

STORY PAPER

Collectors'

Digest

VOLUME 45
NUMBER 531

MARCH 1991



86p

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Revisited

Bob
Whiter

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STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

Editor: MARY CADOGAN

STORY PAPER COLLECTOR
Founded in 1941 by
W.H. GANDER

COLLECTORS' DIGEST
Founded in 1946 by
HERBERT LECKENBY

S.P.C.D.: Edited and Published 1959 - January 1987 by Eric Fayne

VOL. 45

No. 531

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Price 86p



W. HOWARD BAKER

I have just received the very sad news of the sudden passing of Howard Baker after a heart attack. It is hard to realize that 'Bill' (as he liked to be known) will no longer be with us. Those who knew him will always remember his, big, benevolent personality, his dedication to producing his truly fine facsimile editions and his willingness to help collectors, writers and researchers.

Bill's association with the hobby was long. A boyhood reader

of the old papers, he never lost his love for them, becoming in adult life a writer, editor and publisher of Sexton Blake stories. Later, as everyone knows, he had the brilliant idea of producing facsimile editions of many favourite weeklies - notably the Magnet and Gem, and also the Nelson Lee, Detective Weekly, Union Jack and a variety of others in anthologies

from the School Friend and the Bullseye to Film Fun and Tiger Tim's Weekly.

The hobby owes him a great deal. It was his relaunching of the Magnet in hard-back form which made and kept Charles Hamilton's stories widely available to new generations of readers. The flow of Skilton/Cassell Bunter books into shops and libraries had ended fairly early in the 1960s after Hamilton's death, and Bill's facsimile editions put the adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. back on their shelves from the end of the sixties to the beginning of the nineties. This ensured that, even when the flimsy, flaking originals which many of us own finally fall apart, the Magnet will continue to be available in a more permanent form.

It is satisfying to know that, despite the many problems of running a publishing business, Bill always seemed to relish what he was doing. It is, however, sad that in spite of his many attempts he did not manage to get hold of a few issues of the Magnet which would have enabled him to complete the production of the whole series. I hope that his fine work will continue and, if so, that some generous hobbyist will come up with these issues and allow Bill's great endeavour to come to full fruition.

Striking a personal note, I shall always be grateful to him for the fact that it was his first Magnet facsimile volume (the Egypt series) which brought me into the hobby and thus ultimately into writing, broadcasting and all that has since developed for me in that field. He was always full of interest in what was going on in the collecting and writing world, always friendly - and ever willing to do a favour to a fellow author or editor. I and many others will always be thankful for his great contribution to our hobby. (Further tributes to Bill are on pages 26-29.)

SOME HOBBY HAPPENINGS

This year's annual William Day will take place at the Royal Hotel, Bury, on Saturday, 27th April. Bury has been chosen as the venue because it was Richmal Crompton's birthplace. Full details of the occasion for anyone interested in attending are available from the organizer, Mr. Darrell Swift, 37 Tinshill Lane, Leeds, LS16 6BU.

This year there will be two W.E. Johns days, one at Nottingham in October (further information about which will be given in these pages later on) and one on 6th April at Watford (details of which are given in a leaflet enclosed in this issue of C.D.).

I would also like to draw readers' attention to S.T.A.R.S. (Savers of Television and radio Shows) which has been mentioned before in C.D. and now seems to be building up. Its aim is to maintain and make available recordings of vintage television and radio shows, especially those which are not included in BBC and other national archives. It also plans to bring enthusiasts of these wonderful old shows together. Mr. Denis Gifford is the instigator of S.T.A.R.S., and details can be obtained from its Hon. Secretary, Ms. Alison Grimmer, 8 Beechwood Lodge, East Bank, London, N16 5RX.

C.D. - PAST AND PRESENT

Our February edition has received even more than the usual number of appreciative letters from readers. I am always grateful to have your comments and suggestions, as you know, and I wonder what the general response would be to one reader's suggestion that I should re-print further issues of the *Story Paper Collector* within the pages of the C.D. The snag, as I see it, is that quite a lot of readers may possess complete runs of Mr. Gander's paper, in which case they will feel that such re-prints are rather a waste of the C.D.'s space.

This brings me to a point raised by another reader, Mr. Ron Hunter. He has been with the C.D. from the beginning and vividly remembers reading its first issue (November 1946). He wonders how many of our present readers are 'old faithfuls' like himself, who have been subscribers of the magazine from its inception. It would certainly be interesting to know this, so please do write to me if you come into this category.

Warmest greetings to readers - both long-standing and new.

MARY CADOGAN

WANTED: £20 each offered for "Boys Friend Libraries" featuring BIGGLES. £15 each offered for 1950's Biggles and Famous Five jigsaw puzzles. £3 each offered for "Happy Mags". £15 offered for B.F.L. no. 204 "Crooked Gold". Original artwork of Bunter, Tom Merry, etc., always wanted.

NORMAN WRIGHT, 60 Eastbury Road, Watford, WD1 4JL.

WANTED: All Bonzo items, books, annuals, toys, ephemera.

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Howard Baker Volumes both Greyfriars Press/Book Club. In and out of print. Low prices. P. GALVIN, 2 The Lindales, Pogmoor, Barnsley, S. Yorks., SY5 2DT. Tel. 0226 295613.

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SEXTON BLAKE AND DETECTIVE WEEKLY
Number 2

by J.E.M.

After the revelation of Sexton Blake's family secret (dealt with in the first of this series), there were two more yarns about the criminal brother, Nigel. The final tale was *Sexton Blake's Triumph*, which appeared in DW No. 4 (DW No. 3, perhaps wisely, giving us a break from the harrowing saga of Sexton's awful sibling).

In this last episode, Blake is still struggling to avoid family scandal, as well as trying to thwart the actual crime in which his brother is involved. Blake's problems multiply when his old opponent Leon Kestrel, the Master Mummer, takes a hand in the game. Aided by his glamorous accomplice, Fifette Bierce, Kestrel attempts to steal the famous Blake magnetic pick-lock but, of course, we are assured by the very title of this pacy and entertaining story that all will come right in the end.

This Eric Parker illustration must surely be unique. Dare we believe our senses - Sexton Blake actually bludgeoning an officer of the law? Oh, my, the things poor Sexton had to do for his friends and family in the Nigel Blake series!



Tinker let out a gasp for help as somebody leapt on him from behind. Then his assailant sagged and fell to the blow from Blake's bludgeon.



OTHER FAVOURITE DETECTIVES

JACK KEEN - PRIVATE DETECTIVE

by W.O.G. Lofts

Curiously, I never read Sexton Blake in boyhood days, but another detective about whom I did read enthusiastically was Jack Keen in the highly popular *Film Fun* comic. It is true that in the main the stories were short, probably only two pages. But they were to me just the right length for about ten minutes of avid reading during the school break (certainly not under the desk!) or awaiting my turn to bat in our cricket match, or waiting for friends to call to go to the popular cinema.

Jack Keen was a private detective, with an agency at Denver St. London. Unlike Baker St. or Grays Inn Road this was a mythical place. Described as a young man, keen eyed, with clear cut features, and a dogged, resolute expression on his face, he always reminded me in later years of Charles Hamilton's Ferrers Locke. Of course he had to have an assistant, this being blue-eyed Bob Trotter, who was 16 years of age. With similar origins to those of Tinker and Nipper, he had been found as an orphan of the streets. Bob Trotter also seemed like an ordinary normal boy for his age, because Keen kept telling him off for reading boys' papers and eating sweets!

Jack Keen's first appearance was actually in *Kinema Comic*, the early Companion to *Film Fun*, issue No. 582, dated June 20th, 1931. *Film Fun* was then running another detective called "Mr. E.". When *Kinema Comic* folded in 1932, they simply switched over Keen to replace 'Mr. E',



Before the man could offer any resistance, Keen and Castleton were upon him!

no doubt thinking he had more appeal to readers. The sleuth was created by Alfred Edgar, who was also contributing to the same group of papers - especially *Bullseye*, "The House of Thrills" and "The Phantom of Cursor Fields" being very much remembered today. When Edgar went out to Hollywood to become a famous script writer, the series of Keen was taken over by Fred George Cordwell. Cordwell a big balding man, and a

cockney, was always laughing at his (and the comic's) jokes in a large, fruity guffaw that used to be heard in the corridors of Fleetway House.

Later writers included Anthony Boucher, Harold Lamb, Walter Tyrer, Charles M. Lewins, Philip Davis and Jack Le Grande. Davis I met in the late fifties, when he was editor. Le Grande also was editor at one period, and I became very friendly with him.

Apart from the single episodes of stories, later on there were serials featuring Jack Keen against various criminals - as in the Sexton Blake sagas, "The Fox" and "San Wu", a Chinaman, to give a brief example, but I never cared for these, much preferring the complete stories. I have a feeling that some old stories were also revised as new towards the end.

In 1957, vast changes were made to *Film Fun*, including giving it some colour. One big change was to give the past adventures of Jack Keen when he was serving with the Secret Service during World War Two. This created no end of a problem, as like Peter Pan the characters had always remained the same age. This time-switch meant that the young Bob Trotter had to be cut out completely.

The last Jack Keen story appeared on 23rd May 1959, so that this popular detective ran for almost 28 years. As the weekly *Film Fun* had an enormous circulation, one of the highest for any A.P.



Comic, and many times the joint combination of Detective Weekly and Sexton Blake Library, I would venture to suggest that far more readers read of Jack Keen than those of Sexton Blake in that period.

The stories were mainly solved by deduction and were extremely lucid. Keen and Bob Trotter were very likeable sleuths, and are still fondly remembered whenever the contents of the dear old *Film Fun* crop up in conversation.

C.S. RAVEN, 46 Troughton Terrace, Ulverston, Cumbria, LA12 7LE.
All books good. No reply, Con. sold/C.O.R. Post extra.
SALE: Girls Crystal Annual 1960 - £2, Schoolfriend Annual 1955-58 - £2 each, Lion Annual 1956 - £2.50, Best of Magnet & Gem - £2, B.B. Butlins, Cassell - £1, Jack's The Lad (F.R.) - £2, William and A.R.P., cover faded, contents mint - £3, (Johns') Quest for Perfect Planet, D.W. Mint - £4, C.D. Annuals, 1976-77 - £2 each.



"NELSON LEE AND HIS POLICE COLLEAGUES"

by Jack Greaves

Nelson Lee had many dealings with members of the Police Force during his years as Housemaster at St. Frank's but I shall only relate events which took place during the Old Series.

Lee was in the fortunate position of being able to combine his scholastic duties with those of a brilliant detective, and it's surprising how many times he was called upon to solve various crimes and deal with so many criminals in what was normally a very peaceful area of Sussex.

The first member of the Police to be mentioned by E.S. Brooks in the Old Series school stories was Det./Inspector Morley of Scotland Yard, who was also one of the select few who knew why Nelson Lee was "disappearing" to take up the position of Housemaster at St. Frank's, under disguise and the assumed name of Mr. Peter Alvington.

It was, of course, to escape from the death threats of the dreaded secret society known as The FU CHANG TONG.

During his early days at the School, "Mr. Alvington" was soon in a position to bring his detective skills into action, and in O/S 118 *The Verdict of the School* he met up once again with Det./Inspector Morley who was carrying out an investigation into a robbery in the nearby town of Bannington. The two of them worked together to solve the mystery of the kidnapping of Justin B. Farman, the new boy, who had recently left his American home to become a pupil at St. Frank's.

In O/S 126 *The Problem of the Copper Frog* "Mr. Alvington" met up, for the first time, with Inspector Jameson of the Bannington Police during the period that the Sixth former Lambert was accused of murder, and later he was able to prove to the Inspector that Lambert couldn't have committed this dreadful crime.

Nelson Lee and Jameson were to be in contact on many other occasions throughout the Old Series.

Brooks described the Inspector as a burly individual whom nature had not blessed with a very large amount of brain-power. Nevertheless Jameson considered that he was quite an able orator, in fact his pet grievance was that he had not been transferred to the special branch of Scotland Yard long ago. Jameson was also pompous, and lacked common sense and imagination.

Another member of Scotland Yard's detective force was Det./Inspector Lennard who was first mentioned in O/S 132 *The Mysterious School Boy*. He and Nelson Lee worked exceptionally well together on many cases, and quite often the latter would unselfishly allow Lennard to take credit for incidents which had paved the way to the capture of some criminal where evidence had been desperately needed by Scotland Yard in order to put the crook away for penal servitude.

THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY



THE DROPS OF OIL WERE DISTINCTLY VISIBLE NEAR THE GATEWAY.

The CLUE of the OIL TRAIL

A Story of Rural Life and Detective Adventures at St. Frank's, introducing NELSON LEE and HIPPER and the Boys of St. Frank's. By the Author of "The Landlady's Lad," "The Mystery of the North Tower," "Missing from Bedouk," etc.

October 5, 1920.

One musn't forget the village constable of Bellton, P.C. Sparrow, who was nicknamed "Dicky Bird" by the juniors of St. Frank's. Brooks described him as "an excellent example of a burly thick headed provincial constable".

He was perfectly capable of dealing with every day petty crime matters of village life, but with the more serious type he was way out of his depth and he had to call on the services of Inspector Jameson, who would come over from Bannington to "solve" the crime. However, it usually had to be left to Nelson Lee to carry this out, much to the annoyance of the Inspector who always had a great opinion of his own capabilities.

My files show that all the police personnel were serving officers at the time the stories were written, but there is one instance where a retired office is mentioned. He is referred to as Ex. Superintendent Browning.

Mr. Browning was a retired police officer from Scotland Yard, who was giving a lecture at Bannington Town Hall on a Saturday afternoon at 2.30 on "Crime-Investigation and Some Celebrated Criminal Cases". Handforth had agreed to accompany his two study chums to Caistowe on the same day to see "The World's Biggest Circus and Fair", but, on seeing the notice in the Bannington Gazette, he changed his mind and decided to see the ex-detective give his lecture.

He fully expected his chums to change their minds too but for once they stuck out, so Handforth had to go to Bannington on his own.

There are quite a good number of other police officers who played their part in the many adventures in the Old Series written at a time when the ordinary P.C. on the beat was quite a respected individual, so different from modern thinking! Here is a list:

P.C. Harrow (212) Caistowe Police; Johnson (454) a detective; Inspector Kemball (136) Sussex Police - based at Helmford; Inspector Mackley (388) Caistowe Police; Det./Sgt. Melrose (363) Scotland Yard; The Montana Police (326); Mr. Whitman (427) Los Angeles Detective Bureau; Mr. Robert Westlake (170) an important official in the C.I.D. Scotland Yard; Det./Insp. Watts (263) Scotland Yard; Det./Sgt. Vincent (281) Scotland Yard; Sgt. Timson (383) Helmford Police; P.C. Tomlin (385) Bannington Police; Inspector Street (389) Kilburn Police; Inspector Hammond (283) Brentlow Police; Gregson (Det.) (223) Scotland Yard; Fullar (Rank unknown) (143) Scotland Yard; Sup't. Dixon (142) Bannington Police; Inspector Davis (144) Horsham Police; P.C. Collins (194) Bannington Police; Det./Sgt. Chambers (131) Scotland Yard; Det. Bruce (157) Scotland Yard; Det./Sgt. Brownlow (499) Scotland Yard; Det./Sgt. Bradford (131) Scotland Yard; Inspector Beech (419) Hampshire Police; P.C. Beckett (142) Bannington Police; Bates (Rank unknown) (263) Scotland Yard; The Berkshire Police (186); Det./Sgt. Smith (145) Scotland Yard; The Skegness Police (358); P.C. Roberts (259) Caistowe Police; Inspector Payne (383) Helmford Police; Det./Inspector Patterson (131) Scotland Yard; The North West

Mounted Police (323); The New York Police (424); Ned, a Police Constable (357) Caistowe Police; P.C. Jenkins (226) Scotland Yard; Jim, a Police Constable (395) Brixton Police.

All the above were "land based" but on two occasions the Thames River Boat Police are mentioned, and we are introduced to Inspector Hammond who was in charge of the launch in O/S 165, *A Bid for Gold*. This was at the time when the girl detective Eileen Dare escaped from captivity in a cellar alongside the river, where she had been kidnapped from Lord Dorrimore's yacht "Adventure" after the holiday party had arrived back from the South Seas.

The other occasion was in O/S 226 *The Mystery of Reed's Wharf*, but the Inspector's name was not mentioned on this occasion. It will be seen that the police played an important part in the Old Series St. Frank's saga and I have found much interest in compiling these details.

No. 226.—GRAND SCHOOL-DETECTIVE YARN IN LONDON!

IN "THE NELSON LEE LIBRARY"!



The police launch closed in with the log, and then a fierce battle ensued.

THE MYSTERY OF REED'S WHARF

A Story of School Life and Detective Adventures in LONDON CITY, introducing "ST. NELSON'S LEE" and "HIPPER" and the Story of St. Frank's. By the Author of "St. Frank's in London," "The Yellow Bird," "Sir Hester's Ordeal," etc., etc. (London 4, 1915.)



By
ROGER M. JENKINS

No. 238 - Boys' Friend Library No. 383 - After Lights Out

Charles Hamilton rarely wrote stories specially for the monthly libraries, the vast majority of his tales in that format being reprints of weekly publications. "After Lights Out" is one of the very few of his stories that never appeared elsewhere, and it is in its way a collector's item. The quality of the story, with its intricate plotting and splendid portrayal of characters, inevitably causes surprise that its merits never demanded a reprint.

The Fourth Form at St. Jim's was on full display in No. 383. Racke and Crooke had persuaded Cardew to accompany them on a nocturnal visit to the Green Man. Levison went down from the dormitory in a fruitless

attempt to dissuade Cardew, but he was trapped hiding behind a tree as Mr. Railton paced the quad for an hour, troubled by his war wound, and other references to the food regulations made it clear that this was a wartime story, whilst the appearance of recent characters like Trimble and Grundy help to establish it as being later wartime. Incidentally, Levison's seediness the next day helped to raise suspicions about the genuineness of his reform.

Perhaps the strongest indication of its date lies in the fact that Levison minor is strongly featured, and it is obvious that this story is an episode in the lengthy reformation of Ernest Levison. Racke hated Levison after his reformation and, when he saw the opportunity of falsely accusing Levison of knocking him unconscious with a cudgel, he seized the chance with both hands. It was young Frank Levison alone who believed in his brother's innocence and who set Inspector Skeat on the right path to proving it.

"After Lights Out" is one of the minor mysteries of Hamiltoniana. Although it is undated, it is possible to deduce from advertisements in contemporary Gems that it was published in 1917, in early summer to judge by the cricket references. Whilst the Gem contained thirteen chapters as a rule at this time, the monthly issue contained thirty-nine, and when No. 383 is examined closely it can be seen to contain three separate sections, each with its own climax, and it must be regarded as certain that this was intended to be a Gem series of three numbers that got transferred to another format. Furthermore, its full title is "After Lights Out, or, Expelled from St. Jim's" and these two titles would have fitted the first two Gems consecutively. The last words at the end of the volume refer to "the junior who was driven from the School" and in view of Charles Hamilton's penchant for mentioning the title at the end of the story at this time it can be supposed that "Driven from the School" might well have been the title of the third Gem. Why Pentelow decided not to publish this series in the Gem we shall never know, but undoubtedly it is too fascinating a story to have been lost for good.

Your Editor says—

It helps the C.D. if readers advertise their WANTS and FOR SALE book and story-paper items, etc. in it. The rates are 4p per word; a boxed, displayed ad. costs £20.00 for a whole page, £10 for a half page or £5 for a quarter page.





Third Spasm

Continuing with my reading of those rare and glorious St. Jim's stories which appeared in **PLUCK** before Tom Merry came on the scene in the Gem, I now reach the 8th story, which is entitled "Mutiny at St. Jim's".

This is described, in the heading, as "The Adventures of Jack Blake and Figgins & Co.", but the main plot, once again, deals with senior school - Kildare and the School House seniors, and their rivals, Monteith and the New House older fellows.

It is a sequel to the story "The Milverton Match" of some weeks earlier. In that story all the New House players dropped out from the St. Jim's team but St. Jim's won all the same. Now Kildare is prepared to play four New House seniors in the Headland match. (Plenty of names of opposing teams which we don't hear of in later tales.) The players selected are Monteith, Baker, Webb, and Gray. Monteith agrees, but he is really simmering with fury.

Tense drama once again. Darrel accidentally bumps Monteith in the first half. Monteith is annoyed and shows it. In the interval, Kildare and Monteith have a row. During the second half, Monteith, white with rage, punches Darrel in the face. Kildare orders Monteith off the field, and Monteith calls on the other New House players to follow him. Reluctantly, they do.

"The Headland fellows looked at one another in amazement. such a sight as this they had never seen on a football-field before." Wow! Drama with a capital "D"!

The game ends in a draw.

Later in the tale comes the Mexborough Match. This time Monteith is left out, but Baker and Webb decide to play.

Three goals all! And ten minutes more to play. Five minutes more. Darrel took a corner and dropped the ball at Kildare's feet. A wild rush of Mexborough men. In vain! The goalie made a frantic clutch at it. Missed! By an inch or less. But a miss was as good as a mile. "Goal!"

As Kildare came off the field, Monteith met him with out-stretched hand.

"I congratulate you, Kildare!" he exclaimed. And for the time, at least, he was sincere. "I'm glad the New House has had a share in this."

There is, once again, a secondary plot in the story. The Head puts a limit on the number of hours the school tuck shop may be



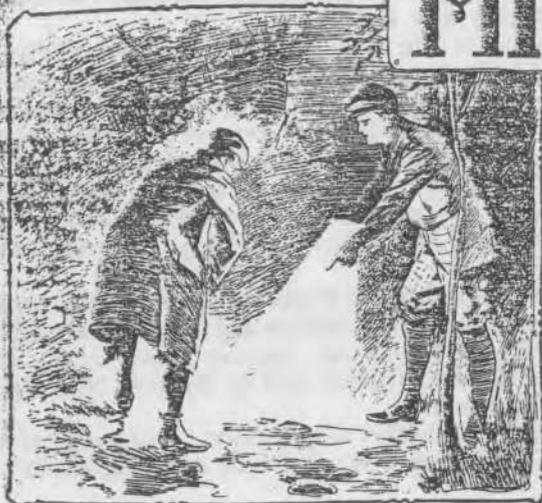
open. Blake, with cash supplied by D'Arcy, gets in a load of food in a box from a Rylcombe grocer's. Figgins & Co. raid the box. So there is plenty of junior adventure and fun mixed up with the high drama of the seniors.



[VOL. 5, No. 123, NEW SERIES.]

The First Long, Complete Story.

MISSING!



A Splendid

School Tale

By

CHAS. HAMILTON.



That issue of **PLUCK** is dated February 10th, 1907. And in that issue there appears an advertisement. 'NEW ADVENTURE STORY PAPER for BOYS. The "GEM". Out Thursday, March 14th. Order it and see what you get for ONE HALFPENNY.'

So the **GEM** was intended to be an **ADVENTURE** story paper. I wonder when and why they decided to make it a **SCHOOL STORY** paper.

This time it was three weeks before the next St. Jim's story appeared in **PLUCK**. This is entitled "Missing!" It is Arthur Augustus who is "missing". He is kidnapped by a gipsy named Barengro. The police are called in. Inspector Skeet does not believe that Gussy has been kidnapped. He is rather a dumb policeman. "Boys have run away from school before now", says Mr. Skeet.

Mr. Kidd, the housemaster, is assured that D'Arcy has been kidnapped by Barengro. "With what object?" enquired Inspector Skeet with a superior smile.

"To extort money for the release of the boy", said Mr. Kidd instantly. "D'Arcy's people are very rich, and he has an unusual amount of pocket-money for a schoolboy. Barengro may know something of this, hence his seizing the opportunity which fell in his way last night."

"Quite a romance!" said Inspector Skeet with ponderous sarcasm.

But D'Arcy HAD been kidnapped by Barenegro. And it was Blake and Co. with Figgins and Co. who tracked him down and brought about the arrest of Barenegro. The ruffian went to prison and the boys of St. Jim's had "seen the last of him".

All the same, later on, a gipsy named Barenegro did turn up in both the Gem and the Magnet on isolated occasions, but we have no means of knowing whether he was the same Barenegro who kidnapped Gussy in PLUCK in March 1907.

This story, "Missing", is the first one in which D'Arcy is referred to as "Gussy". Blake has always called him "Adolphus", and, even in this tale, D'Arcy isn't called "Gussy" to his face. But in "Missing", on two occasions, after the kidnapping, Blake says "I wonder where on earth Gussy can be." A trivial point, of course. But rather interesting.

I've still got three more of these PLUCK St. Jim's tales to read. So, more anon, Diary!

ERIC FAYNE Comments on DANNY LOOKS BACK

The first GEM appeared in the same week that "Missing" appeared in PLUCK. The Gem was widely advertised as the new Adventure Story paper for boys; price one halfpenny. The first story was entitled "Scuttled". As Danny says, it is interesting to muse on just why and when they decided to make it a school story paper. Tom Merry turned up in No. 3, entitled "Tom Merry's Schooldays", and it obviously "caught on" with the boyhood of 1907.

Adventure stories appeared in Nos. 1,2,4,6,8,10. Probably, as adventure tales went, they were pretty good. But Tom Merry had taken over. We can assume that, after five Gems had been published, the powers-that-be decided that the GEM must be TOM MERRY'S PAPER. No doubt there were hurried consultations with Charles Hamilton, who had called himself Martin Clifford in his Tom Merry stories.

So in No. 11, St. Jim's and Clavering, Tom Merry's first school, were amalgamated. And the story in GEM No. 11 was "TOM MERRY AT ST. JIM'S".

I'll have another look at this, if Danny carries on.

MADGE AT THE MOVIES?

by J.E.M.

The reproduction of that old SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN cover on the front of January's DIGEST brought sheer delight. Leonard Shields' lovely illustration of Madge Minden outside a cinema, watched by two other members of her form, was surely nostalgia-plus, even for readers only marginally familiar with the saga of Morcove School. It certainly gave me enormous pleasure. For one thing, Shields, whether illustrating Morcove or Greyfriars - or anything else, for that matter - was always a firm favourite. Then there was the attraction in this particular case of the drawing's main subject.

I know I speak for male as well as female when I say that Madge Minden has always had a vast army of adorers. I, for one, was (and am) madly in love with this beautiful, talented, strong-willed - not to say wayward - girl. But back to that cover. The story it illustrates is entitled *Misjudged By Her Chums* and this, of course, sends clear signals to the reader, as does the caption to the drawing: Has Madge Minden Been To The Pictures? Well, has she? And, if so, what about it? Why should such an innocent diversion cause so much drama? Was an outing to the

flicks by a fourth-form schoolgirl such a dreadful escapade - the equivalent of an after-dark visit by Loder or Vernon-Smith to the Three Fishers?



MISJUDGED BY HER CHUMS!

A Magnificent New Long Complete Story
of the Girls of Morcove School, featuring
Madge Minden, of the Fourth Form.

BY MARJORIE STANTON.

The answer: Well, nearly if not quite. This, you recall was the year 1921 and boarding-school girls were definitely forbidden trips to the cinema unless accompanied by a mistress. Such a rule existed long after that date and, for all I know, still obtains at girls' public schools throughout the land. So Madge, our dear, wayward Madge, did seem to have broken an important rule, but the situation was not quite what it seemed.

Through the kindness of our Editor, I have had access to the series of which *Misjudged By Her Chums* is a part and it is a saga whose theme was made familiar to us by countless school yarns, whether about boys or girls. The first tale in this particular series, *Madge Minden's Folly*, has our heroine deceiving the Headmistress in pursuit of her passion for music, and being saved from expulsion only by the timely action of Polly Linton, the trusty number two of the famous Betty Barton Co. Madge's musical devotion leads her into further trouble in the succeeding stories when she helps a poor orphan girl whom she accidentally injures with her cycle.

The girl, Alva Forbes, has been earning a little money playing the piano to an elderly blind lady and, to save the situation when Alva's injury puts her out of action, Madge takes her place. This leads to more infraction of school rules, Madge even breaking bounds after being gated. She is, in fact, only one jump ahead of expulsion throughout the series, the scheming Grandways sisters ever hard on her heels to bring about her downfall and thus score a hit against Betty Barton and Co. Because Madge won't explain the reasons for her actions she is eventually disowned by her form-mates. Betty Barton, who alone believes in Madge and sticks by her, is also finally rejected by the rest of the form. (What an unbelievable heroine and angel B.B. was at times - and I mean unbelievable!)

Of course, everything comes right in the end. Not for the first - or last - time in a school story series, a nice mixture of virtue, stiff-necked pride, misunderstanding and final reconciliation provides some pleasing, even heart-warming, entertainment. Yes, all right, I hear you say, but **had** Madge Minden really been to the pictures? Well, yes and no. She had gone to the cinema only to make an advanced booking (could you do such a thing in those days?) for a loyal old



MISS MASSINGHAM'S INDIGNATION! "There, girl!" cried the Form-mistress, tearing the sheets of music. "Perhaps that will teach you to be more obedient in future!"

housekeeper who looked after the old, blind lady who, at the end of the series, conveniently died and left a legacy to the orphan girl. Satisfied?

Well, I can't honestly say I was - not entirely, anyway. I've had a long-lasting love affair with the cinema - and Madge Minden - and when I read that question, "Has Madge Minden been to the pictures?" I did wonder if our lovely young musician had played truant in order to perform on the picture palace piano, such a necessary accompaniment in those days of the silent screen. But I was disappointed. Oh, well...



MADGE MINDEN'S HESITATION! "If the girls find out that I came to Berncombe this afternoon," muttered Madge, "they may jump to the conclusion that I was just doing it out of reckless defiance. But I promised Aiva Forbes, and so—here goes!" And she walked up to the house.

(Stories referred to: MADGE MINDEN'S FOLLY; MISJUDGED BY HER CHUMS; THE GIRL WHO FAILED THE FORM; TOO LOYAL TO HER CHUM; THE OUTCAST OF THE FORM. S.O. numbers 20-24.)

HOW I FOUND OUT ABOUT THE AMALGAMATED PRESS

Part II

by John Bridgwater

The last venture before the First World War broke out was the "Premier Magazine", a high-class monthly with contributions by most of the abler young writers of the day. It was still running in 1922.

"The Romance of A.P." now continues with a few pages devoted to "Fleetway House and other places" giving descriptions and snippets of history associated with the various homes of A.P. The effect of the War occupies the next eight pages. Some twelve hundred men, from directors, through editorial and printing staff down to office-boys, left their work at A.P. for the trenches. Positions were held open and generous allowances granted amounting by the last year of the war to £65,148 6s 10d. The firm carried on largely by the aid of devoted feminine assistants. Apart from propaganda in various directions an outstanding contribution to the war effort was made by the chairman, Sir George Sutton, who was called in to stimulate the sale of war bonds which had a poor reception in 1917 when they were introduced.

Through his efforts the total subscription by the end of the war had reached the stupendous total of £1,600,000,000. The only new ventures started during the war were the serial publications "The Great War" and "The War Illustrated".

After the war came the first popular cinema paper "Picture Show". Another first was "Popular Wireless" a technical journal for the general public. This had Sir Oliver Lodge as scientific adviser. Other new papers were "Children's Pictorial", "Children's Music Portfolio", the "Violet Magazine", and the "Merry Magazine". The year 1922 saw the death of the founder Lord Northcliffe. In the same year the company was reconstructed with an increase in capital to £3,800,000 and thus became the Amalgamated Press (1922) Limited. The history of the development of the A.P. ends here and the rest of the book, a further fifty pages, deals with what we now refer to as the nuts and bolts of the organisation.

The great writers and artists who contributed to A.P. get a chapter to themselves. The list is impressive whatever your literary tastes may be. Starting with Max Pemberton and Cutcliffe Hyne in "Answers", the list continues with Thomas Hardy, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Eden Phillpotts, all three associated with "Answers", followed by Ethel M. Dell and Ruby M. Ayres whom A.P. claim to have discovered. Other names are: O. Henry, H.G. Wells, Arnold Bennet, Stephen Leacock, Charles Garvice, Ian Hay, Marie Corelli, H.A. Vachell, Joseph Conrad, Bret Harte, Jack London, Quiller Couch, E. Nesbit, Phillips Oppenheim and Winston Churchill. A few authors mentioned as equal with the above seem to have sunk without trace. To mention but two: Leonard Merrick and the Duke of Argyll. Anyone know what they wrote? It is interesting to note that Neville Chamberlain wrote for the "Harmsworth's Business Encyclopedia". The artists get but one paragraph, and the list starts with Tom Browne, followed by Fred Pegram, Claude Shepperson, Tom Webster (who started with A.P., his first paid work being a cover illustration for a boys' story), W. Heath Robinson, Charles Dana Gibson and many more.

The printing works are impressive. 400,000 sq. ft. with eighty huge rotary presses each manned with a crew of six. Machines cost between £5,000 and £30,000 in those days. In 1893 after five years of putting printing out to contract the A.P. opened its own Geraldine Press. This was in Whitefriars Street and had eight rotary presses with mechanical type-setting which put it in advance of many other printers who still worked by hand. Within four years larger works were needed so a new building was erected in Lavington Street, Southwark, completed in 1899. This became inadequate and another site was acquired at Gravesend and opened in 1901. By 1903 Lavington Street had been extended. After this, various minor printing establishments had to be brought into use as expansion continued. The next big project came in the 1920s, the main printing works of A.P. in Sumner Street, Southwark, being completed in 1922. It was designed by a Mr. Ellis, who also designed Fleetway House, and was built by Sir William Arrol & Co. the builders of the Nile and Assouan Dams. The six floors had a combined area of four acres. The printing data given includes the following statistics:- 7,500 miles of yard wide paper used each week, 3,000 people directly employed on printing, an illustration block completed every 40 seconds of the working day, 12,000 bales of printed journals despatched every week, 30 cameras constantly in use for illustration work, more than 500 tons of printing ink used per year, 70 tons of metal used every week making 5,000 plates, and the monthly consumption of string 360,000 yards and of rope 340,000 yards.

The enormous consumption of paper rates two chapters on paper-making. A.P. did not want to import paper, but it could manufacture pulp into paper in its factory, Imperial Paper Mills, at Gravesend. An eight year search resulted in A.P. obtaining a two-thirds interest in the Canadian Gulf Pulp and Paper Company with a thousand square miles of timber in Quebec. This company provided the bulk of the pulp required. It is interesting to note that in 1900 newsprint could be bought for about a penny a pound and enormous quantities were to be had. The Gravesend factory occupied a 45 acre site on the banks of the Thames with its own wharfs and piers capable of accommodating big deep-water ships and had a railway running direct from the factory to London. The site had 1,100 feet of river frontage, and 1,500 people were employed. 55 cranes and hoists were able to unload 120 tons of pulp an hour on to the jetty, whence railway trucks were pulled by fireless engines to the dumps. An overhead railway conveyed the pulp from dump to factory. Pulp was converted into paper in an hour and delivered to the printer in London within 4 hours of its arrival at the jetty.

Ink is congealed smoke. Benjamin Franklin used soot and oil for an early American newspaper, according to the book. The A.P. used so much that it was decided to make its own in 1899. A small modern factory was set up. It was progressively extended and other premises in various parts of London added. The output exceeded 3,500 tons per year. Carbon black was obtained by burning a natural gas flame at low pressure in contact with a metallic surface. The deposits of minute particles of incandescent carbon of intense and brilliant black were automatically scraped from the plate, sifted and packed. Other colours were produced from coal-tar by extremely intricate processes. A very extensive laboratory at Plaistow carried out tests on all raw materials and finished products. Here also experiments were made and formulas prepared. The factory even made its own tins, and kegs. Among the equipment was a plant for distilling, refining and blending oil, of which 3,000 tons a year was prepared.

The A.P. was very conscious of the importance of advertising. It spent £250,000 a year in publicity outside its own journals. As for sales, this department kept up to date lists of schools, Sunday schools, cinemas, theatres, cricket and football grounds etc., noting all forthcoming events from boxing contests to Boy Scout rallies to find all suitable opportunities for the distribution of suitable publicity matter. A statistical branch provided information from the percentage of unsold papers to the number of square yards of hording space available for any particular district. Over 12,000,000 small posters, which if put side by side would occupy a hording nearly 4,000 miles long, were produced every year. 300 posting contractors and over 1,000 distribution firms for leaflets were employed. A single edition of a leaflet could run to 3,000,000 copies while a year's total has amounted to more than 80,000,000.

The A.P. ran a vast book business. Many books carried the imprint of the subsidiary named The Educational Book Company, located in New Bridge Street, with twelve branch offices in principal towns throughout the U.K. and agencies in the overseas Dominions, India and America. It employed 250 travellers handling over 40,000 separate accounts. Publications include:- "Harmsworth Self-Educator", a 26 volume edition of Sir Walter Scott, an edition of Dickens which sold for £9 (25,000 sets were sold), "Children's Encyclopedia", "The Masterpiece Library of Short Stories", "The Punch Library of Humour", etc. "The Library of Short Stories" was produced by that prolific editor Sir John Hammerton.

One final note is on the counting house. About 2,000 cheques were paid out every week and 150 people were employed there.

(As recent research may have proved some of the above information incorrect, it is emphasised that this is what A.P. said about itself in 1922.)

BULLIES, BEAKS AND FLANELLED FOOLS

Robert Kirkpatrick replies:

I can't let Brian Doyle's glowing testimonial to my book pass without one or two comments in reply!

He's kindly sent me a list of the titles from his own collection that I appear to have missed, although in his review he only mentions two. As far as I can recall, Auberon Waugh's "THE FOXGLOVE SAGA" only has a school setting for the first two or three chapters - after that the hero joins the army. As the school element is so small compared with the rest of the story, I excused it.

The same goes for Gilbert Jessop's "CRESLEY OF CRESSINGHAM". Again, I'm relying on memory, but I'm fairly certain that this is a boxing story rather than a school story - while Cresley certainly starts off at a public school, he leaves (for some reason I can't recall) and takes up boxing as a career.

Of course, I stand to be corrected, and I'll certainly check both titles again in the near future.

I cannot agree that the GRANGE HILL stories should have been excluded. They are, arguably, the modern equivalent of earlier, public school stories; and if the "adult" section of the bibliography includes such classic novels as Michael Croft's SPARE THE ROD, E.R. Braithwaite's TO SIR, WITH LOVE, and Barry Hines' A KESTREL FOR A KNAVE, it would have been quite incongruous to have omitted their juvenile counterparts.

Besides, I understand that the Grange Hill stories are quite realistic.....

I have to hold my hands up to omitting Brian's WHO'S WHO OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE from the list of Further Reading, along with Green's TELLERS OF TALES - it was only meant to be a selective list, for reasons of space, but certainly both titles should have been included.

My thanks are due to Brian for drawing my attention to the mistakes and omissions he's spotted, and to one or two other readers who've done likewise.

WANTED: 'Magnet' Greyfriars Press volume No. 16 'Harry Wharton's Enemy', No. 17 'The Black Sheep of Greyfriars', No. 29 'The Mystery of the Moat House', No. 39 'The Ghost of Polgelly'. Greyfriars Book Club volume No. 9 'The Boy from the Underworld'. Must be fine or very good condition. Also other volumes.

W.L. BAWDEN, 14 Highland Park, Redruth, Cornwall, TR15 2EX.

Valerie Drew Revisited

by Bob Whiter



From 1928 until 1960, I lived with my parents and family at 706 Lordship Lane, Wood Green, a suburb of London. Many of the older members of the Old Boys Book Club will remember meetings there, hosted by my brother Ben and myself. During our tenure, we had many neighbours, some stayed longer than others, we were glad when some departed whilst we were really sorry to see others leave.

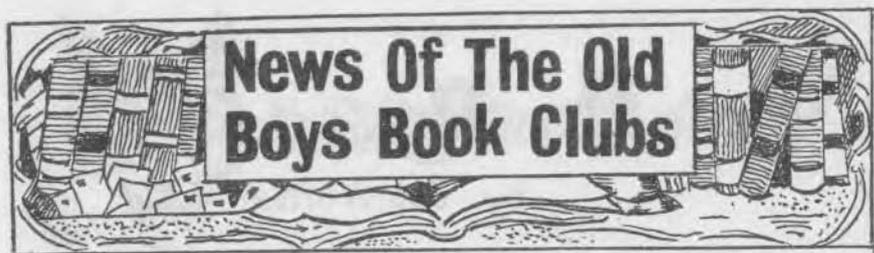
Among the latter was a family comprising a grandfather, father and two daughters. The girls, Gwenn the youngest and Molly a couple of years older than myself, turned out to be very nice and friendly, and soon we were swapping our weekly story papers, I giving them the "Magnet" and "Gem" and they giving me the "Schoolgirls' Weekly".

The time was the middle thirties, and such movies as:- "The Gay Divorce", "Lives of a Bengal Lancer" and "The Last Outpost" were all the go. Whenever I watch the Ginger Rogers-Fred Astaire movies on T.V., I am reminded of the two girls singing "The Continental". It wasn't long before I was deep in the weekly episodes of Valerie Drew and Flash, her Alsation dog (known as a German Shepherd over here in the States).

One story in particular stays in the memory. Apparently, when people dived into a certain swimming pool they vanished! Of course there was no magic but a secret, hidden doorway at the bottom of the pool. I'm reminded of this particular tale, when in one of the "Twilight Zone" sequences, two children who lead unhappy lives because of their parents' constant wrangling, find a happy land through the bottom of the swimming pool. The stories of Valerie Drew, almost forgotten, were brought back from the old memory-bank by the recent articles and stories by our good friends, Mary Cadogan and Marjorie Woods, respectively. Hence my little "Valerie Drew Revisited".

Another series in the same paper strikes a chord in the memory; it was entitled "Someone's Masquerades" and I think in the end the mystery figure turned out to be the head prefect. But to return to my friends next door, I'm very sorry to say that tragedy struck. It seems that one night the Grandfather, feeling a little hungry, got up and went downstairs for a snack. As he passed from the kitchen to the room where the larder was kept, he slipped and by a freak accident caught and tore his throat on the projecting tongue of the door lock. It wasn't until morning when the father couldn't open the door, that he was discovered lying there.

On account of this happening, the father and his two daughters moved and left no forwarding address. I never heard from them again. One speculates in such cases whether they survived the war with its "blitz" and other dangers - and, if they did, whether they saved their "Schoolgirls' Weeklys" and became collectors like us? I often wonder!



NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

In contrast to the wintry conditions of 8th December when we had to cancel our Christmas Party, Saturday, 12th January proved to be a crisp, sunny day. Still, we were disappointed to have an attendance of only ten for the revised programme of a New Year's party. A wonderful selection of 'goodies' from members produced a study spread that even Bunter would have found difficult to demolish! We were extremely sorry that neither our Secretary, Geoffrey Good, nor Bruce Lamb were well enough to attend the meeting, and our warm thoughts went to them and their families.

Paul Galvin presented an item on hobby magazines, concentrating naturally on those relating to popular literature, including those for the enthusiasts of Dan Dare, Rupert Bear and Edgar Wallace. Paul referred to an excellent article by Roger Jenkins in the 300th edition of *The Collector's Digest*. Much time was spent looking at the many examples of the magazine which Paul had put on show. The belated Christmas cake, beautifully iced by our Chairman Joan Colman was cut; cool wine produced from the kitchen fridge, and cups of tea for those who preferred that beverage all added to the convivial atmosphere.

Sadly, because of the extremely bad weather conditions causing travel problems, it was necessary to cancel the meeting scheduled for 9th February. We hope that our guest speaker will instead fit into our programme later in the year.

We are pleased to report that both Geoffrey Good and Bruce Lamb are improving in health and we look forward to seeing them soon at our meetings.

Our next meeting is planned for Saturday, 9th March, at our regular venue; also arrangements are going ahead for our Club Dinner to be held on Saturday evening, 23rd March, at the Stansfield Arms, Apperley Bridge, Bradford. We would be delighted to have O.B.B.C. members from other clubs with us; our secretary can give further information.

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

LONDON O.B.B.C.

21 members made the journey to the Loughton home of Chris and Suzanne Harper for the January meeting, which was the A.G.M. The following appointments were made: Graham Bruton, Chairman; Alan Pratt, Secretary; Roy Parsons has now taken over the Nelson Lee Library; all other officers and librarians were re-elected en bloc. Alan Pratt gave an interesting talk on Sydney Horler, including his likes and dislikes. Bill Bradford followed with the usual Memory Lane reading, this time from January 1971. Roy Parsons next gave a quiz relating the London Underground to names connected with the O.B.B.C. A two minute quiz from retiring chairman Brian Doyle meant that everyone talked for two minutes on an O.B.B.C. subject, or film related item. Many thanks to the hosts for a lovely spread. My personal thanks

to everyone for their help over the last year, and very best wishes to Alan Pratt for the future, as our Secretary.

(The meeting schedule for February at Chingford had regrettably to be cancelled because of the difficult travel conditions resulting from heavy snow.)

GRAHAM BRUTON

CAMBRIDGE CLUB

The first Club gathering for 1991 was held in February at the Cambridge home of Adrian Perkins.

This time presentations consisted entirely of video tape recordings: firstly two of the early episodes from the TV series "Comics, The Ninth Art" - a chronological worldwide survey of the cartoon strip. Once limited to comics in the UK, this most popular of all art forms out-sells conventional literature in some parts of the world.

Later, Keith Hodkinson treated us to "Science Fiction in the Cinema" part five, wherein the decades 1950 to 1980 were examined for films of robots, androids, time travel and super-intelligent computers - with excerpts from *The Time Machine*, *Back to the future*, *2001 - A Space Odyssey*, *2010*, *Blade Runner* and *The Terminator*.

ADRIAN PERKINS



BOB WHITER (Los Angeles, California): The poem *Greyfriars Youth* (reprinted in the January C.D.) was originally issued in Bill Gander's *Story Paper Collector*, and was written by Jack Corbet.

MARK TAHA (London): Regarding Eric Fayne's comment that, in later years, Dr. Holmes 'would never have spoken of "St. Jim's"', when exactly did he use the name "St. James's College"? In 1931 in 'Battling Grundy', the last original Hamilton story in the Gem before the reprints, he referred to the school as "St. Jim's".

JOHN LEWIS (Uttoxeter): I have just read Magnet no. 239 (The Hidden Horror). In the story the Co. consists only of Wharton, Nugent, Cherry and Bull, with no mention whatsoever of Hurree Singh. Yet there are at least four references to the Famous Four of which, at that time, Bull was not a member - the Famous Five not being inaugurated until Magnet no. 250. I find this very paradoxical. Also during the Christmas period of the Lamb Series (Magnets no. 1661-3) there are a number of references to the Famous Five having, during the previous summer, paid a visit to the

Moat House, near Wharton Lodge. If this was so, in which Magnet did their first visit the Moat House appear?

(Editor's Note: My request for information about Sergeant Matt Braddock V.C., drew a strong response from readers. I give some of the replies here, followed by an interesting article on this character by Martin Waters. I thank all readers who replied to my query.)

DENNIS BIRD (Shoreham-by-Sea): I received the February "C.D." today and was interested in your "Do You Know?" item about "Sergeant Matt Braddock, VC". I know nothing about him, but I am fascinated by his aeroplane. It is unmistakably a Messerschmitt 410 high-level reconnaissance bomber. Close inspection reveals that it is in RAF markings, however, so it must be one of the several captured enemy aircraft. There were so many of them that they eventually became known as the "RAFwaffe", and there is a Putnam book about them. They were obviously at risk when flying in this country, so it is not surprising that the three fighters are zooming in to check up. Their identity is less clear - probably North American P-51 Mustangs. They just could be Hurricanes (hump back, central radiator) - but the Hurricane was no longer used as an interceptor when the ME 410 was current.

W.O.G. LOFTS (London): I know that the series was very popular - so much so that D.C.T. published a hardback edition entitled "I Flew With Braddock" - the author's name being George Bourne. Whether that was a real name one does not know, though I've never come across it before.

MARK TAHA (London): I remember picture/stories about Sgt. Matt Braddock, V.C., in the *Victor* in the 1970s... He said he'd turned down a Commission because "there were too many officers messing up the war effort anyway!".

DESMOND O'LEARY (Loughborough): In Colin Morgan's ROVER INDEX he lists the Braddock stories in 20 series from 1952-1972 (the ROVER amalgamated with WIZARD in 1973, having previously linked with the ADVENTURE).

The I FLEW WITH BRADDOCK stories, narrated by his faithful navigator, George Bourne, featured Matt Braddock who was pugnacious and rebellious of discipline. He also favoured **bombers** which was a bit different.

Two books I FLEW WITH BRADDOCK 1959 (hard-back) and BRADDOCK AND THE FLYING TIGERS 1962 (RED LION paperback) were published by D.C. Thomson.

MATT BRADDOCK

by Martin Waters

Sgt. Braddock was my favourite story paper character when I was a boy, and I used to read his adventures in the 'Rover' each week. When my wife started to pay regular visits to the British Library to consult the files of girls' papers, I took the opportunity to re-read Braddock's adventures once again.

Matt Braddock first appeared in the 'Rover' in 1952, and his adventures continued in serial form into the 1960s. He then began to appear in picture strip form in the 'Victor'. I remember reading many of the picture stories during my own military service out east. These continued until quite recent times; my own son used to read them during the 1970s.

BRADDOCK and the FLYING TIGERS

Sergeant Matt Braddock, V.C. was one of Britain's greatest pilots in the last war. Sergeant George Bourne was his navigator. In 1942, the new Mosquito aircraft had proved so successful with the R.A.F. that the Fleet Air Arm had decided to try one out. Braddock and Bourne were aboard the aircraft carrier Royal Ark, ready to fly special tests for Vice-Admiral Parker of the United States Navy.

OUR TAKE-OFF TIME HAS BEEN PUT OFF HALF AN HOUR BECAUSE OF A YANK ADMIRAL AND A COMMANDER. THEY'RE HAVING A NATTER ABOUT THE MOSQUITO WITH OUR BLOKES. FROM WHAT I'VE HEARD THEY'VE ALREADY MADE UP THEIR MINDS IT'LL BE NO USES AS A CARRIER PLANE.

IT WON'T - NEITHER.

HE'S A BIT OLD-FASHIONED IN HIS IDEAS IS HARRY.

MAYBE SO, BUT HARRY HORNE'S THE BEST BLOOMING RIGGER ON THIS BOAT, AH, HERE COME THE YANKS NOW.

WHAT'S ITS RANGE?

A FLYING PETROL TANK, ER? WHAT ELSE IS THERE ROOM FOR?

WELL, WE DID FIND ROOM FOR A 2,000 POUND BOMB, WHICH IS MORE THAN ONE OF YOUR FLYING FORBESSES COULD CARRY.

ENOUGH OF THE BACKCHAT, WATROUS. THIS MOSQUITO IS NOT THE BOMBER TYPE. CAN IT FLY 1,200 MILES AS WELL?

Pictures copyright D.C. Thomson

Braddock was a tough, abrasive character, he always held the rank of sergeant and would never take commissioned rank. Most of his adventures took place in Bomber Command, he normally flew Lancasters or Mosquitoes (Battles, Blenheims and Hampdens in the early days of the war). The stories are always narrated by his navigator, Sgt. George Bourne, hence the sub-title 'I flew with Braddock'. On occasion Braddock

served with other branches of the RAF, a notable story being 'Braddock and the Big Bad Wulf' where he hunts U boats with Coastal Command, having pinched a Focke-Wulf Condor from a German airfield near Bordeaux.

Many of Brad's adventures dealt with the destruction of secret weapons, V weapons, heavy water factories, etc. He was regarded as indispensable to the war effort. Although many of his adventures were far-fetched, they were much more believable than other wartime characters - 'Battler Britton', 'Paddy Payne', etc. The unknown writers of the Braddock stories, like most DC Thomson writers had done their homework thoroughly, all the details of weapons, aircraft, etc. were 100% accurate. The writers captured the RAF atmosphere, and its sometimes rather 'petty' discipline very well indeed. There were a number of rather silly minor mistakes -- RAF bomber squadrons have always been commanded by officers holding the rank of a **Wing Commander**, not a Squadron Leader, as in the stories.

Braddock came from what we would now describe as a 'deprived' background. He was a native of Walsall, and had worked as a steeplejack in civilian life; prior to 1939 he was a weekend flyer with the Auxiliary air force. There are no post war Braddock adventures, except for a mission against 'Werewolves', a German underground group, in 1946.

Looking back on these stories from adult life, they appear vastly superior to modern war fiction, but having been a regular and territorial soldier for almost 30 years, I find that they no longer give me much pleasure. When you have seen active service in several parts of the world, war stories are no longer entertaining. I much prefer to read and write about Betty, Joan and Peggy, the *Silent Three* of the *Schoolfriend*.

TRIBUTES TO WILLIAM HOWARD BAKER

From DARRELL SWIFT

It was quite by accident that I saw in the desk drawer of a foreman where I work a copy of a Howard Baker Magnet reprint. In 1972 I had no idea that the books were becoming quite established and had been around for 3 years. Indeed, although I had heard of "The Magnet" I had never actually seen a copy - original or otherwise.

So it was that a fascination for the works of Frank Richards that I had possessed as a boy at school (through the Bunter books) was re-kindled, and started me on the road that is so familiar to members of our hobby. For

virtually twenty years, I have been reading and collecting the various works and editions connected with Frank Richards and other writers.

I am sure my story is not unfamiliar: through his insight in issuing the first Magnet reprint in 1969, Bill Baker brought many people into our hobby and gave those already involved a renewed interest. It was a labour of love on his part and the natural question we all ask is, what is going to happen to the proposed completion of the Magnet reprint programme? It is only a pity that Bill Baker cannot see the culmination of his far-sighted idea.

So - thank you Bill for the countless hours of enjoyment you have given so many people, not only in the production of Magnet reprints, but Gem, Nelson Lee and others. The Howard Baker imprint on so many publications will be a long lasting tribute to a man who in a very quiet, undramatic way brought life and enjoyment to our hobby, and through whom so many people like myself have made friends throughout the world.

From PETER McCALL

As many people know, not much leaves me speechless, but when Irene, Bill Baker's wife, rang me with the news of his sudden tragic death, I found myself with nothing to say. Disbelief; incredulity; sadness. All these have their place in one's reactions. I knew Bill for 14 years and looked upon him as a good friend.

Everybody in the Hobby knows of his contributions: to the Sexton Blake Canon as author and editor and, later, publisher; to the promulgation of Frank Richards' work - for whatever the diehards may say, many people, among them myself, would never have heard of Charles Hamilton but for Bill's efforts with the massive task, often thankless, always hard work, of reprinting all 1683 Magnets; to the "flops" of the Gem volumes and other less successful formats.

His biographical publishings were, to use one of his favourite words, arcane.

However, it is not upon the "works of Bill that I want to linger but rather the man. Outsize in every way. A giant in build and girth, he was one of those splendid eccentrics that only seem to inhabit Great Britain. A wicked impish sense of humour to match; and even when he was trying to be serious the laughter lines and the twinkle in the eye would break through as he shook with mirth.

Without doubt Bill was one of the kindest men I have ever had the honour to know. In every respect a real gentleman, ever courteous and considerate. When I was writing my *Greyfriars Guide* he never lacked the time to discuss a point, elucidate a mystery, or simply to chatter. Many's the time he would ring as I was about to start, or was in the middle of, a busy surgery. I might have cursed him briefly but the ensuing chat always drove away those blues!

I know they say, "de mortuis nil nisi bonum", but in my case, speaking as I found, I can put my hand on my heart and say there was a great man whom I admired, respected and liked immensely - a man about whom I know no ill. And that is no mean epitaph.

To his widow and family, our condolences.

To Bill, may he pass eternity in his favourite pastime - a contemplation of tasks undone!

From JACK ADRIAN

Bill Howard Baker's messianic mission to reprint, *inter alia*, all 1,683 issues of the *Magnet* was not the whole story. Nowhere near. But it's almost certainly what he'll be remembered for, and it's not a bad memorial.

For myself, however (and forgetting about his Hamilton hang-up), Bill was, at one and the same time, an inspired hands-on editor and a one-man fiction factory in the grand tradition of pulp fiction. He learned his craft while editor for Panther Books in the early-1950s, during which he met many of the writers - like Tom Martin ('Martin Thomas'), George Mann ('Arthur Maclean'), Arthur Kent and Jack Trevor Story - who were later to help him transform the *SBL* from an ailing cripple into something alive and vital ... something one actually looked forward to buying at the beginning of every month.

It's a matter of lasting regret that the *SBL* was given no money by the AP, and not much promotional push, during his editorship; when the Mirror Group took over, even less. He could have done so much more with the series. Even so, Bill performed miracles, and under his guidance some of his writers turned in little masterpieces of suspense and tension - taut and tightly-plotted thrillers which were often just as good as, in many cases rather better than, the majority of detective novels issued in hardback by mainstream publishers.

I remember, in no particular order of merit, Arthur Maclean's *Dark Frontier* (4th Series 368), *Broken Toy* (362) and *The House on the Bay* (419); Martin Thomas's *The Evil Eye* (415) and *Bred To Kill* (448); Steve Francis's *Vendetta* (481); James Stagg's *Murder Down Below* (397) and *Crime of Violence* (403); Jack Trevor Story's hilarious *She Ain't Got No Body* (416) and *Assault And Pepper* (472). And for each of those writers, and others, I could triple the list of titles. And I remember, too, many of Bill's own *SBLs*, either under his own name or his many pseudonyms, though especially the quite superb war thrillers *The Last Days of Berlin* (395) and *The Sea Tigers* (400) he wrote as 'Peter Saxon'.

He was a superlative 'ideas' man and had a sharp eye for a gap in the market. As far as I know Bill was the first British editor/packager to come up with the notion of the TV spin-off series, in his case original paperback thrillers featuring the ITV secret agent hero John Drake, *Danger Man*, written by him, Wilfred McNeilly and Peter Leslie and published by Consul Books in 1965/66 (there were *Dixon of Dock Green* and *Z-Cars* novelisations before, but not in a sustained series).

I regret Bill's death (apart from anything else he published my first book) and I regret that he never quite saw his dream of seeing every single issue of the *Magnet* (whether by Hamilton or a sub-writer) reprinted in volume form

come to fruition. It's to be hoped that there is someone out there who will carry on his very good work.

"WHY, WHY 'FLAMER SPRY'?"

by Simon Garrett

Norman Wright's opinion of "Flamer" Spry (CD 528) struck a chord with me. Of course there is old affection for the likes of Tinker and Nipper, but the Boy Genius Assistant seemed out of place in Dan Dare. Much of this saga's strength lay in its solid, detailed service background, which lent credibility to dashing exploits on distant planets. Thus Dan's regular crew in the first four series consisted of Space Fleet personnel plus one civilian scientist - all adults.

The fifth series, Prisoners of Space, saw "Flamer" Spry's debut.

Here he was fine: just a likeable but reckless boy getting himself into a scrape.

He was less believable when he went on to become a regular member of the team, being selected for important missions ahead of career officers. Even when a schoolboy myself I felt that Eagle, for once, was talking down to me. "Here", we were told in effect, "is a cheeky, freckled lad, just like you, yet look! He can fly a spaceship, save the world, etc. etc." I didn't believe it.



from EAGLE - 22 June 1956

"Flamer" recalls E.S. Turner's amusing comment in "Boys will be boys", that in any interplanetary conflict, whichever side first recruited an Earth schoolboy was sure to triumph.

How much better if, like old Groupie, "Flamer" had been a major star only once and had otherwise just popped up from time to time in cameo roles. (On a point of detail, Groupie's first bow had been in the previous series, as an eccentric air-taxi driver.)

Oh well! I expect Eagle was giving its readers what they wanted. Sadly, I suspect Mr. Wright and myself are in the minority.

EXTREMES OF YOUTH

by Colin Cole

I was very interested in Mr. Mark Taha's article concerning Highcliffe School, Ponsonby and Tom Merry in the February 1991 issue of the Digest.

We have two extremes of youth here; One, Tom Merry, of St. Jims, a decent lad, brave, a natural leader, very good at sport, performs quite capably in class. Any father would welcome him as a son. As to Ponsonby, to me, he is depicted as an utter young villain, an aristocratic villain, perhaps the most villainous of all Hamiltonian schoolboy characters.

You have only to read "The Worst Boy in the School", (Magnet No. 1323, 1933) for a typical example of Ponsonby plotting. He is, of course, the arch enemy of Courtenay and De Courcy, the "Caterpillar", particularly Courtenay, his cousin.

Ponsonby takes Mr. Mobbs' stamps from the form master's valuable collection, burns them in the fire grate in Study No. 3, belonging to Courtenay and De Courcy, intending of course, the blame for his actions to fall upon the occupants of that study. Fortunately, Bunter is hidden from sight in the study behind a screen and observes the whole foul deed. The Owl later transfers the remains of the charred stamps to Ponsonby's study. The blame falls upon Ponsonby and he is fortunate in being a favourite of Mr. Mobbs, his form master. Mr. Mobbs successfully pleads on behalf of Ponsonby, for lenience, despite the loss of his stamps.

Throughout the Magnet over the years, there are numerous examples of Ponsonby's unscrupulous behaviour, see Magnet No. 1337 (1933), "The Kidnapped Hiker". He plots with gypsies in Yorkshire to arrange for the kidnaping of Bob Cherry.

Mr. Taha states that he thinks more of the boys in Public Schools are like Ponsonby than Tom Merry. I really do not think this can be so and, indeed, I sincerely hope it is not so. The average boy is probably more like Peter Todd, Johnny Bull, Tom Brown or Mark Linley rather than Tom Merry, but there must be precious few quite like Ponsonby.

As readers of the Digest will know, Highcliffe School, together with Courtenay, Ponsonby and Co. often were featured in the Magnet stories. I cannot recall an indifferent story which included Highcliffe characters; some were excellent.

There were two stories, written by Hamilton in 1915, mainly about Highcliffe. These were "The Boy without a Name" and "Rivals and Chums". The first named introduced the boy Clare, later to be known as Courtenay. It is a pity that Hamilton did not write more stories about Highcliffe. I think the occasional story would have been most acceptable

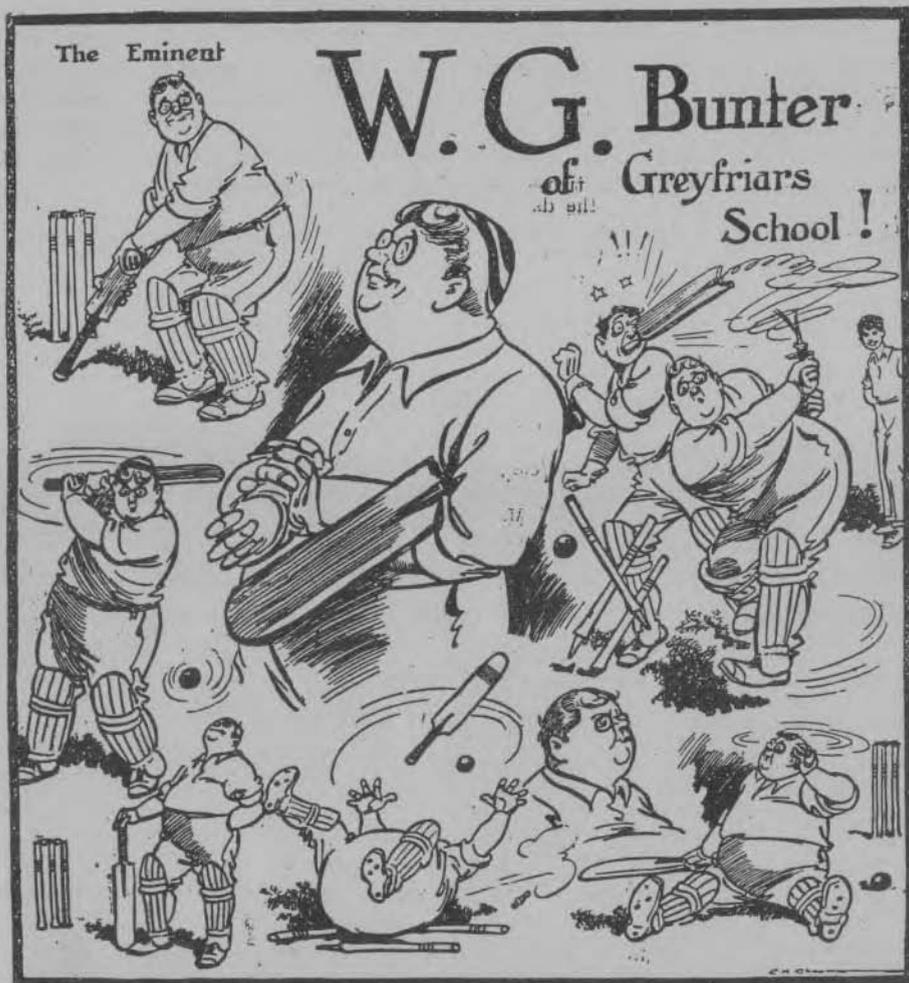
to readers. However, I do not think they could have been produced successfully on a weekly or monthly basis. There were just not enough real characters at Highcliffe to hold regular interest. Among the boys there are Courtenay, De Courcy, and Ponsonby. There are the followers of Courtenay and the friends (nuts) of Ponsonby: Yates, Benson, Smithson, Gadsby, Monson and the others are merely names.

Dr. Voysey, the Headmaster and Mr. Mobbs are quite interesting characters. Very little is known about the boys of the other forms. Most of the stories would concern the rivalry between Courtenay and Ponsonby and the schemes of the latter. The frequent inclusion of Highcliffe in the Magnet stories rather than separate stories about Highcliffe, except in small quantity, I think would be preferred by most readers.



William George on the Cricket Field!

Some Lightning Sketches by C. H. CHAPMAN



It is one of Billy Bunter's favourite delusions that he can play cricket. He is always complaining that it is "personal jealousy" on the part of Harry Wharton that keeps him out of the Remove cricket eleven. Yet when he does play, incidents such as those depicted above invariably happen!

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

Printed by Quacks Printers, 7 Grape Lane, Petergate, York, YO1 2HU. Tel. 635967