VOL. 45 STORY PAPER No. 532

COLLECTORS' DIGEST

APRIL 1991

86p

STORY PAPER COLLECTORS' DIGEST

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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. 532** **APRIL 1991** **Price 86p**

THE EDITOR'S CHAT

OUR FIFTY YEARS

Several readers have responded warmly to my mention last month of our Fiftieth Anniversary. Some have endorsed the plea for more reprints from our predecessor paper, the Story Paper Collector, and some have suggested occasional reprints from early issues of the Collectors' Digest as, apparently, few present-day readers have complete runs of the magazine. You will see that Henry Webb has provided a fitting cover this month to mark the half-century; it is a splendid celebration of some of the characters who have been featured over the years in the C.D. and will trigger many happy memories.

The passing of time, however, also brings sadness when we learn that our collecting circle has been depleted by the death of one or another of our readers and contributors. I have just heard of the passing of Derek Adley who was, of course, one half of the celebrated Lofts/Adley literary and research partnership to which our hobby owes so much. I met Derek on several occasions, but my relationship with him was generally conducted through correspondence and telephoning. He was, like Bill Lofts, always helpful and extremely generous in sharing the fruits of his research with

other writers and hobbyists. Tributes to Derek appear on pages 24 and 25 of this issue, and also in his memory I am publishing this month one of his articles in our 'Other Favourite Detectives' series. This, like every piece of his writing, indicates the depth and range of his researches and of his interests. He will be greatly missed, and we send condolences to his family.

With warm greetings to you all,

MARY CADOGAN

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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.

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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.

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WANTED: All Bonzo items, books, annuals, toys, ephemera.
FOR SALE: C.D. Monthlies many numbers old and new.
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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WANTED: 1933 Playbox Annual. Private collector will pay an exceptionally good price for same. Please contact F. ARMSTRONG, 35 Allenby Road, St. Annes-on-Sea, Lancs., FY8 2DL. Tel. 0253 726244.

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WANTED: by Collector. JOHN HAMILTON: Pre-War hardbacks, any title with or without D/W, including the 'Ace Series' 'Airmans Bookcase' 'Flying Thrillers' 'Sundial Mystery' and Adventure Library, and Airmans Bookclub editions in Dustwrappers. W.E. JOHNS: Any Pre-War hardbacks, with or without D/W, and Paperback editions of 'MOSSYFACE' (by William Earle) and any 'BOYS FRIEND LIBRARY' Editions, any condition considered. JOHN TRENDLER, 7 Park Close, Bushey, Watford, Hertfordshire, WD2 2DE. Tel. (0923) 31608.

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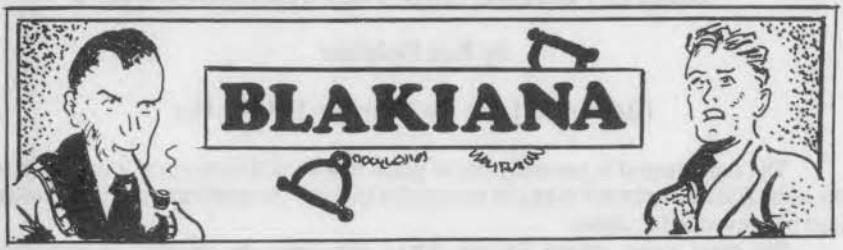

SEXTON BLAKE AND DETECTIVE WEEKLY by J.E.M.

Number 3

Blakian author Anthony Skene had two main obsessions: science (or, more accurately, science fantasy) and the exotic. X-Ray spectacles, devices to immobolise anything powered by electricity, chemicals with the most terrifying properties, all featured in his stories. As for the exotic - well, what or who could be more exotic than his creation, Zenith the Albino?

The Falcon of Fambridge (DW 5), however, is not a Zenith story but it has plenty of sci-fi (what is the secret of the sinister substance, D77?), as well as any amount of the exotic, including a fabulous castle, a claimant to its title and a mysterious falcon. The tale also features an ex-accomplice of Zenith, the ruthless, unprepossessing, pistol-packing Frau Krantz, "a desperado", in the author's words, "with no regard whatever for the laws of civilisation." Did a very similar character, Krebbs, in one of the James Bond stories, owe anything to Krantz, I wonder....?

Anyway, here is a portrait of the formidable Krantz, as well as an illustration of Blake in mortal peril from one of the Fambridge family - and that deadly D77. As always, Eric Parker's drawings catch the spirit of the story which has all the favourite Skene ingredients at their liveliest.

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SEXTON BLAKE AND THE SUPERNATURAL

by Rex Dolphin

(Reprinted from the October 1948 C.D.)

The supernatural is normally out of place in a detective story; if it exists there it has to be finally explained away in terms of logic and materialism, in other words, it must be proved to be faking.

So, most cases where Saxton Blake has been up against "supernatural" phenomena have been resolved along those lines. After all, a detective is a hard-headed practical man, not addicted to superstitious beliefs.

All the more surprising, therefore, that there should be in Blake history, four outstanding stories of the supernatural in which the manifestations are not explained away. And Blake himself is unable to explain them except in terms of magic. In every one of these stories, moreover, Blake is credited with a knowledge and study of the occult.

First is "Union Jack" No. 1111, "The House of the Horoscope" by Gilbert Chester. This is in effect an ingeniously contrived story of hidden treasure, all the events being based on astrology. To solve the case, Sexton Blake has to cast a horoscope!

Chester himself says, in a "Detective Supplement" article in the same issue:

> "It may be thought strange that in my story I have made Sexton Blake, the modern, shrewd, hard headed detective, conversant with astrology..... More remarkable that I should have made him resort to it as a means of solving the mystery..... Blake's conduct was neither so extraordinary nor so far fetched as might at first sight appear."

He goes on to say that a knowledge of astrology and other occult sciences is necessary to a detective whose job it may be to expose frauds and trickery based upon the said sciences:

> "Consequently, for this reason alone, a detective would take care to acquire at least a superficial working knowledge of the art. Moreover, since the signs and symbols in astrology, together with most of the mathematical calculations employed in creating a horoscope, are also employed in navigation, a highly educated and well informed man such as Sexton Blake would start equipped at the outset with much information relative to star-reading."

The second of these queer stories is also by Gilbert Chester. "Union Jack" No. 1400, "Fear!" (later reprinted in "Detective Weekly"). This is really a hair raising story for anyone who is even slightly credulous of the supernatural. Elemental spirits, a poltergeist, Black Magic operated by an African witch doctor all combine to strike terror into the reader, and the characters - even into Blake himself. And the fact that part of it is explained by trickery somehow leaves a final effect more chilling than if nothing had been explained.

Another poltergeist is up to his tricks in "Union Jack" No. 1245, "The Haunted Hotel Mystery" (also later reprinted in "The Sexton Blake Library" as one story of a two-story issue). This yarn is mainly concerned with smuggling but has several genuine supernatural moments, and a most effective supernatural ending, with Blake again showing some measure of credulity. Anthony Skene wrote this one.

But the best supernatural story of all is George Hamilton Teed's "The Victim of Black Magic" in "The Sexton Blake Library" 2nd Series No. 134. This is one of my favourite stories in all Blakiana. Strange, because I am absolutely unbelieving of such matters. This yarn could easily rank with the finest occult stories ever written. It is a tale of Huxton Rymer and Mary Trent, with Rymer practising the Black Art, of a dying man whose body is entered by the spirit of an evil Hindu black magician, of a gigantic white owl which carries a man's soul from India to a lonely place in the West of England. In retrospect, almost laughable in its incredibility, yet, start reading it and its spell grips you. I tell you, when I read this story twenty years ago my flesh crept. I lived in a lonely part of the country, with brooding woods and the night full of strange sounds. Soon after reading the story I saw in the woods a huge white bird of an unknown species. Today I picked the story up again. No longer does it terrify, but it certainly still fascinates.

And in this story Mr. Teed tells us definitely that Sexton Blake was a student of the occult, that he had lived in Tibet as an ascetic and had studied the most abstruse phases of black and white magic. Blake was a member of one of these Hindu cults (Yoga?), had taken part in many psychic demonstrations, and had actually witnessed a display of levitation.

And so the addition of yet another aspect of Sexton Blake's many-sided character is brought to light - an aspect that cannot be ignored as the three authors concerned are among the elite of Blake writers.

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UNUSUAL SERIES **by C.H. Churchill**

As any regular reader of the Nelson Lee Library would agree, Edwy Searles Brooks was a master at writing series with unusual plots. One has only to scan through Bob Blythe's Bibliography of his writings to realise that there were so many that come under this heading that it would be impossible to pick out any one for special mention.

However, I have always thought that the servants' strike of March/April 1920 was outstanding because of the humour in it although it had its serious side. The relevant numbers of this series are old series 249 to 255 inclusive.

The humour came from that extraordinary character, Timothy Tucker. This freak (Handforth's name for him) made it his business to act as agitator to the staff trying to persuade them to come out on strike for increased wages. His speeches to them were most hilarious and caused as much laughter from the staff as from the listening juniors. It had become known that the wages paid were so poor that many of the staff were obliged to take in extra work in order to supplement their income. The wages had dwindled in value with inflation caused by rising prices (how relevant to recent years). Mrs. Poulter had been reduced to taking in sewing. Naturally, the juniors were on their side and Tucker was foremost in addressing meetings. His speeches were most amusing, as mentioned above, and became longer and longer as time went on.

Chairman of Governors, Sir Roger Stone, was at heart all right but was obstinate and rejected the servants' demands despite overtures from the Head and Nelson Lee to listen to reason.

Eventually the staff walked out, and this is where the fun came in. The boys were ordered to take turns at the domestic jobs such as bedmaking, preparing meals etc. This all became so chaotic that the school was closed down and the boys sent home early for the Easter holidays.

On return to school the boys were furious to find a "Blackleg" staff installed. These new people were a pretty rough lot and after a while a robbery was planned by some of them. When this was attempted the juniors took a hand and with the help of Nelson Lee the crooks were thwarted. As a result Sir Roger Stone relented and the old hands were reinstated with a considerable rise in pay.

This series was most enjoyable and I would advise any prospective reader to borrow these numbers from the St. Frank's library now operated by our new librarian, Roy Parsons, whose address is 'Fairhaven', Church Hollow, West Winterslow, Salisbury, Wilts., SP5 1SX.

"A DRAGON FROM THE PAST!" by Jim Sutcliffe

Archie Glenthorne, that likeable and popular character in the Remove form at St. Frank's had a valet named Phipps, rather unusual but it was generally accepted that Archie was pretty helpless and needed someone to look after him. However in actual fact Archie could show surprising engery and resourcefulness when the occasion arose, and in any case Phipps also doubled as butler to Dr. Stafford, the Headmaster. Usually Phipps glided about his duties with silent but machine-like precision but there came a day when he returned from a trip to Bennington with a furtive look on his usually impassive face and rushed past Archie without a word. Puzzled, Archie returned to his study and rang his bell a few times before Phipps arrived looking extremely shaky and ill at ease. Archie looked at him "You're in a most frightful state Phipps", he said. "I'm not quite myself, Sir", Phipps replied, and athough Archie implored him to unload his worries on the young master it was to no avail, and Phipps made his departure.

The cause of his agitation soon appeared - Nipper and Handforth were out in the Triangle just as dusk was falling when they saw a woman and asked if they could help her. "My name is Miss Arabella Pringle," she said. "This is St. Frank's College isn't it?" "Yes" they replied, not very impressed by her general appearance. "I want to find Mr. Phipps" she said. "Eight years ago he deserted me in Sydney, Australia - I'll teach him, the cowardly wretch!" In next to no time the story spread like wildfire, and Handforth in the excitement received a whack from her umbrella as Nipper led her into the Ancient House and the Remove passage just as Phipps appeared. "There he is, the deserting scoundrel she shouted. "After eight years I've run him to earth!" Phipps dived into Archie's study with the hot, untidy and angry woman in pursuit. "You villain - now I've got you!" she shouted, "you'll marry me or pay damages for breach of promise!" Nelson Lee arrived on the scene and could see that she was no lady and soon exercised his authority and escorted her to the gates.

Before the unfortunate Handforth could dodge, the lady's umbrella descended with considerable force upon his back.

After this Phipps felt obliged to tell Archie the whole story, how Miss Pringle was the daughter of a greengrocer in Sydney, Australia, where Phipps happened to be just before the war. Her father was an acquaintance and, at a party he held, Phipps was a guest and under the influence of some wine in which he suspected a sleeping draught had been added, possibly as a practical joke, he was told that he had proposed to Arabella. After an intolerable week he managed to slip away one night and caught a ship to London. By this time the 1914 war had started and he went on active service, after which he felt safe from the Pringle menace until the 1922 summer holiday expedition to the Antarctic when Phipps, among many of the school party, received a lot of publicity from the newspapers.

"So that's the story, Sir". Phipps said to Archie. "It would be best for me to get away, I may be able to slip over to France or South America." Leaving Archie he went out into the Triangle to try and think of the future when he was confronted by a burly figure asking for Phipps - it was Jim Pringle, Arabella's brother. He suggests that for £200 Arabella could be persuaded to return to Australia and that would be the end of it. However, Phipps refuses and is being beaten up by Pringle when Handforth spots them and with the help of Nipper and other juniors throws the Australian into the fountain. The next morning Archie finds a note from Phipps in his study saying he has left the school. It also happens that Dr. Stafford's study has been burgled during the night, and

a quantity of money is missing (money which Phipps had collected for the Head from a Bannington bank the previous day, so he is an immediate suspect).

However, some detective work on Archie's part points to Jim Pringle as the culprit. In the meantime, Phipps is caught and arrested by Inspector Jameson but all ends well, and Arabella and Jim Pringle are arrested on Bannington station after some smart work by the Removites. Phipps returns, a free man, to look after the "Young master's" needs as before.

And then, as a kind of grand finale, Jim was sent hurtling with terrific force into the well-filled basin of the fountain.

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SLADE OF THE YARD

by Derek Adley

The character of Jack Slade had a most interesting history for though he had first been featured in a traditional A.P. comic he had progressed to another comic for slightly older readers, then into a weekly mystery paper and a boys library, eventually ending up in adult crime fiction.

The first story was entitled 'Slade of the Yard' and appeared as a serial in Chips 1513, 30th August, 1919 to 1527, 6th December, 1919. This was followed immediately by 'Slade the Sleuth' 1528 to 1542, 13th December, 1919 to 20th March, 1920.

John Darrell was a member of Parliament, and a rising politician who had disgraced himself at a function by knocking the chairman down when drunk. He joined the police under the name of Jack Slade, a member of 'H' Section after wrecking his career, and his friends all turning against him. By shaving off his moustache and by various other means he managed to conceal his real identity.

It was in the second story that he was eventually able to resume his old identity and be reinstated as an M.P. and welcomed back to the fold by his friends. In the ensuing stories, though he continued to serve his government, he would on occasions revert to being Jack Slade and return to the Yard to become a crime fighter once again. The original Chips stories were reprinted respectively in Film Fun in 1931 in issues 588 to 601, and 602 to 615.

Slade had one long term adversary - as Holmes had his Moriarty. His name was Lessinger, a notorious thief but one not without honour. A clever disguiser, he had been known to impersonate Slade himself. His boast was that he would only steal from the rich and that he preferred to steal from affluent unscrupulous thieves. When he came face to face with the deadly Secret Seven he told them, "I love to steal stolen goods but I do not steal from my country in the stress of a national crisis. I have my limits." It is a fact that he did give Jack Slade information to fight certain evil doers.

In 1934 Slade and Lessinger - the two would appear together and individually - were promoted to the pages of THRILLER alongside a host of detectives and criminals created for the adult market. The first yarn was the original story 'Slade of the Yard' published in serial form in the issues 275 to 291 and 293 to 296; then followed a succession of stories. Researchers will be able to trace some of these into the hardback series of books.

The full list of stories in the Thriller was:-

299	27 Oct.	1934	The Secret Seven
300	3 Nov.	1934	Wanted!
305	8 Dec.	1934	Deaths Deputy
311	9 Jan.	1935	The Fence's Victim
316	23 Feb.	1935	In Fear of Four
318 to 320		1935	The Purple Tie
345	14 Sep.	1935	The Trail of the Tiger
374	4 Apr.	1936	The Bank Messenger's Secret
381	23 May	1936	Larry the Rat
397	12 Sep.	1936	Lessinger Interferes
406	14 Nov.	1936	Secret Service
437	19 Jun.	1937	Lessinger in a Spot
444	7 Aug.	1937	They All Wanted Arrabella Minter

There were also three reprints in the second series of Boys Friend Library.

493	Sep.	1935	Slade of the Yard. (Chips 1513 to 1527)
497	Oct.	1935	The Secret Seven (Thriller 299)
513	Feb.	1936	Lessingers Lapse (presumed reprint of Chips 1528 to 1541)

In 1932 began the series of novels for the adult market featuring Slade and/or Lessinger all of which were published by Herbert Jenkins.

1932 Slade of the Yard
1933 Slade Scores Again
1935 Lessinger Comes Back
1936 Murder in the Bank
1937 Marinova of the Secret Service
1938 Lessinger Laughs Last
1939 Assisted by Lessinger

There was also a paperback published in June 1966 by Tallis Press entitled 'The Girl in Black'. This was actually a revision of the earlier story 'Slade Scores Again'

and tells the story of Slade's fight against the evil Secret Seven and Lessinger's assistance in their defeat.

The writing of the Slade and Lessinger stories was ascribed to Richard Essex, this being a pen name of the late Richard Harry Starr. I think I was the first collector to contact this author way back in 1958, and after a long telephone conversation I had extensive correspondence with him . He was living in Worthing, Sussex, at the time.

It transpired that he and his sister, Mrs. N. Murch, were two of the most prolific writers for the old penny comics, or black comics as they were known, of H.J. Garrish. Born 5th April, 1878 in Wandesworth, London, he started writing in 1910 and served in the R.F.C. from 1915 - 1918. His first novel was published in 1915 by Hurst & Blackett. It was entitled 'Married to a Spy'. He wrote mainly for the comics at first but soon concentrated on boy's fiction. At times he and his sister wrote the whole contents of Young Britain. He was a great friend of and occasional collaborator with H.J. Allingham, father of Margery, and another prolific writer. Starr wrote about 60 novels, many of them taken from Picture Show and Girls' Cinema.

He spent his retirement in Sussex and died there in late 1968 at the age of 90.

He used the pen-names of Captain Essex, Kerry O'Dare, Richard Essex and Frank Godwin for boys' stories and, for girls', Stella Richards.

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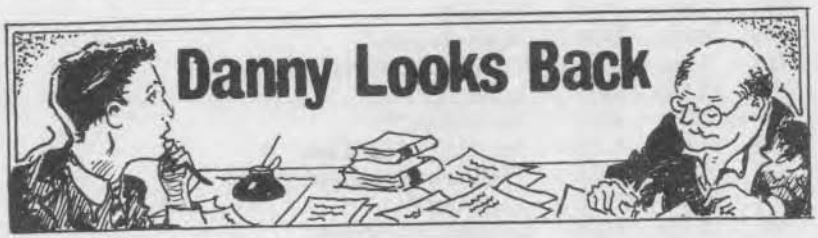

(Fourth Spasm: entered at the back of Danny's famous Diary in the year 1941.)

I miss the Gem and Magnet terribly. Doug says they will be back as soon as the war is over, just like they were after the previous war. But Dad says he is talking through his hat because the Gem and Magnet went merrily on right through that other war.

At any rate, I've got big compensation in the pile of PLUCKS which Doug's pal put into Doug's care while Doug's pal is away in the Air Force. And Doug has allowed his brother, Danny, to read those PLUCKS while Doug's pal is away. And, of course, they contain the very earliest of the St. Jim's stories ever written - before Tom Merry came on the scene. This time I have been reading the tenth and eleventh of these tales. Two stories which featured a new boy at St. Jim's named Marmaduke Smythe. And there is so much in these tales to fascinate everybody who knew St. Jim's at a much later date.

The first is "The Misadventures of Marmaduke." It is in PLUCK dated March 23rd, 1907. And, deliciously enough, this issue contains advertisements for the third issue of the GEM on the Thursday of that same week. (PLUCK came out every Saturday.)

And that issue of the Gem, No. 3, contained the very first story ever written by Charles Hamilton as Martin Clifford, and it has the rather quaint title of "Tom Merry's Schooldays", the first story ever of my great favourite Tom Merry. The GEM cost a halfpenny. PLUCK, which had 36 pages every week, cost a penny. Happy days!

And now back to the first of the Marmaduke stories. Blake and Herries are sitting in Study No. 6, at rather a loose end. Blake says to Herries: "What are we going to do this afternoon? Poor old Arthur Augustus is in the sanatorium, with the cold he caught in that beastly old castle when he was kidnapped. And Dick's gone off to see a sick relation."

An interesting comment for us. So far as I can trace, there are only two occasions in these early stories when D'Arcy is referred to by the nickname of "Gussy". In those days he was always Augustus or Adolphus. With regard to "Dick", it is obvious that Blake was referring to Digby. I feel almost certain that Digby's names were Robert Arthur in the main stream of the GEM.

However, Kildare drops in and sends Blake and Herries to meet a new boy at Rylcombe station. The new boy is destined for the School House.

Marmaduke Smythe turns out to be a horrid character. The son of a self-made millionaire, he is purse-proud and snobbish, characteristics which are slightly over-done, if one wants to be critical. Marmaduke is annoyed that Dr. Holmes did not send "a carriage, or at least a trap", to meet him and drive him to St. Jim's. (Lovely bit of "dating", this!)

Marmaduke is bundled into the station hack, and the driver tickles up his horse. Near St. Jim's Marmaduke falls out of the hack, into a ditch. Smothered with mud and smelling horribly, Marmaduke cannot be taken to the Head in that state. So, now in the School House, Marmaduke has a bath, and, as his box of clothing has not yet arrived at the school, Herries rustles up for Marmy a change of clothing. These were a very old pair of Norfolk knickers, much too short for him, with stockings too large which looked odd in conjuction with canvas tennis shoes, and a striped cricket shirt. (Who

ever heard of a striped "cricket" shirt? Surely, even in 1907, they played cricket in whites like they do to-day!!).

And, clad thus, Marmaduke goes before the Head. In the next few days Marmaduke has trouble with various boys, especially Blake, and with Mr. Kidd (the housemaster) and Mr. Lathom, the form-master. So Marmy runs away from school.

We are told that trains are infrequent from Rylcombe station - after the one at nine in the morning the next is at four in the afternoon. So Mr. Kidd, with Blake, goes after Marmy, and he is brought back to school. Marmaduke hates Blake. That night, when the boys are asleep in bed, Marmaduke, armed with a stick, attacks the sleeping Blake. And a riot ensues.

It looks as though Marmy may be expelled. To attack a chap when he is asleep is quite heinous. However, Blake asks the Head to give Marmy another chance, and suggests that he might do better in the New House.

So Marmaduke is put into the New House, in the Study of Figgins & Co - and finds things even worse for him. So Marmy telegraphs his mother that he is very unhappy at St. Jim's. In a hilarious final chapter, an awe-inspiring Mrs. Smythe arrives, and takes Marmaduke home with her. And so we come to the end of the story - ten chapters absolutely packed with plot.

The readers of PLUCK had to wait 4 weeks before the next story of St. Jim's appeared. The issue was dated April 20th, 1907. The story re-introduced Marmaduke Smythe and was entitled "The Reformation of Marmaduke." (It is fascinating to note that in that same week the 7th issue of the GEM appeared, and it contained the third story of Tom Merry at Clavering, entitled "Our Captain".)

Mr. Smythe, annoyed with his wife, brings Marmaduke back to St. Jim's, and insists that Dr. Holmes gives Marmy another chance. So Marmy goes back into the New House with Figgins & Co.

Oozles of plot, once again - and gorgeous reading. As the tale progresses, Monteith goes out on the river with a boat and makes Marmaduke accompany him to steer for him. The boat is upset, and Marmaduke is in danger of drowning. Blake saves him from a watery grave. That gallant rescue has a big effect on Marmy, making him far more decent. (The reformation is, perhaps, slightly too wholesale for belief, but one mustn't carp, must one?)

Blake senses that the New House has a secret plot in hand, and tries hard to find out what it is. Actually, Figgins & Co. are planning to put on an elaborate stage show - a concert plus dramatic sketches - on the stage in Big Hall, with a hope that they will get a big audience and score a great success. The programme has the following announcement; "Under the distinguished patronage of Gordon Ratcliff Esq. M.A. Cantab, master of the cock house at St. Jim's." One of those lovely little interesting points here. I'm sure that in later times Mr. Ratcliffe's name was "Horace".

Eventually, accidentally, Blake finds out, through Marmaduke, what the great New House secret is. So the School House chaps plan to put on a similar concert - almost identical with the New House programme - in Big Hall on the Friday night - the night before the New House affair is due.

So, on the Friday night, the School House concert is put on before a packed house, and it is going splendidly. And then, suddenly, all the gas lights in the hall go out - and the whole thing develops into a riot between School House and New House in the dark hall. The School House show is wrecked. It was Marmaduke who had turned off the gas at the main.

Marmaduke is the hero of the hour in the New House, and Figgins makes him a member of the famous group known as Figgins & Co. "That day was the happiest

Marmaduke had spent at the good old school. For his reformation was complete, his probation was over, and now he had the proud consciousness of being a fully-accredited member of Figgins & Co."

So ended the second of the Marmaduke Smythe stories - the eleventh of these marvellous old St. Jim's stories in PLUCK.

I have just one more of these PLUCK stories left to read. Be ready for it, my beloved Diary.

ERIC FAYNE Comments on "DANNY LOOKS BACK"

Even now, all these years later, there is still an aura of mystery about the two Marmaduke Smythe stories which featured in PLUCK in the Spring of that distant year 1907. And, I fancy, we shall never find a solution to the mystery.

As Danny recounts, Smythe became a member of Figgins & Co., and it seemed that the famous trio was set to become a foursome. In fact, in the final PLUCK story, an account of which Danny promises, Smythe is there as a fourth member of the famous Co.

Yet, a few months later, in the GEM, the stories of Tom Merry at Clavering became the stories of Tom Merry at St. Jim's. And, when Tom Merry and his Clavering friends, and their Clavering Headmaster, arrive at St. Jim's, the famous Figgins & Co have become a trio again, and Marmaduke has disappeared from the tales. And the Clavering Head, Mr. Railton, replaces Mr. Kidd as the School House housemaster.

(continued on page 18)

At Courtfield with Bob Blyth discussing Nelson Lee repro's.

At Stanmore with myself and other members.

W. HOWARD BAKER

A tribute from THE GREYFRIARS CLUB

To all who knew Howard (Bill) Baker, the news of his death on 13th February 1991 must have come initially as a tremendous shock, for he always seemed to be so full of life and energy. His enthusiasm and zeal for the mammoth task of reproducing in their original form - but with more durable attractive hard covers - the beloved Magnets and Gems of our youth, so that they can be read and enjoyed by present and future generations, will long be remembered. The superb reproductions, treasured in private collections, libraries and universities throughout the world will be a fitting memorial to him.

I first met Bill over 19 years ago, in February 1972 at a meeting of the O.B.B.C, where I think we struck an immediate rapport with each other. He was delighted with my enthusiasm for the excellent reproductions of the Magnet and I was delighted at meeting him - the publisher - and we had a long chat on the old papers as he told me of his plans to reprint every one of the Magnets. I told him how I also had read the Egyptian series as a boy,and how I had longed to read that story again after I had climbed the pyramids in World War II. We have remained firm hobby friends ever since, exchanging much correspondence and many telephone calls, and visiting each other at home to discuss the hobby and new reproductions.

I think that one of the sincerest compliments that I can pay Bill is to say that he was most certainly exactly the right man in the right place at the right time - for it would indeed have been most distressing if the finest stories of the worlds greatest school story writer, Frank Richards (Charles Hamilton) had disappeared as more and more of the fragile original storypapers disintegrated completely with age. How Frank Richards would have loved to see his stories so beautifully and permanently reproduced. Needless to say, readers all over the world owe Bill Baker their everlasting thanks and appreciation, especially the younger readers who have been introduced to 'our Franks' stories solely by Bills' wonderful reproductions.

There is no need for me to recap on the opening para of our announcements in the C.D Annuals and this years January C.D but, suffice to say, that since your Courtfield hostess and I first founded the Greyfriars Club Bill has been a constant source of encouragement and help. He attended every meeting he could at Courtfield and, on the occasions when he was absent, sent a plentiful supply of Greyfriars Gazettes,new dust jackets and catalogues to me, to show and hand out to members. He readily accepted my invitation to become the Club's first President and an Hon Trustee of the Frank Richards Museum and Library, positions he held for the rest of his life. I well remember his pleasure when I introduced him to our late President of the Museum, Miss Edith Hood.

The Club sends sincere sympathy and condolences to his family, Irene, Helga and Alex, and a minutes silence will be observed at our Spring Meeting at Kingsgate Castle.

R.F.(Bob) Acraman. Chairman\Secretary.

But strangely enough we have not heard the last of Marmaduke Smythe. Over 5 years later, in October 1912 to be precise, that lovely paper THE PENNY POPULAR came on the market. The attractions were stories of Sexton Blake, plus stories of Jack, Sam and Pete - and - for most of us - the star turn was the reprinting of the early stories of Tom Merry at Clavering and then at St. Jim's. The Gem version had been named "Tom Merry at St. Jim's". In the Penny Popular it was named "The Rival Studies", and it appeared in PENNY POPULAR No. 5. And for the next 6 weeks there was a Tom Merry story from the early GEM.

And then - mystery of mysteries - in PENNY POPULAR No. 12 - we find the first of the Marmaduke Smythe stories reprinted from PLUCK. It is given a new title, "Jack Blake's Recruit." The Clavering chaps had disappeared, and Tom Merry's absence is explained by Blake saying: "There's poor old Arthur Augustus and Tom Merry still in the sanatorium with colds...." The only change is that any mention of Mr. Kidd is altered to Mr. Railton.

Next week, in PENNY POPULAR No. 13 was reprinted the second of the Marmaduke tales, now under the title of "Marmaduke's Master Stroke". Danny has quoted the final lines of the story in PLUCK. This is how the story ended in the Penny Pop:

"That day was the happiest day Marmaduke had spent at the good old school. For his reformation was complete, his probation was over, and now he had the proud consciousness of being what every boy at St. Jim's was - a decent fellow!"

So this time, Marmy did not turn Figgins & Co into a foursome.

WHY, WHY on earth was it done? Why, when reprinting stories from the early Gem, with scores more to come, did they suddenly reprint the two tales from PLUCK. I can think of no explanation at all. Can you?

Oddly enough, I feel quite familiar with Marmaduke Smythe in my recollections of Gem history. I have a feeling that, though he had left St. Jim's, he turned up once or twice in earlier years as a visitor to the school. Yet, in spite of a search, I have been unable to find a Gem story in which he featured. Can anyone, with a better memory, tell me whether there was in fact, such a story - or stories?

Finally, Danny was right when he stated that cricketers always played real games, as opposed to practice, in white shirts. Yet, not so long ago, I switched on TV to watch a match between Australia and England, being played in Australia. And, to my old-fashioned horror, I saw that the players on both sides were in Musical Comedy clothing.

P.S. I switched it off, and, perhaps, read the Gem.

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THE PRINCESS SNOWEE'S LAST CORNER

For a good long while she was, perhaps, the most famous pussy-cat in the world. Hundreds knew of her. Scores met her, petted her, and told her she was gorgeous.

From time to time, in her heyday, she even had her "corner" in the C.D. And her comments were popular with that large, if odd, run of kindly folk who love the furry beauties.

The Princess Snowee received a wealth of love in her lifetime - and she gave back a wealth of love.

She died last month. "Her Man" was by her side as she drifted peacefully away.

She is buried in a corner of the quiet garden at Excelsior House. The Princess Snowee's Last Corner.

ROSE LAWN REMEMBERED: II by Una Hamilton Wright

A SUMMER PLACE

Further Memories from Charles Hamilton's Niece

Lying on my back on the grass amid the daisies in Rose Lawn garden, listening to an invisible lark singing in the clear blue sky: at four years old this was my idea of paradise. There I first fell in love with Nature and have always remembered the magic of that garden. The far end of the lawn was bounded by a lavender hedge backed by thick privet, the lavender acting as a magnet to butterflies and bees during the summer. The righthand side of the garden, which received most sun, effervesced with rambler roses while flowering shrubs bloomed opposite - seneccio, rosemary, lilac, syringa and shade-loving winter anemones. In spring along with the usual crocuses, daffodils, hyacinths and primulas, wallflowers were crammed into every available space, my uncle's early-flowering favourites. It was impossible to see the soil in spring, for the sweetsmelling wallflowers hid it.

Summer brought a change of emphasis - cottage garden flowers in profusion - hollyhocks, Canterbury bells, marguerites and irises lighting up dark corners. Delicate Gysophyla and love-in-the-mist, larkspur, forget-me-nots and stocks all added more colour. Red and white valerian grew wild on the chalk soil of Thanet and no one had the heart to remove it. Tulips, pinks, cornflowers, white Madonna lilies and in autumn glowing chrysanthemums and Michaelmas daisies contributed yet more brilliance.

The garden door led from the dining-room on to an asphalt terrace on which was the inevitable water butt. Although he kept a gardener uncle enjoyed pottering and he liked to collect rainwater for his plants. The back of the garage opened on to the terrace and through its cobwebbed windows I could see the leftovers of his past life - odd items from his properties abroad and relics of ancient bicycles, nickel-silver pressure cycle lamps and long-spouted oilcans littering the dusty shelves in their dozens.

Also opening on to the terrace was the garden shed, formerly a wash-house. Now it was cleaned out and served as a summer house and nanny (Miss Hood) gave me my tea there when the wind was too vigorous for picnics on the lawn. She taught me to make daisy-chains and helped me to search the grass for a four-leafed clover, but neither of us was successful. Beyond the garden were cornfields stretching over the horizon towards Cliftonville. "Uncle, why did you put a hedge behind the lavender to hide the cornfields?" "Because, my little dear, rows and rows of new houses will be built to march over that horizon and spoil your uncle's view." Time was to prove him right.

After the furious bustle of preparing Rose Lawn for occupation in its first summer, life settled down to a more leisurely pattern. Gaps were filled with the arrival of my mother's furniture from her coastguard cottage at Sandgate, now given up. Books arrived en masse from store, left from the Hampstead flat mother and uncle shared before her marriage. They formed the nucleus of uncle's library at Rose Lawn and filled his study shelves and the dining-room book-cases.

Although uncle's housekeeper, Miss Beveridge, was an excellent cook, he always sent her on holiday when we came down bringing nanny with us. I soon gathered that

there was no love lost between them. Therefore uncle engaged another cook by the name of Mrs. Bacon (!) and her superb creations even aroused some enthusiasm on uncle's part, whose attitude to food was otherwise like that of Mr. Quelch. Although it overlooked the garden, the dining-room was dark and so these sumptuous meals were taken on the gateleg table at one end of the long lounge which stretched across the whole width of the house.

Uncle still enjoyed seabathing in the early days. He installed a capacious wooden beach hut, painted apple green and white, at Botany Bay at the bottom of the road. We would spend the whole day on the beach, provisioned with salmon and cucumber sandwiches, cakes and fruit, while tea was brewed on a methylated spirit stove. The smell of methylated spirit even now recalls the whole beach scene. All the grown-ups swam. Mother taught Edie to swim and eventually me when I was seven. Uncle bought a large inflatable rubber swan to ride on the sea. Then, when a little girl was blown out to sea on a similar mount, he tied a cord round its neck and stood on the beach holding it, or pegged it down securely, even then keeping an eye on it. A paddleboat was secured to the beach in a similar way. There were no beach guards there in those days. The swan also visited Rose Lawn garden where we pretended to feed it on leaves.

Tired and glowing after tea on the sands we made our way up Percy Avenue to Rose Lawn, the house with the ever open windows where the lavender curtains billowed out.

There my education began, on the dining-room table. First lessons in Geography, with the aid of uncle's enormous Atlas, filled me with awe. The vast quantity of water in the Pacific Ocean frightened me after I had grasped how small England was. Then stories from History; quotations from English Literature, and from French, German and Italian, appeared in conversation, arousing my interest and developing familiarity. I listened to 'Children's Hour' on the wireless by the big lounge window. I experienced absolute freedom and relaxation. I never broke any rules - there didn't seem to be any - although bed-time was a fixed hour and so were meals where I was produced clean and shiny and was expected to "eat it all up". I was only too willing to oblige. Mrs. Bacon saw to that.

In 1929 we overflowed into Mandeville, the bungalow opposite Rose Lawn which uncle bought for my mother. The two establishments were complementary. Nanny was based with us and Miss Beveridge re-appeared in the Rose Lawn kitchen while Mrs. Bacon disappeared from the scene. Additional help arrived in the shape of "Choodles" - uncle's nickname for Mrs. James, a plump elderly soul who was deficient in teeth. Although living in the bungalow I used to invade Rose Lawn, where I was always welcomed by uncle, to interrupt his work in the mornings, and there were skirmishes with Miss Beveridge who played goal defence. My uncle certainly lured me across the road from Mandeville. He was a past master at devising games and occupations for children. I had little friends to stay and he was always 'one of us'. Presents, novelties and sweets appeared in abundance, in fact everything that could make a child's holiday perfect. Now he had turned my old bedroom at Rose Lawn, the small room at the front, into a miniature laboratory complete with sink, shelves and Bunsen Burner and jars of 'safe' chemicals. We worked through all the experiments in the book that came with a chemistry set. I enjoyed it, but was not enthralled as a small boy would have been. I was always on the arts side. So the laboratory then became the Green Room cum dressing-room, and the narrow end of the lounge became a stage, complete with curtains and lighting, while a door for the performers was made through to the hall. Costumes were run up, and make-up boxes and wigs and false moustaches appeared in the dressing-room. My friends eagerly

served as actors while uncle happily wrote and adapted the plays to suit the cast available. Grown-up visitors formed a willing audience.

I look back on the Rose Lawn holidays as times of tremendous stimulation. To me they were filled with sunshine and cloudless skies, even though fierce winds blew at Easter and thunderstorms washed us in from our tents in Mandeville garden when we were 'camping' in August. I was never bored and never idle. I read a lot, discussed a lot, questions were encouraged and answered. As I grew older, so the pursuits kept pace - walking, cycling, riding, photography, drawing, painting, singing, cards, quizzes, guessing games, charades. An extra garden, 'the Field', was laid out down the road from Mandeville to accommodate a tennis court and a boating pond. To me, Rose Lawn remembered in those immediate pre-war years is a recollection of blissful fulfilment.

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LA CREME DU CRIME

by Mary Cadogan

There are many treats of a nostalgic nature around at the moment for lovers of crime fiction - so many, indeed, that it is hard to choose the best. Nevertheless I feel that I've managed to do so, and hope that C.D. readers will share my enjoyment of the books mentioned here.

The Oxford Book of Detective Stories. Edited by Patricia Craig (O.U.P. £15.00)

I was delighted to receive this bumper anthology of crime stories, chosen by Patricia Craig (who, as many of you know, co-authored three books with me - *You're a Brick Angela! Women and Children First* and *The Lady Investigates).* She provides an extensive introduction which is both informative and entertaining, and her selection of thirty three stories ranges from Victorian mysteries to sleuthing puzzles set in our own time. Some of these, although by celebrated authors in the genre, are not particularly well known; surprises rub shoulders engagingly with one or two classic tales, and amongst the authors represented are Clarence Rook, Arthur Conan Doyle, R. Austin Freeman, E.C. Bentley, Freeman Wills Crofts, Ronald Knox, G.D.H. and M. Cole, Agatha Christie, Anthony Berkeley, Dorothy L. Sayers, Ngaio Marsh, Cyril Hare, Gladys Mitchell, Margery Allingham, Nicholas Blake, Carter Dickson, Christianna Brand, Julian Symons, Edmund Crispen and Geoffrey Bush, Ruth Rendell, P.D. James and Simon Brett. Five hundred and fifty four pages of fascination, and exercise for 'the little grey cells'.

One of our contributors, Ernest Holman, whose Holmesian article recently appeared in our Annual recently wrote in a letter to me: '...I made the assertion that the Deed Box of Dr. John Watson, containing the records of many Sherlock Holmes cases, had perished in the London Blitz. I have now discovered that the noted authoress, June Thomson of Chief Inspector Finch fame, has decided that, in fact, the Deed Box survived. From it she has produced accounts of several of Holmes' unknown cases.' I am grateful

to Mr. Holman, and also to Larry Morley, for drawing my attention to this intriguing book which is called *The Secret Files of Sherlock Holmes* and published by Constable at £11.95. June Thomson writes with her usual skill and stylishness, and provides a convincing provenance of how the stories survived, despite bombing and other hazards. The seven hitherto unknown cases are suitably atmospheric, colourful and brain-teasing and are described on the dust-jacket 'blurb' as follows: 'The collection contains an investigation into the disappearance of a headwaiter, his locked wardrobe and a baker's van; a missing medical student and a secretary to a charitable organisation who contrives simultaneously to run an Australian sheep-farm; the contents of a matchbox which provokes the defenestration of a famous Peruvian journalist; the blackmailing of the indiscreet Duchess of Welborne; the skin trade in desirable domestics; how two glasses of 1867 port led to the apprehension of an artful burglar; a bird-watching 'holiday' in Cornwall which leads to the unmasking of a spy.'

Agatha Christie: Murder in Four Acts by Peter Haining (Virgin £14.99)

Described as 'A Centenary Celebration of "The Queen of Crime" on Stage, Film, Radio and TV', this book was published last year when, of course, Agatha's centenary was being marked. It is an attractive and well illustrated account of the extensive range of adaptations of her plots and characters in the four named fields of entertainment. I was interested to come across unlikely stars in several of the roles, and impressed by the line-up of distinguished performers who have been involved in presenting the Christie crimes before an audience. As well as many black and white photographs, there are several pages in colour and, as a bonus, a small selection of illustrations from the early books and of cartoons. A *must* for Agatha enthusiasts, and yet another book in which research assistance by our own Bill Lofts is acknowledged.

The Gollancz Crime series continues to provide some excellent titles. My favourites of their recent batch of hardbacks are *The Titian Committee* by Iain Pears at £13.99 another art theft mystery with a Venetian setting, following the success of the author's *The Raphael Affair* (now available in a Gollancz paper back at £3.50) and *The Manson Curse* by Dell Shannon at £13.99 (a remote house in a Cornish setting hiding a best-selling author who has dropped out of literary London society because of his fears of a curse agains his son. Lots of brooding atmosphere and chilling suspense!). There are literary associations too in *Emily Dickinson is Dead* by Jane Langton and theatrical ones in Simon Brett's *Star Trap* which features the redoubtable investigator Charles Paris (Gollancz paperbacks at £3.50 each). These offer wit and satisfying depth as well as the unravelling of crimes.

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DEREK ADLEY

Bill Lofts writes:

Following the death of Howard Baker, who had been a personal friend for over 35 years and who will be sadly missed, I never dreamed that in only a couple of weeks I would lose another very close friend in Derek Adley, whom I had known ever since I entered the hobby in 1951 - some 40 years ago. Derek who was 62 suffered a heart attack, which was totally unexpected.

Derek first wrote to me after reading my very first contribution for the C.D. in the form of a letter I had received from John Hunter, the famous boys' writer. We soon met, and became good friends. Later we formed a partnership of Lofts/Adley. It was simple; I did the researching, whilst Derek did the writing - which I thought was the hardest part. His knowledge was as wide as mine in all aspects of the hobby. Indeed it was far superior in the science fiction/western areas that I never read. His compiling of long lists of dates and figures for our numerous catalogues was really brilliant especially in the most popular *William* and *Rupert* Indexes, as well as our books *Men Behind Boys Fiction, The Saint and Leslie Charteris, The Edgar Wallace Bibliography,* and *The World of Frank Richards.* We jointly wrote in a great many fields.

Derek was extremely amiable by nature, and always willing to help anyone with information. He leaves a widow, two married daughters and one grand-daughter. With his death following that of Bill Baker, the hobby will never be the same again.

Jack Adrian writes:

Derek Adley's death came as a tremendous and tragic shock to all who knew him, all the more tragic because less than a year ago he took early retirement so that he could, as he put it, "get about a bit more and get on with a lot more projects".

I knew Derek for over 30 years; I don't suppose a month went by, over the past 20, without he rang me or I rang him, often for information, frequently for the exchange of news, sometimes just for a natter. He was generous with his time, more than generous with his facts and figures. His private reference library, painstakingly built up over many years in collaboration with Bill Lofts, was unique, and vast.

It was not the case that he had all the information in his head (only freakish human computers such as Leslie Welch, the Memory Man -- "Am I right, sir?" -- could retain such quantities of arcana), but give him a couple of minutes and he could track down the answer to any query to do with boys' papers, girls' papers, writers, artists, editors and publishers that was bothering you.

He had a large library of biographies, autobiographies and memoirs, picked up over the years at no great expense (Derek was not a puritanical First Edition collector: so long as the text was there an umpteenth reprint even in the grimmest condition would do), and he would scour such books for mentions of authors he was particularly interested in. Even the most trifling of references would help to build up a picture; add flesh, as it were, to the vaguest skeleton.

But the cornerstone of his library was his own private archive, a staggering collection of files, exercise-books and notebooks, all stuffed with data written in his neat handwriting (Derek was never a typist). Here was the raw material for the profusion of checklists and bibliographies that issued in a steady stream from his direction (more often than not published by him from his own home). All were in collaboration with Bill, whose main task was the unenviable one of extracting much of

the hard information from the gritted teeth, so to speak, of the British Library. Presented with Bill's gleanings, Derek would collate and compile.

He was not a natural writer, but this did not in the end matter. Facts were his forte, and he presented them in the best way he knew how. My own work and books would be the poorer for not having on my reference shelves the numerous Lofts/Adley publications.

Earlier I mentioned Leslie Welch, and as I wrote that sentence I forgot, for the moment, Welch's surname. Had my mind remained a blank, and had Derek still been alive, I'd have rung him up in the sure knowledge that his cheerful voice would have told me the answer within seconds. I shall miss him (and not simply for his knowledge) enormously, and my thoughts go out not only to his wife Edna and their two daughters, but to Derek's friend and writing-partner of over 40 years Bill Lofts.

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DOROTHY CARTER: NOVELIST OF THE AIR PART ONE

by Squadron Leader DENNIS L. BIRD, RAF (retired)

"Worrals of the WAAF," as Mary Cadogan reminded us in her lively editorial tribute in the October 1990 "C.D.," made her début 50 years ago. How well I remember the occasion, from my sister's copies of the "Girl's Own Paper"! Flight Officer Joan Worralson was a brave and likeable girl, and being already a "Biggles" fan, I took to her at once.

Incidentally, in choosing his easily-remembered names for his characters, Captain W.E. Johns did not go beyond the bounds of probability. James Bigglesworth's name was inspired by the bona fide Air Commodore Cecil G. Wigglesworth. Nor is "Worralson" unlikely; in my own RAF days, I served in the same Fighter Command Group as the ex-Battle of Britain pilot Air Vice-Marshal John Worrall.

Much though I liked Worrals, however, I could never really believe in her, because she was always flying operational aircraft, sometimes into battle. And the one thing Waafs never did was fly aeroplanes! Furthermore, Johns was irritatingly imprecise about them. Worrals and her friend Frecks (Section Officer Betty Lovell) shoot down an enemy when flying in a "Reliant". Now the RAF did have an aeroplane of that name - an American light reconnaissance job called the Stinson Reliant, which looked like a smaller version of the Lysander. But what Johns had in mind was clearly a two-seat fighter - the Boulton Paul Defiant - yet the illustration on one of the book covers shows it without its distinctive gun-turret. At that time I was a ten-year old schoolboy, and such things bothered me. So I transferred my allegiance to a different author and character who were always authentic on detail: Dorothy Carter and her ferry-pilot heroine Marise Duncan. Marise belonged to Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA), which really did fly front-line aircraft, from Spitfires and Hurricanes to Lancasters.

Dorothy Carter is a most interesting and yet elusive figure in aviation literature. She clearly knew an enormous amount about aeroplanes and their handling, yet I have been able to discover almost nothing about her. My recent letter to her publishers, William Collins & Sons, produced no reply. The only personal information I have about her comes from a single article she wrote for the June 1938 "G.O.P." Entitled "Flying as a Career for Girls," it extolled the opportunities being opened up by the

exploits of women like the New Zealand record-breaker Jean Batten and the air-taxi pilots Pauline Gower and Dorothy Spicer.

In her article, Dorothy Carter mentions flying lessons at £2 to £3.10s (£3.50) an hour - £70 or £80 would be the figure now! She rightly emphasised the importance of clear thinking and self-discipline: "A muddler or the sort of girl who drifts amiably through life.....will soon be told gently but firmly that she had better try some other sphere of interest. There is no room in the air for the half-hearted." Miss Carter adds that she herself learned to fly in a British Aircraft Co Swallow (actually the German Klemm L.25 angular two-seat monoplane) which could fly hands-off, "showing how safe modern flying is". The article includes a couple of pictures of her, one showing her getting out of a Spartan Arrow biplane.

Here is Dorothy Carter after a lesson in a B.A. Swallow complete with instructor—beheaded!

Dorothy Carter's first flying story was published in autumn 1936 by Adam and Charles Black, Ltd. It was entitled "Flying Dawn," and it did not feature Marise Duncan, who was to appear a year later. "Flying Dawn" is of particular interest to me because it was illustrated by Alfred Sindall, who also drew for the Biggles books. He was our next-door neighbour at the time, in Shoreham, Sussex, and I remember him well. he was a good-looking man with wavy hair and a Ronald Colman moustache. He had two children, Dora and Bernard: my sister and I made faces at them over the garden fence. Bernard is now a distinguished sculptor who exhibits at the Royal Academy.

Alfred Sindall's drawings for the first Carter novel show all the power and realism which characterised his Biggles illustrations and the "Tug Transom" strip cartoons which he drew for the "Evening News" in the 1950s. And his cover for the book clearly depicts that delightful little single-seat high-wing monoplane of the 1930s, the Comper Swift.

"Flying Dawn" shows all the weaknesses of a first novel. It never makes up its mind who is the central figure: the millionaire's daughter Dawn Bright, or her cousin the qualified pilot Molly Mallory.

We meet Molly first. She lives in the home of her uncle Peter Mallory, an Imperial Airways captain flying the stately Handley Page Heracles airliners. She receives the news of her uncle's death with remarkable sang froid, and as she and her aunt do not get on well, she is anxious to leave home. By a coincidence, the steel magnate Joshua Bright hears of this, and Mrs. Bright (a not very appropriate name!) vaguely remembers that her sister married a Mallory. The upshot is that they discover their daughter Dawn and Molly Mallory are cousins, so they offer Molly a home.

Molly interests Dawn in learning to fly, and Mr. Bright thereupon buys two Comper Swifts for the girls. His friends Major and Mrs. Cartwright have their own de Havilland Leopard Moth, and suggest that they and the girls go on a Continental touring holiday by air to France and Germany.

Much of the story centres on Vervins, a real place 30 miles east of St. Quentin. Two rather cardboard villains, Armand Cochefin and his mother, kidnap Molly in Germany, believing her to be Dawn and demanding a ransom from Mr. Bright. This

leads to a quite incredible episode where Molly is incarcerated in an old mill; Dawn locates her, and undertakes to get some sedative which Molly can put in her captors' coffee and so facilitate her escape. "Then I'll fly over," says Dawn, "and throw it in through your window - I'm pretty good at throwing!" This absurd plan works, and Molly, unbelievably, escapes.

An unusual feature of the book is its attitude to Nazi Germany. Remember it was published only 3½ years after Adolf Hitler had come to power, when few people in Britain knew, or wanted to know, about the evils of his régime. Some Britons, in fact, rather admired him, and in the story Major Cartwright responds in kind to the "Heil Hitler" salute.

"But I don't like Hitler!" murmered Dawn..... "Then you had better keep your likes and dislikes to yourself", said the Major sharply. "In German, say 'Heil Hitler'. It's common politeness, since they seem to like it....." She saw the sense of the Major's retort.

DAWN LOOKED AT IT WITH A PUZZLED AIR

Illustration for Flying Dawn by Afred Sindall

Later, however, in an intimidating interview with a Nazi police chief, Dawn refuses to be cowed and finally wins the encounter handsomely.

In October, 1937 the second Dorothy Carter novel began a year's serialisation in the "G.O.P." before publication in book form in 1939. This was "Mistress of the Air" - the first of six books featuring Marise Duncan and usually having an "..... of the Air" title. But I want to consider Marise separately later on, so instead I will mention Dorothy Carter's "G.O.P." short stories. These were:

"Edna: Night Watcher" (May 1939)
"May's Monoplane" (June 1939)
"Lizzie of the Bush" (August 1939)
"Patricia's Party" (September 1939)
"Sally's Solo" (February 1940)

Of these, only the last is of real interest because of its amusing final twist. Sally Crichton is a slapdash, blue-eyed muddler who has done so badly in her lessons that her flying instructress is about to tell her that she is hopeless. Due to a misunderstanding, Sally thinks she is to be sent off on her solo, and she goes up alone in the Tiger Moth. Her instructress, appalled, pursues in a Miles Hawk Major, and gives detailed orders over the radio-telephone to tell Sally how to cope. Sally lands apparently under instruction - and then reveals that she forgot to switch the R/T on. She had soloed successfully by her own efforts. "You'll make a pilot yet", grudgingly concedes the instructress.

Another Dorothy Carter novel came out in 1939: "Wings in Revolt," from R.T.S. Lutterworth, who were also to produce most of the Worrals books. It was illustrated by Douglas Lionel Mays, who drew for the early Marise and Worrals serials and books, and later for Anthony Buckeridge's "Jennings" stories.

In "Wings in Revolt" Miss Carter experiments with her plot pattern. Ostensibly the main figures are Mary Blount and Francine Vandaffy, respectively the daughters of the British and American consuls in the South American republic of Bazanta. But the story is just as much about their fathers, George Blount and Homer P. Vandaffy, and the diplomatic problems created when the two girls and their Percival Vega Gull monoplane play a too-active part in the revolt against the usurping President Don Pilar. Subsidiary characters complicate the story: an Irish doctor, Tim O'Hara, and a distinctly shady English mercenary, Honest Tom Shadwell - "dealer in anything; professional runner of risks". It will be seen that Miss Carter's people are rather different from the usual staid "G.O.P." fare!

Thanks largely to the girls, the rightful President Rafael de Vega is restored to office. But I must just mention Dorothy Carter's mild dig at her rival, Captain W.E. Johns. She introduces a slightly comic personality, a sea-captain who engages in a form of arm-wrestling with the U.S. consul - and his name is Captain Higglesworthy.

Percival Vega Gull

(To be Continued)

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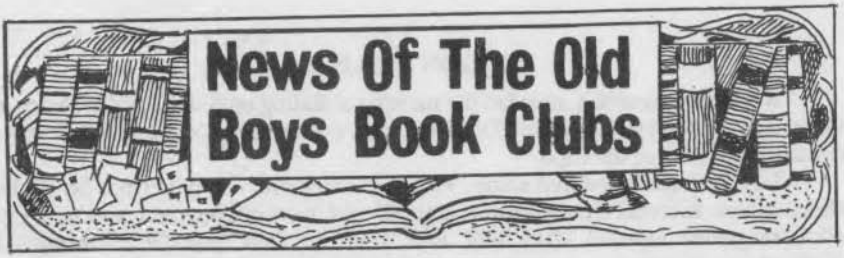

NORTHERN O.B.B.C.

A good number attended our March meeting and a warm welcome was given to a newcomer, Mr. Michael Lund.

Our Secretary Geoffrey Good appears to be making progress and we were pleased to hear that Bruce Lamb is able to move about the house: we do miss Geoffrey and the Lamb family.

Comment was made about the Tom Porter Collection, recently auctioned. Keith Normington had attended and quoted to us some of the high prices paid.

We were all sad to hear of the death of Howard Baker, and a tribute was paid to him by a number of members. Various obituaries from newspapers had been brought along.

Mark Caldicott spoke on Edwy Searles Brooks. His prolific writings spanned 60 years of school and detective stories and he was very popular as Victor Gunn and Berkley Grey. He had subbed for Hamilton in "The Magnet" and "The Gem". He wrote for "The Nelson Lee" from 1917 until 1933. By the 1950's, he was firmly established as a detective writer.

John Dixon Carr was the subject of Keith Normington's talk. He was born in 1906 in Pennsylvania, U.S.A. and, before his writing career, read such detective stories as Sherlock Holmes. He was a genius in that he could create atmosphere in his stories not unlike Poe, coupled with the humour of Wodehouse. He had the ability to create a seemingly impossible to deduce situation, yet gave convincing explanations, often giving the reader many clues (without their realising this) throughout the stories, and never resorted to the frustrating "get-out" used by some authors of the final "explanation" involving a curse or black magic. Carter Dixon was another pseudonym. Keith's obvious enthusiasm for John Dixon Carr's writings could not be over emphasised and his professional delivery kept all our members spell-bound!

JOHNNY BULL MINOR

CAMBRIDGE CLUB

Our March meeting took place at the Linton home of Roy Whiskin.

Roy presented an illustrated talk on book and magazine writers who are either "Men of Kent or Kentish Men". The idea that this title conveys was somewhat broadened to cover authors/artists such as Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, H.G. Wells, Ian Fleming, Anthony Buckeridge, Mary Tourtell, and to include those 'adopted' by Kent like Richmal Crompton and Frank Richards.

Later we watched and discussed a video of part 3 of 'Comics, The 9th Art', the ITV programme.

ADRIAN PERKINS

LONDON O.B.B.C.

Twenty two members attended the meeting at Ealing on Sunday, 10th March and extended a warm welcome to Rex Diamond who expressed an interest in becoming a permanent member of the Club.

Mary Cadogan produced some "William" souvenirs received from St. Elphin's School (where Richmal Crompton was a pupil) and drew our attention to a new genre fiction magazine entitled MILLION, Bill Bradford then "wandered" through his childhood in a fascinating presentation based upon the story papers which had given him most pleasure. Win Morss rounded off the proceedings with a reading from the Magnet Hiking series of 1933, a favourite of many of those present.

The next meeting will be on April, 14th at St. Luke's House, Sandycombe Road, Kew Gardens, Richmond, Surrey.

ALAN PRATT

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MATTERS OF IMPORTANCE by TED BALDOCK

"He is a very valiant trencher-man."
Much Ado about Nothing.

From time immemorial - so it seems - the excellence and superiority of Mrs. Mimble's jam-tarts, meringues and eclairs have been an accepted and delightful fact of life among discerning Greyfriars fellows. Never have they been questioned as to quality compared with confections of a similar nature produced elsewhere. Chunkleys of Courtfield, renowned in so many commercial fields, produce a very fair article which is famous over a wide radius of that corner of Kent with which we have to deal. But to the connoisseur there is an indefinable something, minute indeed, yet something, missing when comparisons are made with the creations of Mrs. Mimble. Her tarts are placed on an unassailable pinnacle quite apart from the common or garden variety.

William George Bunter, an acknowledged expert of deep experience in all matters pertaining to comestibles, readily gives his approval to the sublime nature of these little confectionary miracles which are always available at her little tuck-shop in a shady corner of the quad.

These sumptuous morsels were wont to be displayed in her little shop window, tastefully arrayed on glass stands, to enhance their voluptuousness, which in turn drove Billy Bunter into all the agonies and ecstasies of longing - and sadly all too often futile - anticipation.

Bunter's first experience of these delights is lost in the shadowy mists of time. That first happy and momentous encounter must be regarded as quite a milestone in his fat career, also to those other fortunate fellows who chanced to be present at that gastronomic and historic moment. Happily the saga has recorded many such moments since, and over the years Billy Bunter has waxed and flourished and never tired of their creamy and jammy excellence.

But, as in paradise where the most beautiful of roses have their accompanying quota of thorns, so in the more mundane area of 'tuck' there exists always the tiresome - and to fellows like Bunter - irritating fact that currency of the realm is required in order to enter into the regions of delight and plenty. Small in amount possibly, but absolutely necessary if one is to embark upon those creamy pastures. It is a sad fact

that a lamentable lack of currency and Bunter had long been dismal companions. For so long as the Owl could recall, postal orders were perpetually drifting about in the postal system yet never seemed to materialize - a sad reflection on the post office, and a continuous embarrassment to Bunter.

William George Bunter and 'tuck' have ever been synonymous; in this context mention should naturally be made of Mrs. Mimble and her tiny yet almost indispensable establishment in the corner of the quad. Was she not the founder of countless feasts in the dog-days? The good lady and, of course, the redoubtable Mr. Mimble, although a somewhat retiring and shadowy figure, were in their respective spheres of equal importance as such scholastic giants as Mr. Quelch, Mr. Prout and for that matter the venerable Dr. Locke himself. The importance of the knowledge these academics sought to impart may have loomed greater to the world at large, yet certain it is that without the administrations of that little establisment hidden by the elms, Greyfriars would lack something very close to the hearts of most fellows.

Bret Harte may well have had a vision of Billy Bunter in mind when he wrote: 'He smiled as he sat by the table, with a smile that was childlike and bland." Substitute Mrs. Mimble's tuckshop counter for Harte's table and a fairly clear picture emerges. Bunter would surely have said with some discernment, "There is an inner man you fellows, he is an important chap who requires constant nourishment..." It is a theory with which few - and certainly none of the Bunter tribe - would disagree.

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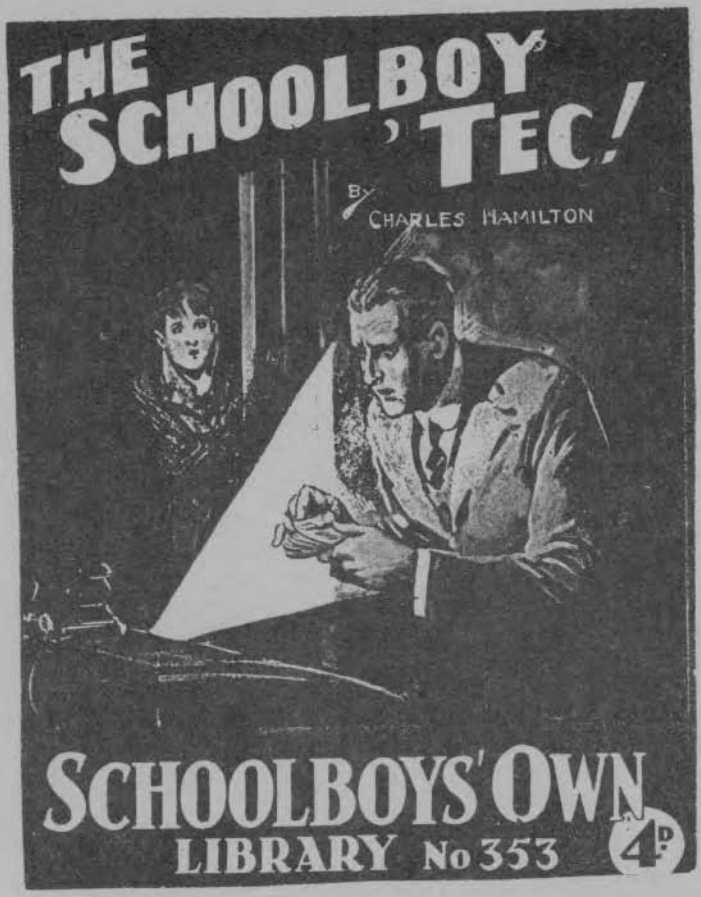

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Printed by Quacks Printers, 7 Grape Lane, Petergate, York, YO1 2HU. Tel. 635967