a Card that is Diggernifed but Corjtal, tho it is hard to forget that he and his cheeky yung bratts in the Remoove have ackcheyally laid hands on me more than wunce this turn, tho, of korse, I whopped them for it, here it is—

My greeting to you is Sinere,  
Good forchin in all that you Pian,  
Tho mind you don't bagg a thick eer  
For cheeking a Seenior Man!

My Card to the Kliff House Girls will be Perite and Grayshus, and in the most fauflless taste, as thuswise :

Greetings, girls, and best of luck,  
To evry merry maiden,  
May you guzzle lodes of tuck  
Until yore-foolly laden!

Well, that's the ideen, and you must admitt it's a korka, or shood it be korker, I'm not quite sure, but it duzzent matter. Phinally, here is my Card to Evry Reader of this paper, hoaping you'll all have a reckord-braking time this Xmas, and may yore prezents be eggactly what you want most.

The best to all, the best to all,  
To all, the best, the best,  
The best to fellows short and tall,  
And also to the rest.

HORACE JAMES COKER  
(Fifth Form).

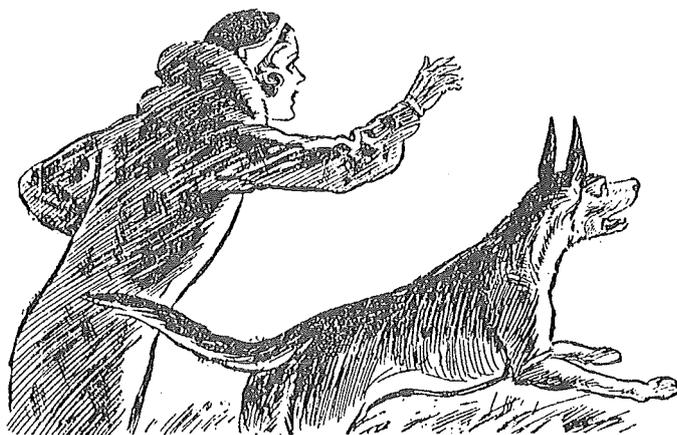
Some fellows have the cheek to say that I can't spell. What rot! Reed throo this article as carefully as you like, and I garantie that you won't find one mistake. (Quite true, Horace, more likely one-hundred-and-one!)

# The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN



Moreove's  
Merry  
Christmas  
Eye!

A happy moment  
from this week's  
long complete  
story of Betty  
Barton & Co on  
holiday.



# ONLY VALERIE COULD SAVE THEIR CHRISTMAS

By Margery Woods

## Chapter 1

"Are we nearly there, Miss Drew?"

Valerie Drew, the famous girl detective, flashed a sympathetic smile at the freckle-faced boy who wriggled impatiently in the front passenger seat. "Only about three miles now, Ben. And I bet you're ready for tea."

"Not 'alf!" Ben subsided, and Valerie reflected that her four young passengers had been extremely good during the ninety mile drive from London to Darleigh House, where they were to spend Christmas. Ben, thin, sandy-haired and streetwise, was the eldest at twelve. Julie, immersed in a lurid account of a horror movie being related by nine-year-old Chas, was eleven, and little Cindy, bouncing restlessly between them in the back seat, was the seven-year-old sister of Ben. All four were disadvantaged children from a London home and were looking forward to the kind of Christmas that for the span of their short lives had existed only in books or television. All of them had long since lost any illusions regarding the existence of Father Christmas but were happily prepared to suspend all disbelief once they reached their destination.

The sixth member of the party, however, was feeling distinctly glum. Flash, the magnificent and sagacious Alsatian who was Valerie's closest and most devoted companion, was not accustomed to being relegated to the floor at the back of his beloved mistress's car, nor was he accustomed to being used as a foot-rest for two pairs of scuffling feet in shabby trainers. That was not all. His seat, next to the driver, had been appropriated by one of them, and for some reason Valerie had decided against a new sportscar in favour of a turbo-charged affair with a roof. Flash did not approve! In fact, ever since that phone call from one of Valerie's old school friends Flash had felt disgracefully neglected. A restless foot jabbed him in the ribs again and he uttered a low deep rumble of protest.

"Flash!" came a firm rebuke from Valerie, and with a deep doggy sigh Flash settled his nose on cramped paws to suffer the last stage of the journey. It did not take long. Moments later Valerie spotted the landmark she sought and slowed to swing into a curving tree-lined drive. Suddenly there were oohs and aahs from the children. Ribbons of bright coloured fairy lights festooned the trees, and concealed flood-lighting illuminated the facade of a gracious old house with mullioned windows and ancient statuary guarding the creeper framed entrance. As Valerie halted the car on the forecourt a slender girl with long dark hair and a merry face emerged into the warm amber light spilling from the open door. She ran to the car.

"Oh, Val! You got here! How marvellous to see you again--after all this time." She was almost hopping with impatience until Valerie extricated herself from her seat belt and sprang from the car.

"Crista---you haven't changed a bit!" Laughing and exclaiming the two girls embraced while the children tumbled out and Flash pranced ecstatically with the joy of freedom.

"And you've got the imps! Oh, thank you for bringing them!" Suddenly Crista was enveloped in youngsters, all equally delighted at the reunion as they clamoured to make their greetings heard.

"Come on into the house," Crista caught little Cindy's hand, "we can get the luggage later."

There were more gasps of delight as the little party entered the great hall of Darleigh House. In central pride of place stood a magnificent Christmas tree, all of twelve feet high, laden with festive decorations, cascades of silver tinsel and glittering baubles of scarlet and green, and a myriad tiny candle lamps. An angel floated at the very top, and beneath the tree were heaped mounds of gaily wrapped gifts of all shapes and

sizes. Cindy stared, for once bereft of speech, and Chas nudged Julie. "Did they pinch it from Regent Street?" he giggled. Julia hissed a reprimand in shocked tones, but Crista was unoffended. "No we didn't," she laughed, and Chas had the grace to look abashed.

During the banter Valerie realised that Flash was still outside, and Ben too. She moved to the door, about to call her errant pet, and tensed. Only a few seconds had elapsed since they entered the house yet the forecourt was deserted. Her violet eyes narrowed. "Ben! Flash!" she called urgently. "Where are you?"

An answering "Wouff!" came instantly and Valerie darted across the terrace where Flash raced from under the trees. A sign of relief escaped her as she saw Ben following and the mild rebuke died on her lips. The boy's face was ashen and frightened as he ran towards her.

"The Shadow!" he gulped. "The Shadow's here! I saw him! I--"

Valerie started. "You saw who? A Shadow?"

"Yes---no. I--I don't know." Ben's expression changed. He had seen Crista and several older guests appearing in the doorway and looking out into the night, obviously wondering what was going on. Ben shook his head and forced a shaky grin. "Sorry, Miss Drew. I thought I saw something but I was mistaken. I was going to carry the cases in but the boot's locked. Can I have the key?"

Valerie produced her car keys and the luggage was brought indoors; Ben appeared to have forgotten his scare, and partook of a healthy sized tea by a rosily dancing log fire in the sitting room. They met Crista's family, two uncles and aunts, several cousins and friends, and Valerie did not miss the covertly anxious glance Ben shot at each newcomer who entered the room, nor did she miss the small betrayal of relaxation afterwards. The time flew and there was no trouble about bed-time when the children discovered portable TVs in their rooms. Valerie saw them settled, the two boys together in one room and the two girls next door, then went to her own beautifully appointed room to bath and change for dinner. It was not long before Crista arrived, longing for the chance to reminisce over schooldays and fun long past.

Valerie brushed her shining red-gold hair while Crista curled up on the bed, bare feet tucked under her, much as she had done in schooldays, and prattled happily away. But, while Valerie smiled and remembered, a part of her subconscious still puzzled over the incident with Ben. She recalled his ashen face and his strange exclamations of a shadow. What shadow? Valerie had seen fear too often to dismiss it as imagination. Ben had been badly frightened by something or someone he had seen in the brief space of time between their arrival

and Valerie's going out to seek him. But what could be here, in Crista's beautiful old family home, a place he had never visited before today, to cause him so much alarm? And why had he retracted those frightened utterances?

"And do you remember the time we went to that Hallowe'en Ball, and Bertha --- of all people! --- was there with that pimply youth from Larchmond? Val --- you can't have forgotten our Bertha, the terror of the prefects! She was got up as a witch, and she didn't dare report us because she was out of bounds herself! Oh, we had her on toast ever after."

"And all those meaning little remarks about bewitching girls whenever she came in sight..." Valerie chuckled. "You were naughty, Crista."

"Well", Christa pulled a face, "she deserved it. She chose the right costume. I bet she grows into a beastly old crone when she's old. Gosh!" Crista glanced unrepentantly at her watch and scrambled up. "I'd better go and get dressed. Gran hates us being late for dinner. She doesn't care what else we do but the meal must not be kept waiting. See you!"

She whirled from the room and Valerie laughed softly as she returned to her make-up. Crista would never change. She was still the same irrepressible, lovable girl who rarely took life seriously, except for one special mission in life, her work with deprived children. All her energies and most of her allowance went on the holiday scheme she had started two years previously to give unfortunate children an opportunity of summer and Christmas holidays they would remember all their lives. And as she preached she practised, spending her own holiday periods with those children. Hence her request for Valerie's help today, to bring down the four Crista was entertaining this year. Something had held Crista up --- how she organised as much as she did would remain a mystery --- for Crista had always had difficulty in keeping the many threads in her life untangled, and then her charm would work its magic on her many friends. Valerie thought of the very special event that was to take place on Christmas Eve and her face became very serious.

Christa's birthday fell on Christmas eve and this year was her coming of age. And the Darleigh inheritance, handed down to the eldest daughter of the family on attaining her majority, would become hers. Valerie had never seen the jewellery, only a photograph showing the three-stranded necklace of diamonds, the lower strand hung with great sapphire drops, each one a treasure in its own diamond and gold filigree setting. There were earrings and a bracelet to complete the set, but Crista had never coveted it, her opinion echoing that of her mother, a famous fashion designer with her own house in Rome, who had refused to accept her inheritance because of the responsibility of owning it. According to

Crista this had shocked the family to high heaven! This attitude had never been known during the two centuries the jewellery had been in the family. Rather the opposite; the female members couldn't wait to get the gems about their persons, and more than one elder son and his spouse had betrayed bitter resentment that the jewels should be entailed to the distaff side. Now Crista said: "After all, where's the fun in something that has to live in a bank vault and only see the light of day once every twenty years or so at a coming of age party? Anyway", she added, "we don't even keep the Darleigh name. I only have it because Mummy married a distant Darleigh cousin." Secretly Valerie sympathised with these sentiments, particularly with the thought that considered all the good the jewellery's worth could do for Crista's beloved waifs. But tradition still held sway in the family and because Crista loved her grandmother very dearly she was prepared to go along with what she laughingly termed the Christmas Eve charade.

After a look in on the children, who were gathered round television in the girls' room, Valerie and Crista went down to dinner, Valerie with the fervent hope in her heart that the celebration in two days time would prove just that --- a lighthearted Christmas charade.

## Chapter 2

For Valerie the evening meal was something of a discreet surveillance of strangers. There were eighteen people at the table, presided over by Grandmother Alicia, and what a table! Fat scarlet candles in glass lotus bowls gleamed on crystal and silver, great epergnes of fruit, nuts and glacé candies added rich colour, and delicate miniature arrangements of holly, little waxen Christmas roses and trails of Star of Bethlehem lay on the snowy napery at each place setting. Golden light from tall candlelabras lent soft radiance and a warm sense of relaxation.

Crista sat opposite Valerie, between her Uncle Gerard, a quiet, burly grey-haired man, and his son Roddie, about Crista's age. The old formality of correct guest placing had not been strictly adhered to, and the three aunts sat together, quietly gossiping, while Crista's parents were either side of Valerie, and Crista's cousin Kay, a self-confident blonde, was hanging on every word of the man next to her. His name was Lucas Dornet, he was a business colleague of Kay's father, who had been unexpectedly stranded by a difficult deal and was unable to get home to France for Christmas, whereupon James Darleigh had offered him hospitality. His neat black beard and rimless spectacles made it difficult to estimate his age. He could have been anything between twenty-five and forty. Kay, however, seemed greatly enamoured. Valerie noticed another pairing in process of being struck

between Roddie and a dark, sultry-eyed girl Valerie had not yet met. Val hid a smile and turned her attention from the exchange of eye messages across the table. Then her smile vanished; she had just discovered that Flash was under the table. And Flash was doing extremely well!

No-one, unless they positively hated dogs, could resist Flash's hungry act. He had long since perfected it into a fine art. The gentle nudge at a knee, the appealing head-on-one-side look that said "She works me like a slave and never feeds me", and the velvet-gentle acceptance of the well-deserved titbit.

Valerie stood up making her apologies to the company and took a firm grip on her wily pet's collar. "I don't know how you got in, you bad lad, but you can't stay. Come on."

Murmurs of "Ah---let him stay", "He's so good, bless him", "Oh, for shame! It is Christmas", followed her as she escorted her unwilling pet to the door, intending to take him up to her room. She had scarcely set foot on the first stair when Flash uttered a sharp bark and tore from her grip. He reached the first landing as the scream rent the night. A crash followed the scream, then a confusion of children's voices. From the dining room came exclamations and the rasping sounds of chairs being pushed back.

Valerie tore up the stairs. She could hear Flash's paws skidding along the polished boards, the deep powerful rumble in his chest, and she made no sound to check him. He had reached the second flight, to hurtle up them past the white-faced maid who came stumbling down, almost falling over in her haste.

"What happened?" Valerie thrust out her hand to stop the girl. "Who screamed?"

"I-I did." The girl clutched at Valerie. "There's something up there --- floating along --- it nearly touched me!" Her voice rose shrilly with fear. "It---"

"What is it, Jenny?" Crista reached them, alarm in her eyes.

"Look after her", said Valerie tersely and made for the second flight. The children were coming down, their eyes enormous with uncertainty, and Valerie gave a sigh of relief to see them safe.

"Ben", she said, "what happened?"

"I don't know, Miss Drew. "We were watching the Black Raiders --- it's the last instalment --- and we heard the scream and then a crash."

Three small heads nodded confirmation of this, and Valerie wasted no more time. The main stairs and corridors at Darleigh House were all adequately lighted, if not brightly. She walked along the second floor landing to the two doors standing open which led into the two large front bedrooms allotted to the children. Nearby was the cause of the crashing sound, a tray which had



held four beakers of a milky chocolate drink and an assortment of biscuits. These were now crumbling in a spreading pool of milky liquid.

Plainly Jenny had been dispatched upstairs with bedtime refreshments for the youngsters. But what had petrified the poor girl into dropping the tray? Flash was darting backwards and forwards along the corridor and round a corner into a secondary, darker passage. It ended in a blank panelled wall, and the only doors led into two store rooms and a bathroom. About to turn back to the main corridor Valerie halted, her eyes narrowing. She stooped swiftly and picked up a tiny jagged piece of material. For a moment she examined it before closing it carefully in her palm until she could put it safely in her room. Quickly she rejoined the others.

"I tell you I saw it!" Jenny was saying to the crowd now gathered round her. "All white, sort of floating along --- towards the linen room."

"Well didn't you follow to see where it went?" asked an unfeeling male voice. "We could have a ghost hunt."

"Yes!" exclaimed Roddy cheerfully, "I always thought Darleigh should have a ghost."

"Have a heart", rebuked Crista's mother, her arm round the still pale Jenny. "Now you're quite safe, my dear, and don't worry about the tray."

"I'll clear it up", offered Julie. "Got an old towel or something?" she asked of no one in particular.

"I expect it was those kids larking about", said Kay. "Really, Crista, I don't know why you insisted on having them here."

"We weren't larking about", said Ben indignantly. "We weren't even there --- we didn't see anything."

"Of course you didn't", said Crista firmly, "and I'm sure Kay didn't mean it."

"Then why did she say it?" the boy flashed.

Crista put her arms round Julie and Cindy. "I think it's time for bed. I'm sure everything will be all right in the morning."

They turned without protest towards their rooms and saw that Kay had gone into one. Ben darted forward.

"Hey --- what are you doing in there? You're scrounging among our stuff! You've no right---"

"Just a moment." Hastily Crista interposed herself between the angry boy and the haughty

blonde girl. "They may not have much, Kay, but they are entitled to privacy in their rooms. Now", she turned, "I'm sure Kay didn't mean any harm, Ben. Perhaps she ---" Crista broke off with a despairing little gesture, then started. "Kay" --- what have you got there?"

A triumphant, not very pleasant smile curled the blonde girl's mouth. "This is what I've got!" She shook free a small white bundle from one hand. A white bundle that floated free into a soft billowing gauze.

"It's an old net curtain", exclaimed Crista's mother. "What's it doing lying about here?"

"Why not ask Crista's dear little protégés?" suggested Kay. "It was rolled up on top of a suitcase in that room. And that", she held out the curtain and let it drop in a floating drift to the floor, "I think, is Jenny's ghost. Those kids were fooling about."

There was a shocked silence, and dismay clouded Valerie's face. For she had seen the small jagged tear in one corner of the lacy net; she needed no actual comparison to know that it matched the piece still hidden in her own hand.

### Chapter 3

The investigation Valerie hoped to make the following morning had to be postponed. There was a full programme mapped out for the day before the Eve and the children wanted to go shopping.

They were subdued over breakfast, but not, as Valerie assumed, over the events of the previous night. Their tough upbringing in London's east end had given them a resilience which did not allow unkind remarks and grown-ups' suspicions to daunt them for long. The cause of their concern was the fact that none of them had known that Christmas Eve was Crista's birthday. They had come prepared with lovingly chosen little gifts for her on Christmas morning, but the discovery of the lack of a birthday gift caused much whispered discussion and then the plea to Valerie to drive into the nearest town to rectify the omission.

Quite a trek began that morning. Mrs. Darleigh had several things to see to, and the most important journey was to collect Crista's inheritance from the safety vault at the bank. Crista and her grandmother, accompanied by her father and uncle were to see to this, and several other guests decided also to go and finish their last minute festive shopping.

After an hour of noses pressed to the window the children were no nearer deciding what to choose for Crista, and Valerie was pondering a tactful way of broaching the subject of the cost. But before she could do so Julie let out a delighted squeal and pointed at a little Christmas musical box containing a rather gaudy robin on a

glittering snow scene, apparently chirruping Jingle Bells.

"It's ten pounds", said Chas flatly. "I've only got one and a fifty pence piece."

"I've only got tenpence left," signed Cindy, looking longingly at the bobbing robin.

"Not to worry," said Ben in a confident voice, digging deep into an inside zipped pocket of his anorak. "I've got enough."

With a slight swagger he produced a ten pound note and marched up to the counter. "I want that robin thing," he announced.

Valerie hid her surprise at this display of largesse and examined the little novelty for possible flaws. It appeared to be all right and the purchase was made, much to Flash's relief. He found shopping a bit of bore unless the itinerary included the butcher. But Flash had to suffer a bit more boredom for Valerie had some shopping of her own to do. The children were nothing loath; they would happily have spent the entire day among the toys and crackers and the delights of Santa's Grotto. By the employment of a little guile, Valerie managed to make certain pertinent purchases unknown to her young companions, and at last they made their way back to Valerie's car, thankful to lighten aching arms of several large parcels and sundry carrier bags.

Lunch was the next call, where the children tucked into large helpings of sausages, beans and chips---lots of chips!--- chased with apple pie and cream and washed down with several cups of tea. A tired, replete and happy little party piled into the car for the drive home through the encroaching darkness. Valerie was not sure which of them first broke into song, but soon the repertoire of favourite carols resounded within the car, echoed with much laughter. Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer was having his third airing when Darleigh House hove into view with its welcoming vista of fairy lights.

How happily and noisily they carried in the shopping, carefree faces innocently ready to smile greetings. But there was a silence. The hall was empty apart from Crista and her mother, and behind them the unfriendly figure of Kay. Mrs. Darleigh stepped forward.

"Go up to your rooms, children," she instructed, "and stay there until we call you."

With bewildered looks at Valerie and Crista, who could only shake her head helplessly, they obeyed, four forlorn young figures who knew something else had gone wrong and that somehow it was their fault. Valerie was quickly divesting herself of her outdoor garments. "What happened?"

"Come into the sitting room," Crista said. "Gran's in there and she wants to talk to you." Rather pointedly Crista turned to her cousin and added firmly, "I think it would be better if you

left us alone." Kay tossed her head, affronted, but even she realised that as a guest she could not persist. She remained where she was, but her gaze followed the two girls resentfully as they entered the sitting room where Grandmother Alicia awaited them. Near her, one of the aunts sat, unhappily plucking at the little rubbed balls of fluff on her cardigan sleeve.

The sorry facts needed little telling. A brooch was missing from Auntie Peg's dressing table, and a ten pound note had vanished from her handbag. Probably some time the previous evening, but she had not missed either item until lunch time that day.

"And Kay found the brooch in Julie's trinket box," Crista said sadly.

Valerie's mouth hardened. she remembered Ben's unexpected wealth but for the moment she held silent. After she had talked to Ben would be soon enough to break that confidence. For Valerie was prepared to stake her faith on Ben's honesty; he had not stolen either the money or the brooch. And Valerie was determined to find out who had, and more important, who was trying to discredit the children. And why?

"We've never had anything like this before," said Crista's grandmother. "We're all family, apart from the children, yourself, and my son's business friend. The staff are all local and have been with me for years. Crista assured me that the children are utterly honest, but frankly, Miss Drew, I'm worried. And now that we have the jewels in the house..." She paused and turned to her granddaughter. "Darling, go and ask Mrs. Brent to serve tea in the drawing room today, take Auntie Peg with you, and bring a tray in here for the three of us, there's a good girl."

"Tell me about your security measures in the house," said Valerie crisply as soon as they were alone. "Where are the jewels now?"

"In a safe in the library."

"You realise," said Valerie, "that there is almost certainly going to be an attempt to steal the jewels."

"It won't be the first time", the old lady sighed. "My grandmother wore them at a wonderful society ball on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, in 1897. An attempt was made to break into her home in the early hours of that morning, but fortunately the attempt failed. That was why my grandfather had a copy made."

"You have the copy here as well?"

"Yes. Occasionally it's worn, but not often. It's rather an overpowering collection of glitter for these days. Although my daughter used it last year for her evening wear collection in Rome."

"So it's quite well known, and fairly easily recognisable", mused Valerie. She sat up. "I'd

like to check all your locks, and window fastenings, and see over the entire house. Would that be possible?"

"Anything, my dear. Do whatever you believe is necessary", said the old lady. "I've always believed in prevention. And will you talk to those children, please. See if you can throw any light on that unpleasant business."

Valerie nodded. "I'd like to leave Flash loose in the house tonight, and each night until the jewels go back to the bank. And could you arrange for me to see them, with no-one present except yourself. And I'd like the copy, if that is possible."

"No problem at all. Ah, here's Christa with our tea."

"Sorry I've been so long", Crista apologised as she set the tray down on the low table in front of the fire. "But I simply had to go up to the kids. They're broken hearted. Ben wants to go back to London to the home. He says they're not really wanted here." She stirred the pot and began to fill the dainty cups. "I could kill Kay with my own hands. I don't know what's come over her. She was always a bit petty, but not really vindictive." Crista paused while she passed her grandmother her tea. When she resumed her voice was sad. "Ben just told me about the money."

"He admitted taking it?" exclaimed the old lady.

"No, he told me he had ten pounds to spend while you were all shopping this morning. But he swore he had been saving up for ages to buy Christmas presents." Crista stared into her own cup and shook her head. "I don't know what to believe. He swears he never touched the missing money or the brooch."

"You'd better tell me more about Ben", said Valerie.

Crista sighed. "Just another broken home story. A father in and out of jail for theft. The children in and out of care, and the father vowing to go straight each time he got out. Oh, he was never cruel to them. He used to swear he only thieved to give them the best. But it isn't the right kind of best", she added sadly.

"Has Ben been a juvenile offender?"

"Only once, a few months ago. And not for theft. His father got involved with a gang, and Ben was accused of being a lookout for them at one of their robberies. But there was no real evidence against him, only suspicion. And I'd stake my reputation on Ben being as honest as you or I. He cares most in this world for young Cindy. He reckons he is all she has to rely on and he'd never do anything to jeopardise her safety."

Valerie's eyes were very intent. "Has Ben ever referred to a shadow, someone or something

which really scared him?"

"I can't remember", Crista said slowly. "The social worker who deals with the children's case would probably be able to give you more details. But why?"

"Because there is a much wanted criminal known as The Shadow. But he was rumoured to have shifted his operation abroad last year. No one has ever seen him. He's the kind of master crook you meet in fiction, who simply plans the whole thing and the underlings carry out the job -- also taking the rap if they get caught." Valerie frowned. "But Ben's father sounds much too small time to interest The Shadow. His men are expert and ruthless. He also seems to use men without previous record. It's believed he is also a blackmailer, which enables him to persuade his victims to carry out a particular job. Afterwards, that victim may never be used again. All of which has made it very difficult for C.I.D. to get a line on The Shadow himself." A cold light came into Valerie's eyes. "I believe the Darleigh inheritance would interest The Shadow very much."

Crista's face had paled, and her grandmother's eyes betrayed unease. "You think we would be in danger?", Crista whispered.

"Your grandmother and I have already discussed this", Valerie said calmly. "I hope to forestall any attempts to take the jewels, but please be discreet. I'd rather that not a word of this was told to any of the family and guests. After all", Valerie finished her tea and set down the cup and saucer, "it may not happen, and we don't want to spoil the festivities any more than we can help. Now, I'd like to inspect the safe in the library, if you would ask your father to join us, Crista."

A few minutes later the four of them were in the big book-lined room with its mellowed brocade curtains and comfortably worn leather chairs. Valerie ensured the windows were well secured and curtained and the door locked before Mr. Darleigh opened the safe and withdrew the small velvet covered box which held the jewels. Both Valerie and Crista caught their breath as the light struck exquisite fire from the diamonds. Every quiver of Mr. Darleigh's hand sent rainbow sparks from every facet. Three glorious graduated strands, and the seven sapphire drops, each set in a gold filigree setting. Their beauty was really beyond description.

Valerie asked to see the copies, which were produced for her inspection. Although of excellent workmanship and a great beauty in their own right, which would certainly entrance any lover of fine jewellery, once one had seen the real thing the faithfully crafted imitations lacked the divine spark. Valerie closed the case and said quietly: "I have to make a certain identification to both boxes. Will you trust me with them for half an hour?"

There was only the briefest of hesitations, an exchange of glances between Mr. Darleigh and Crista's grandmother, then Crista said quickly, "Yes, Val. I think I can give permission. After all, in a few hours time they become legally mine."

Within the promised time Valerie returned downstairs with her roomy suede bag slung casually across her shoulder. She found Mr. Darleigh awaiting her in the library, and after handing over the two jewel cases, with a few smiling whispered words to him, she watched him return them to the safe before she made her leisurely way upstairs. She had several more jobs to see to, and at least one of them could be accomplished before dinner. And before tomorrow eve she hoped to know why a small vendetta was being waged against a boy in whose innocence she believed with all her heart.

#### Chapter 4

The children were terribly downcast when she went in search of them. Cindy's small face still bore tear tracks down one cheek; Chas looked sullen; Julie was angry, and Ben was in despair.

"Come on", said Valerie. "If I promise to try my hardest to make everything all right, will you come and help me wrap Christmas presents?"

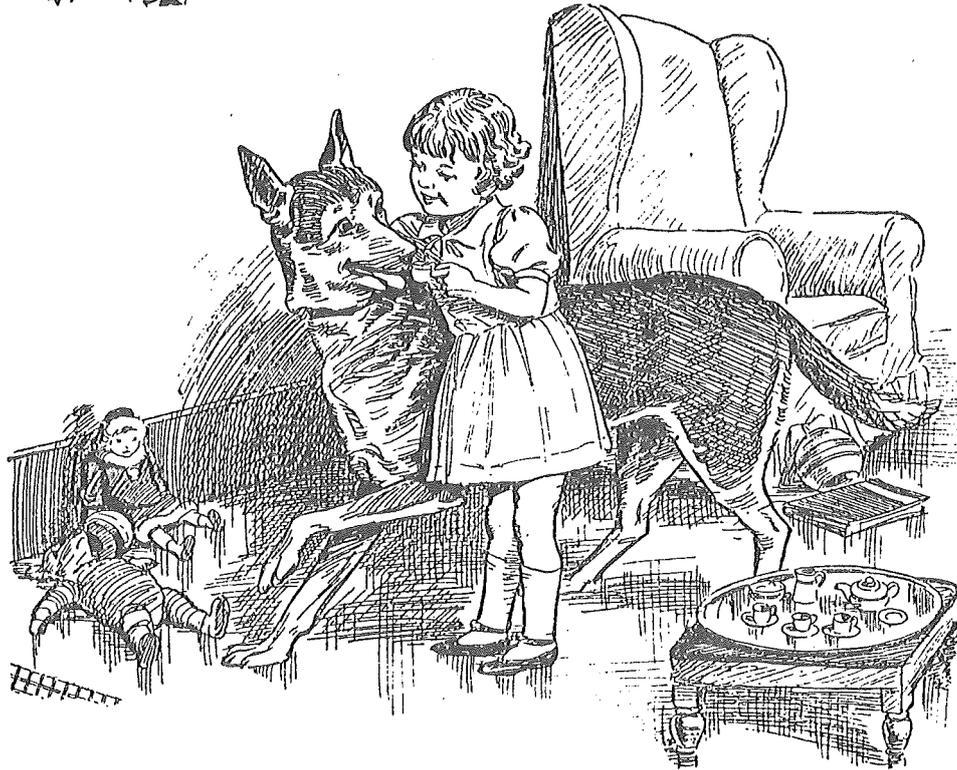
"We've got ours to pack yet", said Julie, "but we forgot to get any special paper."

"I have lots", said Valerie. "And Flash needs cheering up too."

Despite their worries the children were not proof against the sheer magic that Christmas could invoke. They crowded into Valerie's room, indulged in play with a more than willing Flash, and within a very short space of time transformed Valerie's neat bedroom into something like a Christmas bazaar. The bed and dressing table vanished under a sea of bright wrapping paper, tinsel and ribbons, while the small waste-paper basket gave up its containing efforts, and discarded paper bags wafted their way over the carpet. The adorning of Crista's birthday present entailed much thought, and the toiletries they had brought for her Christmas gifts suddenly were declared inadequate. Valerie studied the somewhat highly scented soap and talc and bath essence, and said she was sure Crista would like them. Ben said it didn't look much from four of them, and Julie said she wasn't sure now about the scent.

Valerie said casually, "I have a spare present here and no-one left to give it to. It's a new French perfume. Would you like to give it to her?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Julie, and Cindy clapped her hands. But Ben did not smile. "No, we couldn't pay you for it", he said flatly, "so it wouldn't be from us."



"Well, suppose you earn the cost?"

"How?" they looked unbelieving.

"Take Flash for a walk each morning. That should be worth at least a pound an hour to each of you, and to me, because I'm going to be very busy, and Flash must have his exercise."

"Suits me", said Chas, hands in pockets, eying the attractively packaged perfume Valerie held. "Is that really the French stuff? Not the sort they sell in the markets?"

"No it isn't the fake kind." Valerie laughed. "Now get it wrapped up. And Julie, will you wrap these lace hankies for me, and write the label for Grandmother Alicia. Time's getting on." Valerie looked round, and delved into another carrier bag. "I nearly forgot --- Flash's Christmas present. He adores chocolate drops."

Flash immediately shook off the improvised paper hat one of the children had stuck over his ears and looked hopefully at the tin with the well-known brand name on, his favourite. "No, Flash, you're not getting into your present until Christmas morning." Quickly Valerie wrapped up the sweets and attached a large label that said "FLASH" then threw it into the bag.

At last all Valerie's gifts were done, and the children's little collection, and they stowed them into a couple of large carriers. "Now", she said, "shall we go downstairs and put these under the tree?"

There followed a happy little interlude while the children displayed the gifts to the best

advantage. There was a great deal of eager expectation when the children saw their own names on quite a lot more excitingly wrapped gifts spread beneath the great tree or looped about its laden branches. At last they had finished. Cindy stood back and cried, "I think Flash ought to guard it!"

"Why not?" Valerie gave one of her special code signs and Flash instantly took up a smart stance in front of the tree, ears alert, eyes watchful, as though he dared anyone to come within a mile of that tree.

Carollers came that evening and the party spirit reigned. Valerie walked Flash last thing, circling the now silent house before she returned indoors to repeat her tour. Flash showed no sign of scenting anything untoward, and at last Valerie retired to her room, leaving the door ajar lest there should be any disturbance. Tension was increasing within her like a coiled spring. She knew she had taken every possible precaution against the worst enemy of all, the unknown. That a move would come within the next eighteen hours she was certain. For now, all she could do was wait...

## Chapter 5

That move did not come until the following afternoon, by which time Valerie was beginning to wonder if she was totally and utterly mistaken. When Flash came pounding back to the house just before dusk, frantically barking, followed by

two frightened children and Ben carrying his small sister, Valerie knew that her reasoning had proved as sound as ever. The children were almost incoherent. Coming back from their walk with Flash they had almost reached the drive gates when a small, insignificant car had pulled up. A man had leapt out and snatched Cindy. But for Flash he would have succeeded.

"Flash knocked him over! He---"

"He got his teeth in the man's arm!"

"I grabbed Cindy---we were all screaming---"

"The car number started with HA---

"There was a three in it but the other man drove off so fast we didn't think in time. We ---"

Valerie shepherded the children to the fire and issued rapid requests for hot drinks to be brought for them. They were all suffering from shock and obviously afraid even to venture up to their rooms. Mr. Darleigh went to telephone the police and the local constable arrived promptly, to take a statement from the children. Valerie secretly had little faith in any success in tracing the car. None of the children could recall the number, nor even the colour of the vehicle, let alone the make. The driver had been deep in the shadows within, the man who grabbed Cindy wore dark clothes with a big collar that concealed most of his face. Judging by the sigh the constable gave as he closed his notebook he did not hold out much hope, but he promised to put in a full report and a warning would go out of possible child abductors in the area. It all omened ill for the celebration which should have been so joyous an occasion. In the big oak panelled dining room the table was set for Crista's birthday tea; a mouth-watering array of savouries and luscious confections surrounding the centrepiece, the large, beautifully iced and decorated birthday cake with trailing fern and miniature pink roses curling about its silver lace frill.

But before the actual tea the coming of age ceremony was to take place in the hall, and already a table had been placed near the tree, laden with sparkling glasses and champagne in silver buckets.

Valerie's heartbeats quickened with tension as she hurried to change into the new lime green frock chosen specially for the occasion. Crista wore white, and both girls raced into their finery, anxious not to be out of sight of the children a moment longer than necessary.

"Do you think they'll try again?" Crista asked worriedly as they hurried up to supervise the dressing of Cindy and Julie.

"Possibly", Valerie's mouth tightened, "although I'm inclined to think this afternoon's attempt was more of a warning. Even with Flash attacking, they could probably have thrown the child into the car."

"But why?"

"We shall know very soon", said Valerie grimly.

At least the business of getting dressed up took the children's minds off their unpleasant adventure. Cindy looked a small picture in a traditional pale blue party frock with a silver sash, while Julie was arrayed in a more modern creation of her own choosing, its geometric design virtually indescribable but it resembled a number worn by her favourite pop star and so Julie was happy. The boys looked very smart in dark trousers, white shirts and little bow ties.

The rest of the party was already assembled when they reached the hall. Unobtrusively Valerie marked where each guest was standing, and equally unobtrusively she took Cindy and Chas to the side farthest from the stairs, giving Cindy into the care of Mrs. Darleigh and the pretty dark girl whose name was Cara. Jenny was circulating with glasses of champagne, and Crista's grandmother, imposing in a burgundy red velvet evening gown with creamy touches of tortion lace at throat and wrists, stood by the tree. There was a sudden hush as Mr. Darleigh entered from the library door. In his hands he carried the black velvet jeweller's casket.

Every nerve in Valerie's body constricted. Flash was at her side, and she sensed the tension rippling through his powerful shoulders, as though he too was prepared for action. She touched him lightly, and watched Crista's father hand the casket to her grandmother. A soft sigh whispered through the assembled company as Alicia opened the lid and smiled at Crista. Rainbow fire glittered from the box as she said:

"Crista, my dearest granddaughter, it gives me very great happiness to pass on to you the Darleigh Inheritance. May it always bring you joy, until the day when you yourself, in your turn bestow it on your own daughter. Bless you, my dear. And very many happy returns!"

Crista stepped forward to kiss her grandmother and a scream rang through the hall. A man in black stood on the lower stairs. In his gloved hand was the dark metallic gleam of a gun. His other hand gripped the arm of a young guest who was nearest. she looked terrified. He gave her arm a cruel twist. "Just bring me the jewel case and no one will get hurt."

"No!" Crista's uncle made a protesting gesture. "You can't get away with this!"

"Can't I!" The masked man aimed unhurriedly at the tree and a shot cracked the air. One scarlet bauble shattered and rustled in shards down through the branches.

"Do what he says", said Valerie.

Kay gave a choked scream. the aunts clutched at each other. Cindy cried and buried her face in Mrs. Darleigh's side. Wordlessly Crista handed over the case. Flash strained desperately against Valerie's restraining hand on his collar,

and at that moment every light in the house went out. There were screams and confusion, people reaching desperately about them and blundering into the darkness. Flash tore himself free and launched himself in the direction of the stairs. Mr. Darleigh shouted to everyone to stay still while he sought a light. Someone flicked on a cigarette lighter, its small flame scarcely illuminating further than its owner's hand. Only Valerie had noticed that one person was missing from the crowd when the gunman made his appearance.

The missing person was Ben.

Valerie's eyes were beginning to distinguish shapes. She moved in the direction of the stairs and called urgently to Flash. He came to her side in a strange silence and a rush of fear gripped her. He didn't bark --- was he hurt? Then she felt his muzzle seeking her hand and something cold and hard brushed her fingers. Flash had brought her the gun!

In that instant she blinked, dazzled, as the hall was flooded with light, and she saw Ben sidling along from the direction of the baize door which led to the domestic quarters. Then Crista gave a cry and dropped to her knees where the velvet jewel casket lay on the parquet; empty.

Valerie spared only a glance for her friend's tragic face. "Please remain exactly where you are, everyone", she said peremptorily. "The jewels are still here."

Roddy looked at her as if she were mad. "But there's the empty box!"

"And the gunman has escaped", added Lucas, his eyes hard in his dark bearded face.

Valerie ignored them. Her glance sought Mr. Darleigh, and she sent him an almost imperceptible nod. She took the gun from Flash and laid it on the table, an incongruous and sinister companion to the magnum of champagne. For a second her hand appeared to caress Flash's nose, then she turned and faced the now silent, intent circle of guests.

She said, "I repeat, please stay as still as possible while Flash makes his search and do not attempt to distract him. It could be dangerous."

Valerie drew Crista aside, and then uttered a soft command to the clever Alsatian. Very deliberately he began to move among the ring of guests, going to each one in turn, pausing and then passing to the next.

A woman moved uneasily, and a man muttered, "I don't like this --- that brute's uncanny."

"Hush", said Valerie. "He won't harm you unless you try to run."

The man subsided, and his sigh of relief when Flash moved past him was audible in the now deathly silence. Valerie was pale with suspense. Had her plan to save the jewels failed -- and was the possible bonus of a lead to one of

the most wanted criminals of the day to come to naught? Then Flash stopped. He uttered a short triumphant bark, sat down, and looked at Valerie. This is the one you are seeking, his big amber eyes seemed to say.

The guest he now guarded was Lucas Dornet!

Even before this unspoken accusation his expression behind the dark beard and rimless glasses remained unreadable. "This is quite ridiculous!" he said with admirable calm. "Please, Miss Drew, remove your animal. I do not trust him."

"He doesn't trust you", returned Valerie. "Now where are the jewels?"

Lucas pretended amusement. "But I am a guest in the house! Why should I abuse your hospitality?" He cast a rather desperate glance towards Uncle Gerard, who stepped forward.

"I'm sure there must be some mistake. I've known Lucas for several years. He's a respected business colleague."

"Yes, it's all crazy! I love Lucas --- we're going to be married!" Kay clutched at his arm and glared at Valerie.

Valerie said calmly: "Then if it is all a mistake we must clear it up --- and I shall apologise most humbly. Flash! Find!"

"No! Get him off me!" Lucas jumped back as Flash's teeth seized the front of his white dinner jacket.

Valerie looked at Mr. Darleigh. "I think you'll find the jewels inside the left-hand side of his jacket."

The men closed round him, disbelief still in their eyes, and Lucas made no resistance as Mr. Darleigh obeyed Valerie's instructions and drew forth a shimmering handful of glittering jewellery. The necklace fell to the floor and someone picked it up, handing it to Crista. The assembled company were still stunned, and after a moment's hesitation Mr. Darleigh said tersely, "I think you'd better go. I won't press charges but I shall ensure that my colleagues are well warned of the danger of ever trusting you."

Lucas seemed hardly able to believe his luck, then a high young voice screamed out: "No! You can't let him go! He's The Shadow!"

"What?"

"Yes." Ben came forward, very white. "I saw him once, when I wasn't supposed to, and I can identify the man who carries out his orders, and knows who he is."

"But --- but why didn't you go to the police long before this?"

"Because he threatened me", said Ben. "He threatened to hurt Cindy, if I didn't do what he said. It was me who put the lights out. I had to wait until the gun fired."

"That was when the gunman handed over the jewels", said Valerie. "Lucas was so confident he



was prepared to hold them in the very place where he'd stolen them. And you unlocked the side door, Ben, to admit the accomplice, didn't you?"

"Yes, I'm sorry." Ben looked at Crista, shame-faced. "I didn't want it to happen, but I couldn't risk Cindy being hurt, and --- and I was sure that --- that Val would make it all come right."

Such touching faith! Valerie's smile was shaky. "It would have been much easier to put right if you'd told me all this at the beginning. But it's over now, and we are going to watch over Cindy in future, don't worry."

But it was not yet over.

Gerard had gone to phone the police and Lucas was being led away to be secured until their arrival. Kay had dissolved into tears, but

no-one was showing any inclination to offer her comfort.

"Lucan's accomplice would be responsible for the ghost scare and the thefts", said Valerie. "He had a very strong motive for trying to discredit the children, Ben in particular", she added. "Every moment Ben remained here was a threat to his plans, indeed, to his whole future."

Chas was tugging at Valerie's arm. "How did Flash know?" he asked. "That Lucas had the jewellery?" she smiled. "Last night I fixed a tiny pad impregnated with a chemical behind one of the sapphire drops. It's a scent Flash is sensitive to, so all I had to do was let Flash sniff it just now and then go and seek. Whoever had recently handled the necklace would be pinpointed by him. Did you notice I kept Crista away from the group, and Mr. Darleigh, who knew what I'd planned, also kept aside."

"Cool!", exclaimed Chas, impressed.

Crista's grandmother chose this moment to drop a bombshell.

"These are not the real jewels!" she cried.

"What." Everyone crowded round, horror-stricken once more.

"Are they still in the library safe?" Alicia hardly dared hope. "Did you exchange them, Valerie?"

"Yes, I dared not take the risk of my plan misfiring. Lucas might have got away with a cool quarter of a million."

"But the other jewel case from the safe is empty, Valerie."

Mr. Darleigh stood there, the second black velvet case in his hand, open and empty. His expression was deeply worried and now his eyes held doubt and accusation as they rested on Valerie.

She gave a carefree smile. "I think it is time to start taking our gifts from the tree. Flash first." Ignoring the astonished glances she

crossed gaily to the big Christmas tree, now ablaze again with lights, and reached up for a cannister shaped package. The large label said "Flash" but greatly to Flash's indignation his mistress handed his present to Crista. "Open it for him, dear."

Wonderingly, as if her friend had gone mad, Crista tore open the packet revealing a large tin of Doggy Chocolate Drops. There were murmurs from the guests, one an audible, "If this is a joke it's in very poor taste", and Flash added an indignant bark.

"Open it", said Valerie.

With trembling fingers Crista stripped the sealing tape off the lid and opened the tin, to give an incredulous gasp. Joyously she drew forth the true gems of her inheritance. "Oh, Val!" she cried, "thank you! Now we can really start celebrating my birthday!"

"And Christmas!" echoed the children.

But Flash was disgusted!



Everybody at Greyfriars contributed to this feature, but space forced me to cut it down to a chosen few.—Ed.

**Harry Wbarton :**

Here's to you all ! My Christmas toast  
Is full of health and reason :  
May everything you like the most  
Be yours this festive season.

**Bob Cherry :**

A happy, healthy holiday  
Be yours, and if you stop away  
Sufficient grub on Christmas Day,  
You'll have it—that's all I can say !

**Johnny Bull :**

Here's a Merry Christmas !  
Here's a happy time !  
Can't think of anything  
Else that will rhyme !

**Burrec Singh :**

May Christmas bring new joys along your  
pathfulness,  
For what does honoured English proverb  
tell ?  
That Christmas is like Bunter Sahib's  
bathfulness,  
It comes but once a year—so spend  
it well !

**Lord Mauleverer :**

I hope that Christmas makes you glad,  
But if it makes you restive,  
Try sleeping all the time, begad !  
That's my idea of festive !

**Horace James Coker :**

A heap of fun to evvrywun,  
Yes, evvrywun, a heap of fun,  
Of fun, a heap, a heap of fun,  
Of fun, of fun, of fun, of fun !  
(P.S. Coker forgot to mention that he  
wishes you all a heap of fun.)

**Frank Nugent :**

Bay Christbafide gaid you a wealth of  
good cheer,  
Good health to sustaid you throughout  
the Dew Year ;  
Thad's all I cad wish you ; I'b golg to bed,  
I'be god such—Atshoo!—a gold id by head !

**Billy Bunter :**

May you have turkees, ham and beef,  
Good appetites and helthy teef ! (Grooch !—  
Ed.)  
Sit down to dinner, and I trussed  
You'll eet like me, until you bust !

**And Lastly :**

May boys be surrounded  
By buckets of water,  
And pushed in and drowned—  
From GOSLING, THE PORTER !

VISIT SANTA . . .



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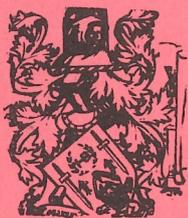
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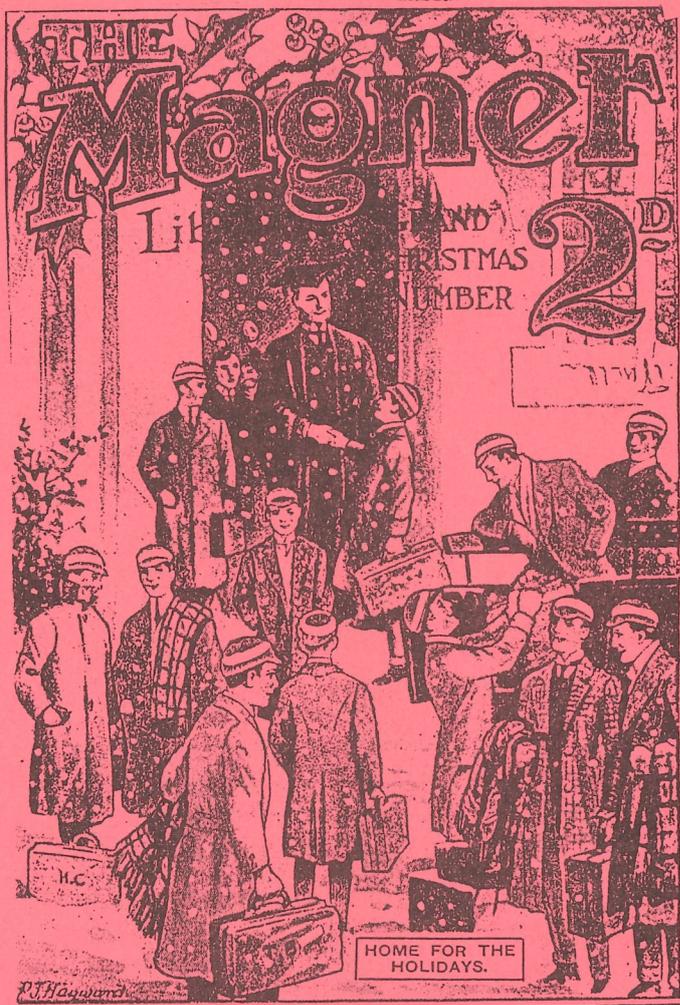
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